

Appendix A

South Cambridgeshire DC – Customer service strategy 2007/10

Version F1

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1.0 Executive summary

The purpose of the Council's Customer Service Strategy is to set out the Council's determination to deliver high quality, responsive, accessible, value for money services; to provide a position statement of where the Council is now in relation to customer service; to set out where it wants to be in the future; and map out how it will get there. This document will provide a strategic overview that will inform service plans and other Council documents and procedures. Its audience is the Council's elected members, staff, partner organisations and its residents and customers.

The Council's Customer Service Strategy has been prepared through a six month process of internal consultation involving staff and elected members, and it will form the basis of future consultation with the Council's customers.

The Council has used the local government Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) three customer service themes to provide a framework for its customer strategy. In summary these are...

Responsive services – understanding what customers want and designing, where feasible, services to meet their needs.

Accessible services – ensuring that services are accessible and convenient to all customers.

Efficient and effective services – getting good value for money and making the best use of resources.

The "Where is the Council now?" section sets out how the Council currently delivers its services to local people, identifying examples of good practice, but also identifying areas for development.

The "Where does the Council want to be?" section sets out the Council's medium term ambitions.

The "How will the Council get there?" section sets out in more specific terms, those actions which the Council will take over the next three years to achieve its ambitions. For 2007/08 the actions are assigned owners, have resource impacts identified, and are time bound. For 2008/09 and 2009/10, actions are more general, but will be made more specific when the strategy is subject to annual review.

The Council recognises that the journey to customer service excellence will be a long and challenging one, given its limited resources and the rapidly changing external environment. However this strategy is recognition of the importance of that journey to the future of the Council and to the quality of life of the residents of South Cambridgeshire.

If you have any comments or suggestions on the Customer Service Strategy and its contents, please contact the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services at:

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2.0 Introduction and background

2.1 Purpose of the strategy

South Cambridgeshire District Council serves over 138,000 residents, visitors and local businesses. It provides a range of services for local people through its own 450 staff and through a number of public and private sector partners and contractors.

The purpose of this document is to set out the Council's determination to deliver high quality, responsive, accessible, best value services; to provide a position statement of where the Council is now in relation to customer service; set out where it wants to be in the future; and map out how it will get there. This document will provide a strategic overview that will inform service plans and other Council documents and procedures. Its audience is the Council's elected members, staff, partner organisations and customers.

The strategy uses the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) framework for customer service, which comprises of the following themes:

Responsive services: Listening to our customers

- How does the Council listen to its customers and work with them to prioritise and design services to meet their wishes and needs?
- How does the Council understand what drives customer satisfaction and use this information to improve services, offering choice and personalised services wherever possible?
- How does the Council understand the different needs of local people to ensure that provision of services is not biased against excluded or hard to reach groups?
- How does the Council deal with complaints about its services? Are complaints resolved quickly and is information about complaints used to improve services?

Accessible services: Providing easy to use services

- Does the Council understand when, where and how customers want to access its services?
- Does the Council make it easy for customers to access services at times and places that are convenient to them? Are services designed around customers' needs?

Effective and efficient services: Good quality, value for money, services

- How does the Council ensure that the customer's experience is a positive one and that they are aware of the standards of service they can expect?
- How does the Council ensure that its services are delivered efficiently and use performance and cost data to maximise value for money?

Customer expectations are rising at a time when the Council's resources are constrained. The Council must manage relations with customers by clearly establishing what can be provided within its limited resources, and ensuring that those resources are applied to the Council's priorities in an efficient manner.

The Local Government White Paper of 2006 set out the future importance of shared services and citizen choice, and the new Comprehensive Area Assessment will assess local agencies jointly rather than separately, meaning that dependency upon partners to deliver positive local outcomes will become more significant. This national policy direction provides an important backdrop to the local initiatives set out in this strategy.

2.2 The Council's Corporate objectives and the Sustainable Community Strategy

In 2007 the Council agreed three new corporate objectives

- Work in partnership to manage growth to benefit everyone in South Cambridgeshire now and in the future
- Through strong management and prioritisation of resources, and a commitment to improvement, deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community
- Listening and engaging with the local community, enhance quality of life in South Cambridgeshire and make it a place where everyone is proud to live and work

Service priorities include "achieving improved customer satisfaction with our services" and "Improving access to service through the contact centre".

The purpose of this Customer Service Strategy is to provide strategic direction to those objectives and priorities concerned with its customer service and to inform the Council's various delivery and service plans.

For 2007/08 the Council has resolved to prioritise the following actions...

- Developing arrangements to allow service users to have a more active role in influencing service improvements

- Incremental improvement in a modest number of customer facing performance indicators in planning, local searches, benefits, environmental services, housing repairs
- A customer service review, six months after the introduction of customer service standards incorporating complaints and a future programme for the Service First project
- Realistic customer service targets for the continuing improvement of the contact centre

These improvement actions are referred to in more detail at Appendix A.

The Sustainable Community Strategy for South Cambridgeshire is being revised in 2007 and sets out the priorities for local people based on consultation with the public as well as partner organisations.

