

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder 7th May 2009
AUTHOR/S: Corporate Manager – Community and Customer Services/Customer Service Coordinator

IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Purpose

1. To review progress on the implementation of the current Customer Service Strategy and performance against local targets and indicators in 2008/09.
2. To outline proposals for improving customer service including the development of a new Customer Service Strategy and work programme for the next three years.
3. This is not a key decision.

Background

4. The Customer Service Strategy developed and adopted in 2007 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.
5. The Council 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.

6. In developing its strategy the Council recognised that the journey to customer service excellence would be a long and challenging one, given its limited resources and the rapidly changing external environment. However the strategy is evidence of the importance of that journey to the future of the Council and to the quality of life of the residents of South Cambridgeshire.
7. The strategy included a detailed action plan for 2007/08 with some headline actions for the remaining two years of the strategy with the intention that the strategy would be refreshed on an annual basis to enable new actions to be added based on achievements and agreed priorities.
8. The corporate Service First team comprising representatives of the Council's four major service areas was established in 2005 initially to oversee the following:
 - establish processes and procedures to develop and reinforce a culture of customer care in the Council ;

- identify and deliver training including customer care as part of new employee induction;
 - integrate customer care in internal communications;
 - include customer service as a cross cutting theme within service planning;
 - to introduce, publicise and promote customer service standards which reflect the needs of customers;
 - to establish mechanisms to collect customer satisfaction data and use that information to improve performance and
 - development of the customer service strategy.
9. Since the development of the customer service strategy the Council has developed a framework to provide direction to the Council's long-term service delivery aspirations.
10. Our vision is:
- To make South Cambridgeshire a safe and healthy place where residents are proud to live and where there will be opportunities for employment, enterprise and world-leading innovation. We will be a listening Council, providing a voice for rural life and first-class services accessible to all.*
11. The Council has also agreed its aims that set out how the vision will be delivered and its approaches to how these aims will be achieved together with specific actions that will be undertaken in 2009/10.
12. The Council has also adopted Values to guide the way that we work together and provide services to the public. These values will help us work effectively to achieve our aims. They govern every aspect of our working relationships within the Council, with the public and our partners.
13. Our values are:
- Customer Service
 - A commitment to Improvement
 - Mutual Respect
 - Trust
14. Our aim is that these values guide everything we do including decision making, training and skills development, relationships and our processes and procedures. Therefore, it will be important that these values are reflected in the customer service strategy and associated implementation action plan.
- What have we achieved?**
15. Progress of the Customer Service Strategy against the implementation action plan is included in more detail at Appendix 1.
16. In summary much has been achieved since the Service First project was established in 2005 including:
- Customer service standards have been introduced and performance has improved against them.
 - The complaints system has been standardised and publicised and complaints are now dealt with more promptly.
 - Customer stakeholder groups have been established for some services.
 - Customer service has been successfully promoted within the Council by participation in National Customer service week.

- Our Contact Centre was ranked as the best public sector contact centre by an independent survey.
 - A range of service specific improvements – for example the planning duty officer system; and the quicker processing of benefits and planning applications.
17. However, a number of actions within the customer service strategy have not been progressed and the action plan has not been refreshed as planned. More recently the Service First team has focussed on monitoring performance through regular review of detailed statistical information.

How well are we performing?

18. In the autumn of 2008 all local authorities carried out a Place Survey to find the views of local people on quality of life their areas. Amongst the results for South Cambridgeshire they show –
- A very high proportion of residents (90.5%) are satisfied with their local area as a place to live
 - 34% of people feel that they can influence decisions in their locality
 - 77% of people feel that they are treated with consideration and respect by local services
 - 44% of people are satisfied with the way that the Council runs things (which is lower than previous surveys) and 33% feel that it provides value for money.
19. The Council has a number of performance indicators that provide valuable information on the experience of our customers in dealing with the Council and/or their experience of accessing our services. The key performance information is summarised at Appendix 2.
20. In summary performance information for 2008/09 is as follows:
- Telephone responses at South Cambridgeshire Hall has remained high.
 - Performance at the Contact Centre has consistently met the Service Level Agreement standards.
 - The 'Handling Unreasonable or Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy' has been approved by EMT. The policy will complement the existing complaints policy.
 - Complaints response times have significantly improved but customer satisfaction has fallen with the exception of the way in which we keep customers informed about the complaint.
 - The average response time for Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) complaints was 37.5 days against a target of 28 days.
 - MRUK have been commissioned to undertake exit surveys for two days every quarter. The surveys will be conducted at the South Cambridgeshire Hall Reception. The information collected will focus on reception and back office customer service levels.
 - Pilot for the collection of NI 14 data, recording levels of avoidable contact over a range of services indicated around 24% of contact was avoidable.

