

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet

9 July 2007

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2007-2010

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's approval for the Council's Customer Services Strategy 2007-2010. The Strategy will follow in due course.

Background

2. The Council started its customer service 'Service First' project in 2005 in order to translate into positive action its corporate objective of that time which was to provide 'High quality, accessible, value for money services'. The promotion of good customer service has been a corporate priority for the past two years. The new corporate objectives that are proposed elsewhere on the 9 July Cabinet agenda reaffirm the Council's commitment to good customer service by including 'The Council will deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community'.
3. It became evident at the time of the Council agreeing its Service First customer service standards in 2006 that it did not have a comprehensive statement of its current customer service position, nor of its ambitions for the future. This information was contained in a variety of disparate service plans and other policy statements. The Customer Service Strategy is therefore the Council's first attempt at producing one document that gathers together its customer service practice and maps how it intends to improve the customer experience.
4. The strategy has a number of important functions. It informs internal and external audiences about the Council's current practice and future ambition in serving local people, and so should shape the thinking of internal and external service providers in developing future services; The strategy provides a framework which will assist members in prioritising actions and resources, recognising that different parts of the organisation are at different stages of development in their delivery of customer focused services; and perhaps most importantly by setting out a 'route plan' of how the Council intends to move forward, the action plan will enable the Council to check progress, and review the 'route plan' as conditions change.
5. Following adoption of the customer service standards last year the Council committed to measuring performance against them. Running in parallel with the development of this strategy, the Service First project team has been preparing a quarterly customer service review report that brings together all the measures of customer service. Figures for January to March 2007 have been collated and it is hoped to bring these together with other corporate performance and financial health reports for presentation to Cabinet by September.

Implications

6. Financial	The action plan attached to the strategy notes resource impacts. Most can be accommodated within existing staffing and financial resources, for the remainder the Council has allocated a sum of £15,000 to the Service First project.
Legal	None
Staffing	The provision of training and workshops on customer service will enable staff to better perform their duties.
Risk Management	Poor customer service damages the Council's reputation.
Equal Opportunities	The Strategy contains sections on how the Council's services are accessed and used by different groups within the community.

Consultations

7. The Customer Service Strategy was developed with the following opportunities for internal consultation:
- Initial and subsequent discussion at Service First project team
 - Collation and examination of customer service strategies from other local authorities and best practice advice from the Local Government Association (LGA) and Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)
 - Staff workshop 7 March 2007, member workshop 28 March 2007,
 - Executive Management Team consideration (23 May 2007), Senior Management Team consideration (30 May 2007)
 - Combined staff / member workshop (12 June 2007)
 - Staffing and Communications Portfolio Holder (27 June 2007)
8. External consultation on the strategy has been limited to invitations to comment through 'South Cambs News', but it should be noted that if the Council agrees the Strategy then it will be further publicised through a variety of channels and feedback sought.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

9. Affordable Homes	Appropriate measures of customer satisfaction with the Council's housing services are included in the 'Service First' suite and are referred to as appropriate in the strategy
Customer Service	The production of the strategy is fundamental to driving forward the Council's customer service agenda
Northstowe and other growth areas	The changing nature of the district's population will affect how it can best deliver its services to its residents
Quality, Accessible Services	The strategy sets out how progress towards this objective will be achieved
Village Life	The dispersed nature of the district's population is a significant factor in determining how the Council's services are designed, if good accessibility is to be achieved.

Sustainability	Choices around different models of service delivery will have various impacts on sustainability.
Partnership	Delivery of the strategy is dependent upon a number of the Council's partners

Conclusions/Summary

10. The Customer Services Strategy sets out for the first time in one place how the Council plans to be responsive to its customers' needs, ensure that its services are accessible to customers, and that those services are both effective and efficient. The strategy sets out the Council's current position, its ambitions for the future, and an action plan that maps out how it will make progress towards its ambitions.

Recommendation

11. Cabinet is recommended to approve the Customer Service Strategy 2007-2010.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Background reports are referred to within the body of the attached Customer Services Strategy

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