The four emerging themes for the Sustainable Community Strategy are:

- Active, healthy and inclusive communities
- Safe and clean villages
- Building successful new communities
- A sustainable environment

2.3 Relationship with other corporate strategies

This strategy is one of a number of documents that the Council is developing to set out its strategic position and future direction. The Customer Service Strategy has a particularly close relationship with the Council's equality schemes, its ICT strategy, its Communications Strategy, its Complaints and Compliments procedures and its Customer service standards.

The Council embarked on an improvement journey in April 2007 as a consequence of a critical Audit Commission corporate governance inspection report published in February 2007. The Improvement Plan that the Council has agreed is ambitious and challenging and will consume significant corporate resource through to 2009. The improvement of customer service is central to the Council's improvement journey.

This strategy does not duplicate the content or actions contained in other corporate strategies but does refer to them where they have relevance.

2.4 Who are the Council's customers?

It is important to make clear at the outset how this strategy defines customers, as in the public sector there are many potential definitions. A simple and straightforward definition is used here, as the focus of this strategy is improving the customer experience rather than to debate at length who is a customer and what is precisely their relationship with the Council. It is

regarded as sufficient at this stage to use a straightforward definition and to understand that this area is complex, rather than resolve in detail that complexity.

For clarity, customers are defined as people who directly experience the Council's services. This group includes 'potential customers' – people whom could use a Council service but don't – as it is important to know why people are not taking up a service which might be useful to them.

Customers are not just individuals. Businesses seek and use the Council's services.

2.5 South Cambridgeshire's population

South Cambridgeshire is located at the heart of the London – Stansted-Cambridge – Peterborough growth area and its population is set to grow significantly in coming years.

The district's population is currently 138,000 but is projected to grow 30% to 178,000 by 2021 as a result of planned house building to meet regional and structural plan guidelines. Growth is primarily located at the new town of Northstowe, the fringes of Cambridge city, and at Cambourne. The dispersed nature of the districts population, in 102 villages, is a significant factor influencing how customer services are delivered.

The new population in the growth areas is likely to be younger and more economically active. While the population in rural areas is likely to become older. In the period to 2021, the largest changes are likely to be in the 65-74 age group (+61%); the 75-84 age group (+57%) and the 85 + age group (+80%).

The national shift towards smaller household sizes is likely to be reflected in South Cambridgeshire's population.

As much of the population growth in South Cambridgeshire is located on the fringes of Cambridge City, many of the new communities straddle administrative boundaries and it may not be clear to new residents which local authority is charged with providing their services. Cross boundary challenges will require the Council to work closely with neighbouring authorities.

The 2001 Census showed that 97.1% of South Cambridgeshire's residents were 'white', compared to 91% nationally. The district has a significant ethnic minority from the traveling community, with over 500 caravans located in the district. The ethnic breakdown of the district is likely to change as a consequence of its projected population growth. (see the Council's Race Equality Scheme for more information).

The population of South Cambridgeshire enjoys good health and higher life expectancy than the national average but significant numbers of the growing

elderly population have disabilities (see the Councils Disability Equality Scheme for more information)

South Cambridgeshire is ranked as 345th out of 354 local authorities in the 2004 index of deprivation, making it one of least deprived areas in the country. A low proportion of residents are unemployed and claiming Job Seekers Allowance (0.9% compared with 6% nationally). The district has a significantly better qualified working age population than average with 36% with a degree or equivalent compared to a national figure of 25%.

2.6 What services does the Council offer?

The Council offers a range of services to residents, businesses and visitors.

- Some services are provided universally, for example, refuse collection, street cleaning, while others are provided to specific groups of customers, for example, council tax benefits and housing benefits, council housing
- Some services are regulatory, for example, building control, planning, food safety inspections while others are discretionary, for example, sports and community alarm services. Regulatory services are necessary due to health protection, public safety, protection of the environment; legislative or national requirements and frameworks sometimes control these services
- Some services are free at the point of delivery, for example recycling, while others require direct payment, for example cesspit emptying
- Some services require a very basic transaction such as a payment, while other transactions are complex, for example a Housing Benefit application, but in all transactions speed and accuracy will be important. Other services are personally focussed and will be based on relationships that are built over time
- Some services are provided directly by the Council, for example refuse collection, while others are provided through specialist contractors or other agencies on the Council's behalf, for example the contact centre, collection of dry recyclables, some housing improvements

The nature of the Council's services are wide ranging and diverse and therefore its relationship with its customers is complex, and it is important for this strategy to recognise this complexity by acknowledging that the improvement of customer service will take different forms in different service areas.