21. After evaluating the NI 14 pilot it has been decided that for 2009/10 NI14 data will be captured for two weeks each quarter and will involve a wider range of services. The Contact Centre has offered to capture this data throughout the year.
22. The detailed information collected will provide Corporate and Service Managers the opportunity to identify specific areas to improve communication and reduce unnecessary contact.

Where do we want to be in three years time?

23. Improving customer service and customer satisfaction are key elements of the Aims, Approaches and Actions. We want to provide first class services accessible to all. Our vision for the future should, therefore, be to an organisation that is recognised for its excellent customer service.

How will we get there?

24. Following the workshop event in March the Service First team have agreed that its role should be refocused on the development, monitoring and review of a Customer Service Strategy with a vision of achieving customer service excellence. Further, there should be less emphasis on performance monitoring as this role is covered effectively by other existing or proposed groups e.g. Contact Centre Partnership Board, Performance Management Group, EMT.
25. It will place greater emphasis on developing a culture of customer care in support of the Council's values; and engaging with customers in accordance with the Community Engagement strategy. More emphasis will be placed on learning from complaints. The challenge will be to continue to improve customer service at a time of financial constraint and increased pressure on services due to the economic downturn.
26. The starting point in developing a new Customer Service Strategy will be to assess the Council against the national Customer Service Excellence Standard.
27. The national Customer Service Excellence Standard is designed to operate on three distinct levels:

As a driver of continuous improvement.

By allowing organisations to self assess their capability, using our online self-assessment tool, in relation to customer focussed service delivery, identifying areas and methods for improvement.

As a skills development tool.

By allowing individuals and teams within the organisation to explore and acquire new skills in the area of customer focus and customer engagement, thus building their capacity for delivering improved services.

As an independent validation of achievement.

By allowing organisations to seek formal accreditation to the Customer Service Excellence standard, demonstrate their competence, identify key areas for improvement and celebrate their success.

28. The Customer Service Excellence Standard criteria are set out in Appendix 4 for information purposes.
29. In terms of moving forward in 2009/10 there are more immediate actions which will help improve customer satisfaction which are key elements of the Aims, Approaches and Actions.

Aim A: We Are Committed To Being A Listening Council, Providing First Class Services Accessible To All

30. In 2009/10 the following actions are proposed to help achieve improved customer satisfaction with our services:

- Establishing a system of satisfaction surveys by May 2010, that will be used to improve all the services that we provide.
- Setting up user groups of residents that will look at three areas of service delivery by 2010 to help guide service delivery in the future.
- Establish systems for collecting data on NI 14 (avoidable contact) and identify potential areas where avoidable contact could be investigated and reduced.
- Assessing the Council against the Customer Service Excellence standard and using the outcome to draw up a plan to identify improvements required.
- Producing an annual report on how we have handled and learnt from complaints.
- Achieving improved performance against key customer service indicators –
 - Time taken to process planning applications (NI 157)
 - Time taken to process housing/Council Tax benefits claims and change events (NI 181)
 - Customer satisfaction with processing of planning applications (SP944)
 - Percentage of customers who feel they have been treated fairly (NI 140)

31. There are also other actions proposed within individual service plans for 2009/10 that will contribute to improvements in customer service and these can be collated to inform the self assessment process and development of the Customer Service Strategy and our performance in terms of positive outcomes for our customers.

32. Alongside delivering the aims, approaches and actions for 2009/10 a timeline for the development of a new Customer Service Strategy has been set as follows:

Target Date	Action
May 2009	Complete self assessment against Customer Service Excellence Model
June 2009	Report on outcome of self assessment
July 2009	Draft new Customer Service Strategy
August 2009	Agree new Customer Service Strategy
September 2009	Agree implementation action plan, including new suite of performance indicators, which will inform service planning and budget setting processes
October 2009 to September 2012	Regular progress reports considered by Service First, SMT/EMT and relevant Portfolio Holder
September 2010 and September 2011	Annual refresh of strategy and progress report to Cabinet

Customer Service Performance Monitoring Information

33. It is proposed that for 2009/10 the indicators included in Appendix 3 be adopted as a 'Customer Service Score Card' to monitor and manage performance, through Corvu, against the current Customer Service Standards. These will be reported on a quarterly basis to the Service First team and the relevant Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the cross cutting role of champion for Customer Service.
34. This information will include telephone performance for the Contact Centre and South Cambridgeshire Hall, complaint responses, number of recorded compliments and Reception / Back Office customer satisfaction.
35. However, as part of the development of the new Customer Service Strategy performance information and targets will need to be reviewed to ensure that they less process and more outcome focussed. This will be important in the context of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) that has replaced the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework.

