

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Policy & Performance Portfolio Holder 15 February 2011  
**AUTHOR/S:** Corporate Manager for Community and Customer Services

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### **CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE (CSE) PROJECT – LATEST POSITION AND DETERMINATION OF TIMESCALE FOR FINAL ASSESSMENT IN 2011**

#### **Purpose**

1. To inform the Portfolio Holder on the current position and recommend a timetable for proceeding to full corporate assessment later in 2011 seeking Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation for the Council, a corporate Council Action to be completed during 2011.
2. This is not a key decision; however, it seeks a decision by the Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder in respect of the timeline to proceed to full corporate assessment for a key corporate project for the Council.

#### **Recommendation**

3. The Portfolio Holder is requested to note the latest position with regard to the CSE project and outcomes from the pre-assessment, and **agree** that the Council proceed to full assessment in **June 2011**, subject to a satisfactory assessment of the Council's readiness to proceed by 30 April 2011.

#### **Reasons for Recommendation**

4. These recommendations are necessary to enable key steps towards corporate accreditation to be taken in accordance with a challenging but realistic timetable. It is considered that a June 2011 assessment date allows sufficient time for the additional work identified within the pre-assessment to be carried out, and key initiatives developed and implemented, without causing unacceptable delays to the project timetable or clashes with the Local Elections. The assessment of readiness in April 2011 will be conducted by the Project Sponsor, and ensure that relevant actions have been taken forward in a timely manner. Any significant issues will be brought to the Portfolio Holder's attention at this stage.

#### **Background**

5. The Portfolio Holder will be aware that the Council has a Corporate Action for 2010-11, as part of its annual Corporate Plan, to prepare the authority to achieve CSE accreditation during 2011. The evidencing stage of the process culminated in full revised assessments being submitted to the Assessor in preparation for a documentary review and on-site pre-assessment. These took place on 6 and 13-17 December 2010 respectively.

#### **Considerations – Feedback and next steps**

6. The documentary review and on-site pre-assessment were intended to determine the Council's readiness to proceed to final assessment which will result in accreditation,

identifying in which areas evidence gaps remain. Following these, the Assessor produced a formal notice on 22 December 2010 highlighting areas for further consideration and key recommendations, as follows (*with updates in brackets*):

- Agree upon the final format that the self-assessment documentation will be provided in. This should be less than the twenty-nine submissions that have been reviewed to date. *The Project Assurance Group has agreed to consolidate 29 self-assessments into six: (the Council's five services, with Revenues and Benefits [Corporate Services] remaining as a separate self-assessment)*
- Encourage departments to review the evidence leading up to the Criterion in the self-assessment documentation, as several areas had not been completed. It is possible that the assessor will ask staff questions about how this relates to their particular area of responsibility. *Workstream leaders have been tasked with undertaking a final review of their self-assessments in order to identify new and updated evidence which demonstrates compliance with the criteria.*
- Review the potential areas for development. *Being taken forward as part of a revised Corporate Work Plan*
- Develop an action plan that may provide an indication of when the Council considers that it will be ready for final assessment. *The Corporate Work Plan has been modified to take into account the additional and amended actions required and is available to the Portfolio Holder upon request. Service-specific actions will be built into final 2011-12 service plans.*
- Agree dates with the assessor for planning the final assessment. *Subject to a recommendation in this report (see paragraph 3)*

7. The assessor's feedback identified a number of strengths, areas for development and potential actions for the Council, these are summarised as follows:

#### *Strengths*

- Self-awareness; growing understanding of strengths and, where performance is not up to standard, a willingness of apologise and commitment to put things right;
- Growing focus on officers and Members and internal customers, and how services relate to each within SCDC;
- Collaborative customer service initiatives between services; willingness to share information and good practice (as encouraged by the CSE self-assessment process);

#### *Areas for development*

- Further analysis of customer relationships through Customer Journey Mapping techniques, especially for internal customer relationships between services.
- Identification of hard to reach internal groups and understanding of their specific needs
- Acting on the results of feedback and demonstrating how improvements have been informed by customer insight (internal and external)
- Development of customer service standards which apply consistent minimum standards for all internal and external customer relationships, wherever possible.
- Clarification of the internal procedure for service complaints.
- Development of actions to investigate the high proportion of calls being directed straight to Voicemail.