In order to appreciate the scale of the Council's transactions with its customers, in an average week there will be:

- 56,000 Refuse and recycling collections
- 12,700 Housing Benefit/Council Tax benefit payments
- 7500 Sheltered housing visits
- 5000 Contact centre enquiries
- 3500 Visitors to Milton Country Park
- 350 Housing repairs requested/carried out
- 50 Applications for housing advice
- 100 Local Land Charge Searches
- 50 Benefit applications
- 50 Planning applications

So each week the Council is involved in almost 100,000 transactions with local people and businesses

2.7 Who are the Council's partners in providing services?

The Council works with a wide range of public sector partners to provide services to local people. Some examples are:

- Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust: to provide out of hours emergency response to residents of the Council's sheltered housing schemes
- Local Village Colleges: to provide dual use sports facilities
- Cambridgeshire County Council: Customer service enquiries for most Council services through the contact centre
- Cambridge City Council: Housing repairs in some areas of the district

The Council provides a number of services through contracts with private sector partners:

- Veolia Environmental Services: collection of dry recyclable materials
- Invicta: 24 hour emergency call answering service for older residents
- Various independent building contractors: for housing improvement work

Through its partnership arrangements and contracts the Council needs to ensure that its partners achieve the Council's own standards in relation to customer service.

2.8 How is customer service integrated into the Council's business?

At a corporate level...

As stated in 2.2 above, the importance of good customer service is recognised within the Council's corporate objectives.

The Staffing and Communications Portfolio Holder holds the customer service brief at Cabinet level.

In order to translate its corporate objective into action that makes a difference to local people the Council established the Service First project in 2005. Its objectives are...

- To establish processes and procedures to develop and reinforce a culture of customer care in the Council – including:
Involving staff in the development of corporate and service customer service standards, customer care training for all staff; reinforce customer care as part of new employee induction; Integrate customer care in internal communications; include customer service improvements in Service Planning.
- To introduce customer service standards (corporate and for individual services) which reflect the needs of customers (both external and internal). The standards would also apply to the Contact Centre.
- To publicise and promote the customer standards, both within the Council and externally, so that all staff and customers have ready access to the standards and appropriate training (e.g. telephone training) is undertaken.
- To establish mechanisms to collect customer satisfaction data and use that information to improve performance.

The Service First project is managed by a project team comprising representatives of the Council's four major service areas (Housing, Planning, Health & Environmental, and Revenues & Benefits services). It is supported by the Council's Customer Services Project Officer and chaired by the Executive Director. It has an annual project plan and reports progress to the Council's Senior Management Team and the Staffing and Communications Portfolio Holder quarterly.

In 2005 and 2006 the Service First project delivered the following

- Customer service workshops for all staff
- Customer service standards prepared and launched
- Telephony training and telephony prompt cards for staff
- Customer service - Guidance to staff published
- Appointment of a full time Customer Service Project Officer
- Specific customer service standard booklets for seven service areas as detailed below:

Housing services

Housing services for Council tenants

Planning and building control services

Community services

Democratic services and Electoral services

Environmental health services

Revenue services

At a Service Level ...

Each of the Council's services produces an annual service plan, which sets out improvement actions and performance targets for the forthcoming year. The service plan template for 2007/08 requests specific improvement actions that will improve customer service (some of these are referred to in the action plan at Appendix A).

At a personal level ...

Each employee of the Council has a personal appraisal after agreement of the relevant service plan which sets out in personal terms how that employee can help deliver the service's priorities. A set of personal objectives and a training and development plan are agreed and then monitored through the year. For 2007/08 managers and employees were asked specifically to identify personal objectives to improve customer service.

3.0 Where is the Council now?

3.1 Responsive Services – Listening to our customers

3.1.1 What are the Council's customers' needs and priorities?

During 2006 and 2007, a variety of consultations took place to develop priorities for South Cambridgeshire's new Sustainable Community Strategy. These extensive consultations revealed that residents' primary concerns were:

- Affordable/social housing;
- Crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Clean neighbourhoods;
- Enhancing the village environment and preserving the countryside;
- Meeting older peoples' health needs;
- Improved sports/swimming facilities;
- Recycling of plastics;
- Rural transport, including congestion, road safety, better public transport and additional cycle paths between villages; and
- Opportunities to participate in decision-making.

A number of other consultations carried out by the Council provide it with information about its resident's priorities and concerns

3.1.2 How does the Council listen to its customers?

The Council's services listen to their customers in a number of different ways. For example, in relation to specific services or proposals for change...

The review of sheltered housing

Residents of sheltered housing were given many opportunities to put forward their views during the review of sheltered housing, which took place during 2005.

All sheltered housing tenants were sent a postal survey, to which 66% of residents responded. They were asked what they regarded as the most important features of sheltered housing. 27% said the 24-hour alarm; 26% said daily contact with the sheltered housing officer; and 23% said the security of living on a sheltered housing scheme. A similar postal survey was also sent to housing register applicants and the 24-hour alarm service emerged as the most important feature of sheltered housing.

Ten consultation meetings were held at sheltered housing schemes across the district, attended by a total of 159 residents.

Later, all residents were sent a letter explaining the proposed changes to the sheltered housing service and inviting comments. Residents views collected through these consultations were reported to members of the Housing for Older People Advisory Group, which made recommendations to the Council for policy and practice change.

As part of the Service Plan for 2007/8 there will be an evaluation of the review of the sheltered housing service, to enable any further adjustments to be made where necessary to improve the services offered to residents of sheltered housing schemes.

Windmill Estate redevelopment

In preparation for the redevelopment of the Windmill estate at Fulbourn, the Council has worked closely with its development partner Nene Housing, to arrange consultation meetings and home visits to gather resident's views. "Planning for real" events have encouraged residents to put their views forward on the future of the estate and a residents group has been facilitated.