Consultations

36. Complaints performance was reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 April 2009. The Committee made the following suggestions:
 - the complaints system used by Addenbrookes Hospital should be examined
 - the themes recorded for complaints should be more descriptive
 - complaints should be assessed on seriousness
37. The Committee have agreed that it would revisit complaints performance in six months time, where progress on the following issues would be reviewed:
 - Whether a clearer definition of what constitutes a complaint has been provided
 - Whether Councillors have received a reminder of the Service First training which described the Members' place within the complaints process.
 - Whether the Council's performance with regard to the complaint satisfaction rate had improved.
38. The Service First team have been involved in and consulted on the development of proposals outlined in this report and will oversee their delivery.
39. The proposals are also to be considered by EMT in May and there will be regular reports on progress against milestones and performance information to both SMT and EMT over the coming year.

Implications

40.

Financial	<p>A dedicated budget of £8,500 has been included within the Estimates for 2009/10 for Service First initiatives, including training. However, corporate training budgets could be used to supplement the funding available for any training needs identified to deliver a new customer service strategy, subject to prioritisation of available resources.</p> <p>Further, successful bids for funding to support the aims, approaches and actions in 2009/10 in relation to improving customer satisfaction has provided the additional resources identified to secure their delivery.</p>
Legal	<p>The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 sets out the new duty on all authorities to involve local communities in all their functions. The duty requires us to take the steps we consider appropriate to involve representatives of local persons in the exercise of all our functions. The new duty to involve will primarily be discharged through the development and implementation of a new Community Engagement Strategy (CES), which is currently out to consultation ahead of its anticipated adoption by the Council in July. However, there are clear links between the CES and the proposed new customer service strategy in terms of involving our customers in how we develop and deliver our services.</p>
Staffing	<p>The new role of Customer Service Coordinator has been established to support the delivery of improved customer service across the Council.</p> <p>The Service First Team has been tasked to improve, monitor and develop customer service throughout the Council, enabling services to work towards the annual vision and values.</p>
Risk Management	<p>The key risks to delivering improvements in customer service are included in the Community and Customer Services Risk Register and can be summarised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of progress on the embedding of Council values • Poor perception of local services/ Council, leading to low NI scores on satisfaction ratings, resulting in lowered CAA performance and poor reputation • Improving customer service within the financial constraints faced by the Council, particularly in the current economic downturn
Equal Opportunities	<p>Our customer service strategy will need to take into account our statutory duties in relation to equalities and ensure that our services are open to, and, accessible by all our residents and reflect the diversity of our rural district.</p> <p>A new Customer Service Strategy will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to ensure that it is able to deliver against the above requirements.</p>

Effect on Strategic Aims

41.	Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.
	The Customer Service Strategy sets out how the Council will meet its short and longer term objectives to provide first class and accessible services to its customers.

Recommendations

42. That the achievements to date in terms of progress against delivery of the current Customer Service Strategy and associated action plan, along with the performance in 2008/09 against the key indicators set out in Appendix 2, are noted.
43. To agree the proposed quarterly Customer Service Score Card for monitoring and managing performance on improving customer service in 2009/10.
44. To endorse the next steps in terms of achieving the vision of customer service excellence through the development and implementation of a new Customer Service Strategy in accordance with the timeline set out in the table at paragraph 32 of this report.

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

Customer Service Strategy 2007-2010

Draft Corporate Plan 2009/10

Final Guidance on Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

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Customer Service Strategy Action Plan 2007-2010

Year One 2007/08

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead Officer</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>By when</i>	<i>Progress</i>
<i>Responsive Services</i>				
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	Jul 2007	✓
More opportunities to listen to customers				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Stakeholder Forum for EH • 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	Mar 2008 Jun 2007 Sep 2007 Sep 2007 Oct 2007	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
<i>Accessible Services</i>				
Pilot Council meetings at different times to enable greater public access to decision making	DSM	Staff time	Mar 2008	✓
Investigate feasibility of mystery shopping to provide external verification of customer service performance	CSPO	£5000 Service First	October 2007	✓