These areas for development are being taken forward within a revised corporate work plan, which has been endorsed by the project assurance group and EMT.

### Considerations – Project Outcomes

8. The assurance group, led by Steve Hampson (Project Sponsor), Paul Knight and subsequently Rachael Fox (Project Managers), has overseen a comprehensive work programme, which has resulted in a full audit of the Council's customer service activities, identifying many examples of good practice and areas in which improvements are required.
9. **The exercise has also resulted in an imperceptible but nevertheless genuine sense of cultural change within the organisation**, through which officers are increasingly thinking of their work, whether directly public-facing or support functions, in terms of the service provided to internal and external customers. This has helped employees and teams to understand who their customers are and recognise the good customer service which they already provide, identify where improvements are required and develop service improvement plans to implement them. Much of this change can be attributed to behavioural change in the way the organisation thinks and acts; however, it can be aided and assisted by the introduction of new initiatives such as updated customer satisfaction surveys and the re-launch of an Employee and Team Recognition Scheme.
10. The positive developments described above demonstrate that already the project has moved beyond a 'tick-box' exercise designed to achieve accreditation without meaningful improvements to the way the organisation operates. It is nevertheless important to ensure that momentum following accreditation is maintained; this will be achieved through the continuing work of the CSE PAG under its previous auspices as the Service First group, and the absorption of corporate work plan actions into service plans for 2011-12 and beyond.
11. Customer service is also being 'mainstreamed' into the Council's priority activities through the customer contact review and draft Council action to improve the Council's website. The Customer Contact Strategic Review is exploring current standards and future delivery options for first-contact customer services, with a view to identifying a preferred option for the way forward for agreement by Cabinet in Summer 2011. This project involves a strong consultation element and has strong links to the key themes of the CSE project; for example, the review of the Customer Service Standards and Strategy will be informed by the consultation, with revised standards to be based around the preferred model chosen.
12. All the Council's corporate policies and projects contribute directly and indirectly to improving customer service. These are too numerous and wide in scope to mention here; however, it should be noted that the recent Performance Management Task and Finish Group's report, its recommendations since accepted by the Cabinet, has led to improvement actions with strong links to customer services, covering areas such as public consultation to determine priorities for action and performance monitoring and employee recognition for strong performance.

### Implications

13.

Financial	The project is anticipated to be delivered under budget, although details of the customer service training programme have yet to be fully costed.
Legal	None specific arising from this report and recommendations.

Staffing	The project continues to be delivered using existing staffing resources.
Risk Management	The project assurance group oversees a risk log modelled on the Council's corporate risk management policies.
Equality and Diversity	The project itself has not been specifically impact-assessed; however, the criteria and evidence required have strong links to equality and diversity in terms of identifying and engaging with hard-to-reach customer groups and adapting services to meet their needs.
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No – see above
	As above
Climate Change	None specific arising from this report and recommendations.

### Consultations

14. The project has been overseen by a cross-service CSE PAG chaired by Steve Hampson, with regular progress reports made to the Portfolio Holder. Consultation in terms of engagement and customer satisfaction has been and will continue to be a key process by which the Council understands its customers in order to provide services which meet their diverse needs. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a report on the latest position at its meeting in January 2011, providing useful feedback for the project team and broad endorsement of the aims, objectives and proposed timetable for the conclusion of the project.

### Effect on Strategic Aims

15. The preparation of the Council to achieve CSE accreditation is a key corporate action to be carried out during 2010-11, and there is a provisional action for 2011-12 to improve the Council's website to encourage a self-service approach based on 'tell us once' and 'getting it right first time'. Indirectly, the project has identified a number of improvement areas which, in conjunction with a long-term vision for customer contact, will help the Council to ensure excellent customer service that all its future aims are based on local intelligence informed by the results of engagement and customer satisfaction.

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

[Report to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, 6 January 2011](#) (and appendix setting out the assessor's full response following pre-assessment)  
CSE Updated Corporate Work Plan (available from the Policy and Performance Team using the contacts below)

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