..... Or through large scale 'snap shot' surveys, for example the three yearly "quality of life" surveys.

Sustainable Community Strategy Consultation

In preparation for the new South Cambridgeshire Sustainable Community Strategy, extensive resident consultation in late 2006 revealed that many residents felt that the best thing about living in South Cambridgeshire is the countryside / rural environment, and general aspects of village life; community spirit, peace and quiet, cleanliness and good standard of living. Preservation of the environment emerges from the research as a key priority for the Community Strategy.

Negatives are traffic, poor public transport and poor affordable housing supply. Residents are also concerned about the loss of green space, which they perceive as being linked to excessive or inappropriately located housing development.

The result of this consultation was that it was recommended that transport and traffic, housing and development, and preservation of the environment should be critical areas for the attention of the South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership.

Budget Consultation 2005/06

In preparation for setting the Councils 2005/06 budget BMG Research were commissioned to find out what residents thought of Council Tax levels and what they regarded as the Councils' most important services. When questioned what were the most important services, the majority of respondents included in their responses refuse collection and recycling, community safety and street cleaning. Three-quarters of respondents highlighted arts development / support as being least important, whilst three in five highlighted economic development and tourism

Environmental Health annual customer survey

The annual environmental health customer satisfaction survey covers a range of diverse services including general environmental health (noise, odours etc) and pest control.

The survey considers customer's reasons for contact, methods of contact, opinion of initial and subsequent contact with the Council. It also considers awareness of services, service preferences and usage, opinions relating to cost, value for money, effectiveness, response times, helpfulness, overall satisfaction and invites suggestions of how services can be improved. The surveys findings are used by the Environmental Health Management Team and shape their annual Service Plan.

The Council also promotes long term groups of customers with whom it discusses service needs, for example the Tenant Participation Group.

South Cambridgeshire Tenant Participation Group

The Council has for many years facilitated and supported a number of residents associations and a district wide Tenant Participation Group (TPG).

TPG members meet regularly to comment upon proposals for housing service improvement and policy development and have been involved in the selection of housing service contractors. They also discuss with Council officers the results of customer satisfaction surveys in various housing service areas.

3.1.3 How does the Council understand the diverse needs of its customers?

The Council occasionally seeks more detailed information from its customers about their specific needs. Examples include:

Housing Tenants – Special Needs Audit

In 2006 all tenants of the Council received a questionnaire with their annual rent increase letter that asked for information about any special needs they might have and their ethnic origin. This information was transferred on to the housing management information system with appropriate flagging so that officers would know if, for example, a customer had difficulties hearing then they could take appropriate action to ensure that information is communicated clearly. In addition, it helped the Council better assess the use of services by different ethnic groups in the community.

Benefits Service – Equalities Monitoring

Since March 2006 the Council has been collecting information from Housing and Council Tax Benefit applicants on a voluntary basis to use in equality and diversity monitoring. It is intended to use this information to help shape future service delivery to improve accessibility for those with special needs and also to promote benefit take-up amongst under-claiming sections of the community.

3.1.4 How does the Council understand the needs of disadvantaged or hard to reach groups?

Travellers Housing Needs Survey

In 2006 the Council commissioned a housing needs survey for travellers in the sub region, in partnership with other local authorities. The methodology included the recruitment of travellers to carry out face-to-face surveys with the traveller community to gather information about their accommodation needs into the future.

The results from the study were informed by data from personal interviews, demographic information, existing records kept by local agencies, statutory caravan counts and focus groups. The conclusions and resulting priorities for action are therefore grounded in good quality information from a variety of

sources and provide detailed information at a local district and sub-Regional level.

Detailed information about health, education and employment issues for the Traveller families will also help inform the policies and procedures of the other statutory agencies that jointly commissioned the study.

This information about accommodation needs is being used to shape the Council's Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document, which is currently being prepared.

The Council works closely with Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum, an umbrella organisation in Cambridge, which provides information, support and advice to individuals and minority ethnic groups

The Council grant aids the following organisations, which assist residents who have special needs:

- People with hearing disability through CAMTAD
- People with visual impairment through Camsight
- People with physical disabilities through Directions Plus
- Isolated older people through Age Concern and Care Network
- Carers through West Anglia Crossroads
- People with legal, homelessness and debt problems through the Citizens Advice Bureau

Young People and the Growth Agenda

In 2006 as part of community consultations for the growth areas, Community Services ran special workshops with young people not in employment, education or training as well as with pupils in village colleges to find out their hopes for future services and facilities

3.1.5 How are customers' priorities reflected in service planning?

While there are a number of examples of consultation responses influencing service changes, the Council does not have a systematic mechanism for ensuring that all consultation it carries out leads to policy review and service redesign. This will be addressed through the development of a corporate consultation strategy which is proposed for adoption in 2008/09.