<i>Effective and Efficient Services</i>				
<i>Training for staff in complaint handling, to be provided with Local Government Ombudsman</i>	<i>CSPO</i>	<i>£2,000 Service First</i>	<i>October 2007</i>	<i>✓</i>
<i>Review of Contact Centre Partnership Agreement to ensure objectives are being achieved and value for money obtained</i>	<i>HICT</i>	<i>Staff time</i>	<i>October 2007</i>	<i>✓</i>
<i>Customer Service staff suggestion scheme to be launched</i>	<i>CSPO</i>	<i>Staff time</i>	<i>October 2007</i>	<i>✓</i>
<i>Customer Service workshops to build understanding of the Councils' customer care objectives and facilitate service improvement</i>	<i>CSPO</i>	<i>£2000 Service First</i>	<i>October 2007</i>	<i>X</i>
<i>Apply for pilot application for new Government "Customer Service Standard" accreditation</i>	<i>CDM (PCT)</i>	<i>£2000 Service First</i>	<i>October 2007</i>	<i>✓</i>
<i>Produce quarterly Customer Service review report to include customer satisfaction/complaints data</i>	<i>CSPO</i>	<i>Staff time</i>	<i>July 2007</i>	<i>✓</i>
<i>Explore benchmarking of customer service performance with other local authorities</i>	<i>CSPO</i>	<i>£2,000 Service First</i>	<i>October 2007</i>	<i>X</i>
<i>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</i>	<i>CEO</i>	<i>Staff time</i>	<i>October 2007</i>	<i>✓</i>

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	Progress
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	X

Year Three 2009/10

Action	Lead Officer	Progress
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	

CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE INFORMATION 2008/09

Telephone Performance

Telephone performance at South Cambridgeshire Hall has remained strong throughout 2008/09 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Cambourne performance against telephone service standards

Measure	Target	2008/09
Calls abandoned	<5%	4.18%
Response times	<30secs	00:00:06
Call answering	80% within 20secs	98.76%

Performance at the Contact Centre during 2008/09 has consistently met the Service Level Agreement standards.

Table 2 Contact Centre performance against SLA standards

Measure	SLA target	2008/09
Calls abandoned	<5%	2.03 %
Response times	<30secs	00:00:07
Call answering	80% within 20secs	91.51 %

Complaints

The following tables set out the number of internal complaints and our performance in meeting acknowledgement & response targets. The tables also detail complaint themes and complaint handling satisfaction.

N.B. Stage 1 & 2 complaints are categorised as internal.

Table 1 Breakdown of internal complaints by stage

	Stage 1	Stage 2
2008/09	115	9
2007/08	123	4

Table 2 Breakdown of internal complaints by acknowledgement

	Stage 1 & 2	Target Met		Target Failed	
2008/09	124	117	94%	7	6%

Table 3 Breakdown of internal complaints by response

	Stage 1 & 2	Target Met		Target Failed		Outstanding	
2008/2009	124	100	81%	21	17%	3	2%
2007/2008	127	71	56%	55	43%	1	1%

Table 4 Breakdown of internal complaints by theme

Theme	% Complaints
Failure to communicate	23%
Failure to act	3%
Misinformation	4%
Council Charges	3%
Service Delivery	32%
Staff Conduct	5%
Processes and/or procedures	30%

Table 5 Complaint handling satisfaction

Satisfaction	07/08	08/09
The way the complaint was handled	44%	24%
The way in which we kept you informed about the complaint	27%	38%
The complaint process	32%	24%
The length of time taken to respond to the complaint	44%	29%

Whilst our response time has significantly improved, customer satisfaction has fallen with the exception of the way in which we keep customers informed about the complaint. However, only 13 surveys were completed in 2007/08 and 10 surveys were completed in 2008/09 so the significance of this decline is difficult to accurately assess.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaint

Provisional information on LGO complaints received during 2008/09 has been provided. A change in the way which the LGO operates means that the statistics about complaints received in 2008/09 are not directly comparable with those of 2007/08. For this reason the LGO has omitted previous year data for comparison. The tables below detail the number of LGO complaints received per service area, the LGO determinations and the average response time.

19 of the 32 complaints received in 2008/09 were forwarded to the LGO Investigative Team. The remaining 13 complaints were categorised as 'premature' (seven) or 'advice given' (six) and were not investigated.

