

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Leader and Cabinet 10 November 2005  
**AUTHOR:** Housing & Environmental Services Director

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### SERVICE FIRST – CUSTOMER CARE PROJECT

#### Purpose

1. To brief Cabinet on the progress of the corporate “Service First’ customer care project and for Cabinet to agree corporate customer service standards.

#### Effect on Corporate Objectives

2. Quality, Accessible Services	This project forms part of the Council’s 2005 Performance Plan and supports the corporate objective “High Quality, Accessible, Value for Money Services” and 2005/06 priority “To Improve Customer Service”
Village Life	
Sustainability	
Partnership	The ‘Service First’ project includes staff from Cambridgeshire Direct.

#### Background

3. In January 2005 the Council agreed its CPA Improvement Plan, which included the following milestones. These were subsequently subsumed into the Council’s 2005 Performance Plan, which has as a 2005/06 priority ‘To improve customer service’.

#### The approval and publication of customer service standards for all major Council services

- M28 Agree service standards and resources following consultation with services, users and staff I&CS H&ES Q3 2005
- M29 Training, communication and preparation to implement the standards I&CS H&ES Q1 2006
- M30 Implementation of the standards I&CS H&ES Q2 2006
- M31 Establish arrangements for monitoring and reporting on achievement of standards I&CS H&ES Q3 2006

#### The enhancement of customer care culture within the Council.

- M32 Establish a corporate customer care project and consult staff on customer service issues I&CS H&ES Q1 2005
- M33 Customer care and telephone training for all staff I&CS H&ES Q3 2005 £
- M34 First corporate report on complaints monitoring I&CS H&ES Q2 2005

- M35 Introduce arrangements for reporting on customer care successes I&CS H&ES Q1 2006
  - M36 Build customer care into service plan and appraisal schemes. I&CS H&ES Q1 2006
4. In October 2004 Management Team set up the 'Service First' customer care project team, comprising staff from across the Council's services, to develop and reinforce a culture of customer care within the Council. The first phase of the project is to produce corporate and service specific customer service standards, and to organise corporate customer service training before the launch of the standards in April 2006.

### **Customer Service standards**

5. Service standards exist in some service areas but not others. Some standards arise through statutory obligation, others have been generated independently within service areas. Where standards do exist they are not consistently publicised, applied, monitored or reviewed.
6. Over the past 12 months the Service First team has developed a standard format for customer service standards. The corporate template contains the following elements:
- Corporate service standards** – which apply to all services and are focused on customers' initial contact with Council services
- Service specific standards** – which are specific to individual services
- Customer obligations** – which set out what customers can do to make their contact with the Council positive.
7. A sample is attached at **Appendix A** and service standards have been drafted for the following areas: - Housing Services, Environmental Services, Democratic and Electoral Services, Revenue Services, Development Control, Community Services.
8. The standards have been developed by staff within service areas and first drafts were agreed with Directors and Portfolio Holders in the summer. An article inviting residents' comments appeared in the Summer edition of 'South Cambs News'. In developing these standards every effort has been made to keep them simple; express them in terms that will make sense to service users; and to aim for ambitious standards without making promises that cannot be fulfilled. The standards reflect service levels which the Council offers now and therefore should not introduce additional resource requirements.
9. The Council's revised 'post capping' budget will affect service levels in some areas and so the draft service specific standards will need to be checked and if necessary revised by Directors and Portfolio Holders.
10. If Cabinet agrees with the corporate service standards then it is intended that further consultation be carried out with residents through established residents' associations to ensure they are easily understood and cover the areas of main customer concern.

### **Customer service training**

11. The Service First team has prepared a training brief for the project, which is subject to external competition, with a view to rolling out half day training sessions for all Council staff early in 2006. It is also proposed to organise training for elected members. The

purpose of the training is to raise awareness of the importance of customer care and to brief on the service specific standards that have been developed.

12. Provision for customer care training is contained in the revised 2005/06 budget.

#### **Monitoring, review and development of service standards**

13. The customer service standards will provide users of Council services with a clear statement and measure of what they can expect. This will enable customers to complain if those standards have not been delivered. Integration of the Council's complaints monitoring and review systems with a system for monitoring and reviewing the new customer service standards is essential to avoid duplication and additional reports.
14. Although the precise mechanism for monitoring and reviewing the standards has not yet been agreed, the Service First team is of the view that it must be proportionate and simple and should not introduce an additional layer of administration. A system of occasional random checking is likely to be adopted. The results of the monitoring will be incorporated into the six monthly complaints review which is considered by Management Team the Information and Customer Service Portfolio Holder.

#### **Service planning and staff appraisals**

15. In order to help embed a culture of customer care within the Council it is proposed to include within 2006/07 service plans and personal appraisal templates a section that will describe team and individual contributions to customer care, inviting managers and appraisees to put forward their suggestions for improvement.

#### **Recommendations**

16. It is recommended that
  - (a) the corporate customer care standards as set out in Appendix A are agreed and used as the basis for further consultation with staff and customers by December 2005.
  - (b) training for Council and Contact Centre staff and elected members is organised for January to March 2006.
  - (c) a customer care element is introduced to 2006/07 service plan and personal appraisal templates to focus attention on how customer service can be improved.
  - (d) all Portfolio Holders be asked to agree the final version of service specific standards to take account of post capping budget reductions by the end of November 2005
  - (d) the Service First project team be tasked with making further recommendations to the Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder on the following:
    - (i) Monitoring of performance against standards
    - (ii) Review and development of standards
    - (iii) Use of mystery shoppers
    - (iv) Integration of customer satisfaction and complaints monitoring
    - (v) Generation of ideas to improve customer care

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Departmental Service Standard Booklets

**Contact Officer:** Steve Hampson – Housing and Environmental Services Director  
Telephone: (01954) 713020