3.1.6 How does the Council measure customer satisfaction?

Statutory 3 yearly Consultation Surveys:

The Council collects data on a three yearly cycle, about satisfaction within its services. The outputs of these surveys are reported to the Council and benchmarking comparisons can be made when the Audit Commission has audited and moderated national data.

a) The results for the 2003 and 2006 **general residents surveys** are set out below:

BVPI #	BVPI Description	BVPI Score		National Average for 2006
		2003	2006	
BVPI 3	Overall Satisfaction	60 %	58 %	55%
BVPI 4	Complaints dealt with satisfactorily	30 %	32 %	35%
BVPI 89	Satisfaction with street cleanliness	63 %	74 %	69%
BVPI 90a	Satisfaction with local recycling facilities and waste collection	87 %	84 %	79%
BVPI 90b	Satisfaction with waste recycling	68 %	69 %	72%

b) **Benefits Service** results for the 2003 and 2006 surveys of benefit applicants are set out below:

BV No:	Question	2003	2006
BV 80a	Satisfaction with the ways in which claimants can contact the benefits office.	80%	73%
BV 80b	Satisfaction with the experience of visiting the benefits office.	79%	72%
BV 80c	Satisfaction with the telephone service provided by the benefits office	83%	76%
BV 80d	Satisfaction with the service provided by benefits staff	83%	77%
BV 80e	Satisfaction with the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form	63%	57%
BV 80f	Satisfaction with time taken to advise whether claim for Housing/Council Tax benefit was successful or not.	79%	70%
BV 80g	Overall satisfaction with the service received from the benefits office.	84%	77%

c) **Planning service** results for the 2003 and 2006 surveys of planning applicants and agents are set out below:

Question	Question	Very /Fairly Satisfied		
		2000	2003	2006
6 BV111	Setting aside whether any individual application was successful or not, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provide by the Council in processing your application?	67 %	63 %	56%

d) **Housing tenants survey:** The results from 2003 and 2006 surveys are presented below:

BVPI	BVPI Score	
	2003	2006
BV74 – Satisfaction with:		
a) Overall service provided by landlord	81 %	81 %
b) Overall service provided by landlord for (black and minority ethnic) BME groups	75 %	67 %
c) Overall service provided by landlord for non-BME groups	81 %	81 %
BV75 – Satisfaction with:		
a) Opportunities for participation	62 %	53 %
b) Opportunities for participation for BME groups	100 %	50 %
c) Opportunities for participation for non-BME groups	62 %	53 %

Other Customer Satisfaction Surveys

In addition to those customer satisfaction surveys required under the Best Value Performance Indicator framework, various Council services measure customer satisfaction using different methods, either at the point of service, or afterwards. It is important to recognise that while these surveys may not be statistically valid, they provide a wealth of information about customers' experience of the Councils services.

For example, Council tenants ordering repairs to their homes are sent satisfaction cards to complete and return; and housing applicants are sent satisfaction surveys for new lettings; Results of these surveys are considered by service teams and Housing Services Management Team

Environmental Health Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey

The 2005/06 environmental health customer survey was based on 363 completed surveys out of 925 sent out (39% response rate).

- 86% of respondents were satisfied with the way their request for a service, complaint or request for information was handled (SE226) an improvement of 4% on 2004/05.
- 95% felt they were dealt with in an appropriate manner.
- 92% felt the time taken to deal with their request was about right.
- However, only 85% of respondents received a full explanation of what the department had done as a result of their request, a fall 11% on 2004/05.

As a result of the annual survey a quality circle has been set up and proposals to implement an action plan to improve customer satisfaction are included within the 2007/08 Health & Environmental Service Plan.

Future surveys, including the 2006/07 (results expected July 2007) will include sections on waste and recycling services.

Rent Collection – Customer Survey

A survey form for all Council tenants and garage leasers was included with rent increase letters in March 2007. In addition to asking about satisfaction with the current rent collection service the survey asked for views on proposed changes to service delivery, such as preferred direct debit payment dates, and the possibility of introducing rent free weeks. Over 25% of the survey forms were returned and the information gathered will be used to shape future service improvement.

A number of standing customer satisfaction surveys have their headline findings translated into performance indicators that sit in the Corporate suite of indicators featured in the Council's Performance Plan.

PI	Period		
	04/05	05/06	06/07
SX6 - % satisfied with customer services at the Cambourne Office	75%	80%	94%
SE223 - % pest control customers overall satisfied	93%	95%	92%
SE226 - % of Environmental Health customers satisfied overall with the way their request for a service, complaint or request for information was handled.	89%	86%	86%
SH328 - % of tenants satisfied with refurbishment work as a proportion of those returning a satisfaction slip		91%	92%
SP908 - % listed building applicants who strongly agree or agree they were treated fairly	90%	90%	93%
SF703 - % Contact Centre callers satisfied with how their call was answered	89%	91%	91%
SF704 - % satisfied with the website	70%	69%	68%

In addition to the surveys noted above, the Council commissions the Contact Centre to telephone 100 customers each quarter to assess their satisfaction with the Council's services. The results of this quarterly survey are passed to services and reported to the Council's Contact Centre Partnership Board meeting and Service First Project Team.

The Council collects a significant amount of data from customers about their experience of Council services. However there is little sharing of information between different service areas either in respect of survey design and methodology or in respect of results. A better planned and coordinated approach will draw efficiencies and improve the quality of data collected, and this will be addressed through the quarterly review of customer service performance planned for 2007.