Table 1 Breakdown of LGO complaints by service area

	2008/09
Benefits	3
Housing	2
Other	12
Planning & Building Control	12
Public Finance	2
Transport & Highways	1
Total	32

Forwarded for investigation	19
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Table 2 Breakdown of LGO decisions

Decision	2008/09
Investigation concluded maladministration causing injustice	0
Local settlement agreed	2
Investigation concluded maladministration but no injustice	0
Investigation concluded no maladministration	0
Insufficient evidence of maladministration to continue investigation	10
Investigation discontinued at Ombudsman's discretion	2
Outside Ombudsman's jurisdiction	3
Total	17

2 LGO decisions remain outstanding.

Table 3 Average response time for LGO complaints

	2007/08	2008/09	LGO Target
Average Response Time	36.9 days	37.5 days	28 days

The LGO has calculated the average response time using 11 responses. Three of the responses exceeded the target of 28 days significantly. This has increased the overall average response time.

MRUK Satisfaction Surveys

MRUK have been commissioned to undertake exit surveys for two days every quarter. The surveys will be conducted at the South Cambridgeshire Hall Reception. The information collected will focus on reception and back office customer service levels. The results from these surveys will be reported to Service First once every quarter.

National Indicator 14 (NI14)

South Cambridgeshire District Council piloted the collection of NI 14 data, recording levels of avoidable contact over a range of services. The pilot took place over two separate weeks; 2nd – 6th February & 23rd – 27th February 2009.

The following service areas were included:

- Contact Centre
 - Housing
 - Environmental Health
 - Electoral Services
 - Revenues
 - Benefits
- Finance & Support Services
- Planning & Sustainable Communities
- Health & Environmental Services
- Affordable Housing

A total of 752 contacts were recorded during the pilot. 421 contacts were recorded by the Contact Centre and 331 contacts were recorded by back office services. The tables below detail the overall percentage of contacts recorded as avoidable and their classification.

Table 1 Avoidable & Unavoidable Contact

Avoidable Contact	Unavoidable Contact
24%	76%

Table 2 Avoidable Contact Classifications

A. Unnecessary Clarification	B. Poor signposting	C. Repeat Notification	D. Progress Chasing	E. Repeat Contact
32%	5%	3%	57%	3%

Proposed Quarterly Customer Service Scorecard 2009/10

CorVu Customer Service Quarterly Scorecard
Contact Centre
SF731 – Contact Centre - % calls abandoned. SF756 – Contact Centre - average call wait time. SF747 – Contact Centre - % calls answered in 20 seconds. SF750 – Contact Centre - % switchboard calls answered within 10 seconds.
Cambourne Telephones
SX040 – Cambourne - % calls abandoned. SX041 – Cambourne - % calls answered in 20 seconds. SX042 – Cambourne - average call wait time.
Complaints
SX049 – Complaints - % acknowledged within deadline. SX050 – Complaints % Stage 1 & 2 complaints responded to within deadline. SX051 – Complaints - Average number of days to respond to LGO. SX018 – Complaints % Complaint handling satisfaction. NEW – Complaints - % justified complaints received an apology. NEW – Complaints - % justified complaints informed of corrective measures.
Cambourne Reception - MRUK
SX046 – Cambourne Reception - % customers spoken to within 2 minutes. SX047 – Cambourne Reception - % customers offered a private room when requested. SX048 – Cambourne Reception - % customers seen within 10 minutes of appointment time. SX006 – Cambourne Reception - % customers satisfied with overall service.
NI 14
NEW – NI14 - % Avoidable / Unavoidable Contact NEW – NI14 - % Avoidable Contact Category
Correspondence
TBC

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE STANDARD – CRITERIA

The standard is divided into five criteria:

1. Customer Insight
2. The Culture of the Organisation
3. Information & Access
4. Delivery
5. Timeliness & Quality of Service

This criteria is further divided into a number of sections:

Customer Insight

- 1.1 Customer Identification
- 1.2 Engagement & Consultation
- 1.3 Customer Satisfaction

The culture of the Organisation

- 2.1 Leadership, Policy & Culture
- 2.2 Staff professionalism & Attitude

Information & Access

- 3.1 Range of Information
- 3.2 Quality of Information
- 3.3 Access
- 3.4 Cooperative working with other providers, partners & communities

Delivery

- 4.1 Delivery Standards
- 4.2 Achieved Delivery & Outcomes
- 4.3 Deal effectively with problems

Timeliness & Quality of Service

- 5.1 Standards for Timeliness & Quality
- 5.2 Timely Outcomes
- 5.3 Achieved Timely Delivery

These sections are further divided into a number of key elements.