3.1.7 How does the Council manage and learn from complaints and compliments?

The Council has a complaints and compliments procedure, which was revised in early 2007. The previous procedure failed to capture all complaints and did not produce information for analysis and interrogation.

The new procedure provides customers with a clear and escalating means of raising their concerns, and should provide the Council with more usable data with which to identify areas of service breakdown.

Satisfaction with handling of Complaints (**SX18**)

Year	Percentage of complainants satisfied with the handling of complaints
2004/05	31
2005/06	35
2006/07	40

3.2 Accessible services – providing easy to use services

3.2.1 How does the Council manage telephone access?

The Council's telephone lines are available through the Contact Centre from 0800 to 2000 Monday to Saturday. Initial customer contact through the Contact Centre was introduced in October 2003, followed by a more comprehensive roll out in April 2004, and resulted in a 75% increase in telephone accessibility. Calls to the Contact Centre are through an 0845 number.

In addition to regular telephone access the Council provides emergency telephone access for emergency housing repairs, sheltered housing, homelessness, environmental health, and building control services, which are available 24 hours, seven days a week.

A dedicated automated touch-tone telephone payment line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for customers wishing to pay bills by debit card.

3.2.2 How does the Council manage e access?

Recent statistics show that 57 percent of households in South Cambridgeshire now have access to the Internet. Usage of the World Wide Web and online services has increased exponentially in recent years and this medium is likely to become a growing channel for the Council's customers to access its services in the future.

The Council's website at www.scambs.gov.uk offers 24 hour access to information about the Council and its services. The website has been assessed by Socitm - (The Society of IT Managers) and has been found to have good levels of accessibility.

The following services can be accessed through the Council's website:

- Complaints and Compliments
- Freedom of Information requests
- Payments
- Reporting of benefit fraud
- Community Services
- Housing Services
- Environmental Health services
- Electoral services
- Licensing services
- Development control services
- Building control services
- Waste and recycling services

- Recruitment

Customer access points offer e access to local people without home computers. They are available at the following locations:

- Church Institute, Balsham
- Wysing Arts, Bourn
- Leisure Centre, Comberton
- St Vincents Close Sheltered Housing Scheme, Girton
- The Pavillion, Hardwick
- The Village Institute, Longstanton
- The Visitor Centre, Milton Country Park, Milton
- Lordship Close Sheltered Housing Scheme, Orwell
- Community Centre, Over
- OWL community café, Free Church, Sawston
- Butts Green Sheltered Housing Scheme, Whittlesford

Some of these access points have volunteer teachers who are available to help local residents who are new users of computers. They can help with access to the internet, setting up an e mail address and sending e mails as well as producing documents and scanning photographs. All of the software available on the computers in the access points are linked to the County council computer learning network which also has computers in libraries where access to the internet is also available.

Generic e-mail addresses are provided for a wide range of customer facing services to provide an alternative means of access to the traditional telephone call or letter. These e-mail addresses are widely publicised and this access channel is increasing in use.

E-mail addresses for individual officers are publicised on most personalised documents.

3.2.3 How does the Council manage written correspondence?

The Council sends customers significant volumes of correspondence each year. That correspondence is either for general publication or is targeted at individual customers, being system generated, for example Council tax statements, or is specific to an individual about a particular matter.

The Council can provide aids to help disabled residents and those who do not speak English as a first language:

- large print copies of South Cambs Magazine are available on request
- some disabled people may prefer to receive information on disc if they use speech synthesizers, large print displays or other tools to improve access to information
- audio or Braille versions of leaflets and information can be ordered at a low cost

The Council's benefits visiting service offers help to customers who cannot read and write to fill in official forms, by visiting them in their own home.

The Council strives to ensure written communication is delivered in simple language and complex documents such as the housing benefit application form have a Plain English Campaign Crystal Mark accreditation.

For incoming correspondence the Council utilises an electronic document imaging system. This reduces the risk of items being misplaced and manages workflow to accelerate responses to customer enquiries.

3.2.4 How does the Council manage personal callers?

The Council's headquarters at South Cambridgeshire Hall is open to personal callers from 0830 to 1700 Monday to Friday. In recognition of the large geographic area which the district covers, housing and benefit surgeries are offered on a bi-weekly and monthly basis, at Cottenham, Fulbourn, Gamlingay, Linton, Sawston and Willingham.

Dates and times can be found as a regular feature in the South Cambs Magazine.

In circumstances where customers find it difficult to access the Council's offices, staff will arrange to visit them in their own homes. The benefits service has a specialist home visitor, while housing management and sheltered housing staff carry out most of their transactions with customers in their homes.

The Council's network of 45 sheltered housing schemes, most of which have communal rooms, provides an additional facility which the Council's staff can use to meet customers in the locality of their homes.

All the Council's offices which are visited by members of the public are accessible by disabled people.

For customers whose first language is not English, interpreting services can be arranged on request as the Council has a contract with Language Line, a translation and telephone interpreting company. Language Line also provides written translation and text to speech translation, where an interpreter reads a letter or other short document to a member of the public.

For customers who have hearing difficulties, the Council's offices at Cambourne are fitted with induction hearing loop systems.

Reception staff currently deal with simple enquiries and provide a triage service to refer more complex cases to dedicated service staff. Private interview facilities are available on request.

3.2.5 How does the Council manage payment of charges?

The Council collects £146.3 million in charges each year. It offers a variety of different payment methods to enable customers to pay in the most convenient way.

Payment channels are:

- Direct debit
- Internet via the Council's website (by debit card - available 24/7)
- Automated telephone payment (by debit card - available 24/7)
- The Council's Contact Centre (by debit card - available 0800 to 2000 hrs, Monday to Saturday)
- By bank transfer
- At Post Offices or Pay zone outlets (cash, cheque or debit card – availability subject to outlet opening hours)
- At Cambridge City Council's Payment Office (cash or cheque)

Payment facilities are not offered at the Council's main offices due to very low demand for this service. Postal remittance by cheque and postal order is still accepted, but this method is being actively discouraged due to the high administrative costs. The Council does not currently accept credit card payments, but this policy is to be reviewed during 2007/08.

3.2.6 How does the Council find out about how residents want to access services?

The three yearly satisfaction surveys referred to in 3.1.6 above ask about the accessibility of the Council's services. The questions refer to opening hours, location of South Cambridgeshire Hall, the method used to contact the Council, and the quality of the experience.

3.2.7 How does the Council ensure accessibility by disadvantaged and hard to reach groups?

All the Council's buildings which are open to the public have public areas which are suitable for, and accessible to, disabled people, as measured by national indicator BV156.

The Council's primary means of communicating with local people about its services is the quarterly 'South Cambs' Magazine, which is distributed to every home in the district. It is available in a large print version on request; the Council currently distributes 70 large print versions of the magazine. Information within the magazine can be translated for customers whose first language is not English.

When the Council deals with specific groups who are known to have special needs it makes individual arrangements where this is practical. For example when undertaking planning enforcement action against travellers in 2006, the Council delivered to all local residents details of enforcement action by way of a CD, in recognition that significant numbers of the travelling community are unable to read written correspondence.

3.3 Efficient and effective services – Good quality, value for money services

3.3.1 How are customers advised of service standards?

The Council's 'Service First' customer service standards were introduced in 2006. They are publicised through 'South Cambs' magazine, by way of leaflets available at all public reception points, and on the Council's website.

The service standard set out corporate and service specific standards for telephone, personal and written contact and make clear how the Council will deal with complaints if service standards are not achieved.

3.3.2 How are staff trained and supported in delivering good customer service?

All staff job descriptions and person specifications make clear the requirement to deliver good customer service and set out knowledge, experience, skills and attitude requirements relevant to the post.

The Council's new induction programme for new staff started in 2007 includes as a central element the Council's customer service objective and all staff are encouraged to visit the contact centre as part of their induction.

For 2007/08 the Council has committed a budget of £15,000 to support customer service activities, which may include a staff training component. The Council has a corporate training budget. Training is offered to staff in handling challenging customers, and handling customers away from the office environment. Managing employees in a customer focussed way will also be a component of the new Management Development programme, due to roll out by March 2008.

The Environmental Health service has achieved 'Investors in People' accreditation, which assesses commitment to staff training and support.

The Council's main service areas provide a programme of training and briefing for the County Council's contact centre agents.

3.3.3 How is a positive customer focussed organisational culture maintained?

The Council's Senior Management Team (SMT) has customer service as a standing item on its agenda and the Executive Director chairs the Service First project team

The Council carries out a bi-annual staff attitude survey and issues raised through it are discussed by a group of staff who then make recommendations

to SMT. For 2006, all of the group's recommendations were accepted by SMT and are being implemented.

The Councils annual employee appraisal system stresses the individual's contribution to the promotion of good customer service, and objectives are recorded through the year.

3.3.4 How is the cost of service benchmarked?

The Council carries out limited cost benchmarking of its services compared to others. For example it benchmarks Environmental Health cost per head and costs relating to waste collection and value for money i.e. cost per tonne recycled.

A small number of BVPIs are also used to measure unit costs.

3.3.5 How is customer service tested and externally verified?

The Council uses a variety of methods to test customer satisfaction with its services (see 3.1.6 above).

Three yearly customer satisfaction surveys and some service specific surveys are carried out by external market research companies.

4.0 Where does the Council want to be?

The following aspirations emerged from staff and elected member workshops as the most important medium term aims of the Council in providing good customer service.

Responsive Services

1. Customers are consulted about the Councils service frequently, through a variety of methods, the results of consultation are shared across the Councils' service and, where appropriate, services are redesigned to better meet changing needs.
2. Customer Satisfaction is measured across all Council services and results are reported and used to drive service improvements, resulting in improvements in customer satisfaction.
3. Complaints should be regarded as opportunities for learning and lead to service redesign, compliments should be celebrated.

Accessible Services

4. Customers only have to make their service request/tell their story once without being impeded by organisational structures. They

should feel well informed about the progress of their service request.

5. Technology should be used to make services more accessible for customers but personal contact will continue to be the best way of delivering some Council services.
6. Council communication should be clear and simple, accessible to all members of the community, and tailored to meet the needs of specific groups

Effective and Efficient Services

7. Customer service standards should reflect what customers feel are important, and should be achieved consistently by all services.
8. The Council should provide staff with the training and tools to be confident in “going the extra mile” to deliver excellent customer service.

5.0 How will the Council get there?

In order to make progress towards its customer service objectives, the Council will take the following actions over the next three years

For year one (2007/08) a more detailed action plan is included at appendix A. For years two (2008/09) and three (2009/10), actions are more general at this time but will be made more specific as part of the annual review and refresh process

The Service First project team, Senior Management Team and the Staffing and Communications PFH will receive a quarterly customer service report from 2007 with progress reported against improvement actions and performance indicator positions against targets.

Recommendations for action will be made at each stage of the Service First – Senior Management Team – Staffing and Communications PFH reporting and review process.

The Council's Cabinet will review the Customer Service Strategy annually. The review will report on actions completed in the past year and end of year performance against targets, and will set out the action plan for the following year.

The strategy will be shared with partner organisations and will be accessible through the Council's website.

Appendix A – Customer Service Strategy Action Plan 2007-2010

Year One 2007/08

Action	Lead Officer	Resources	By when
Responsive Services			
Implement a revised complaints and compliments procedure	CSPO	Provided for in 2006/07 budgets	May 2007
Corporate Communication Strategy to be prepared and adopted	CM (H &ES)	Funded through Inspire project	July 2007
More opportunities to listen to customers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Stakeholder Forum for Environmental Health Services • Agents Forum for Development Control services • Building Control Customer Focus Group • New Tenant Compact for Housing Tenants • New consultation events for the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document 	EHO (PH) DCQM BCM HSM PPM	Funded through 2007/08 service budgets	March 2008 June 2007 September 2007 September 2007 October 2007
Accessible Services			
Pilot Council meetings at different times to enable greater public access to decision making	DSM	Staff time	March 2008
Investigate feasibility of mystery shopping to provide external verification of customer service performance	CSPO	£5000 Service First	October 2007

Effective and Efficient Services			
Training for staff in complaint handling, to be provided with Local Government Ombudsman	CSPO	£2,000 Service First	October 2007
Review of Contact Centre Partnership Agreement to ensure objectives are being achieved and value for money obtained	HICT	Staff time	October 2007
Customer Service staff suggestion scheme to be launched	CSPO	Staff time	October 2007
Customer Service workshops to build understanding of the Councils' customer care objectives and facilitate service improvement	CSPO	£2000 Service First	October 2007
Pilot application for new Government "Customer Service Standard" accreditation	CDM (PCT)	£2000 Service First	October 2007
Produce quarterly Customer Service review report to include customer satisfaction/complaints data	CSPO	Staff time	July 2007
Explore benchmarking of customer service performance with other local authorities	CSPO	£2,000 Service First	October 2007
The Council will explore the practicalities of shared services with other local authorities or public section partners where this offers potential for service improvement or efficiency	CEO	Staff time	October 2007

Abbreviations

BCM – Building Control Manager
 CDM – Community Development Manager, SCDC/Cambridgeshire PCT
 CEO – Chief Executive Officer
 CSPO – Customer Service Project Officer
 DCQM – Development Control Quality Manager
 DSM – Democratic Services Manager
 HSM – Housing Services Manager
 HICT – Head of ITC
 PPM – Planning Policy Manager
 CM – Communication Manager
 PPM – Policy and Performance Manager

Year Two 2008/09

Action	Lead Officer
Produce first annual customer service review including review of previous years performance and proposals for updating the Customer Service Strategy	CSPO
Development of a Corporate Consultation Strategy that will set out how the Council will consult with residents and customers and listen to their views	CM
To consider how to make better use of the three yearly BVPI satisfaction surveys, including increasing their frequency to annual	PPM
Self access the Councils service against the Audit Commission "Access to Services" key line of enquiry	CSPO

Year Three 2009/10

Action	Lead Officer
Development of the Councils web site to enable more active customer transactions	HICT
Exploration of the potential for mobile phone technology to become a major means for the Council to communicate with its customers	HICT
Production of new Customer Service Strategy 2010/13	CSPO

Appendix B: Background material and publications

Budget Consultation Report 2005/06
Community Strategy Development Consultation
Community Strategy Briefing and Factsheet
Council Tax Consultation Results Analysis 2005/06
Disability Equality Scheme
Environmental Health Annual Customer Survey
Local Authority total population forecasts by ward
Mid 2006 Population projections for Cambridgeshire by age and single year (2001-2031)
Quality of Life Survey Report to LSP Board Leader and Cabinet 2006
Race Equality Scheme
Report 'Deprivation in Cambridgeshire-The English Indices of Deprivation 2004'
South Cambs District Council Benefits Questionnaire
South Cambs District Council District Quality of Life Questionnaire
South Cambs District Council Planning Questionnaire
South Cambs District Council Tenants Questionnaire
Performance Plan 2006
IdeA – Customer Service Framework
Audit Commission Corporate Governance Inspection report 2007

