



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Cabinet's Response to the Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny 3, Customer Services Task and Finish Group presented to Cabinet on 20th May 2009
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	5 th August 2009
Key Decision:	NO
Listed on Forward Plan:	YES
Within Policy:	YES
Policy Document:	NO
Directorate:	Finance and Support
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Tony Woods
Ward(s)	ALL

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets out the response of the Director of Finance and Support to the Cabinet in respect of recommendations made by Overview and Scrutiny 3, Customer Services Task and Finish Group. The Group made 19 recommendations which are listed in Appendix 1.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet agree the response of the Director of Finance and Support to the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny 3, Customer Services Task and Finish Group. In particular that Cabinet:
- a) records its appreciation for the work of the Task and Finish Group in identifying further ways in which the Council can improve the customer experience.
 - b) Notes that many of the Group's recommendations have been addressed in the Service Plan 2009/10 for Customer Services due to the involvement of the Head of Customer Services and ICT and the Assistant Head of

Customer Services in the Task and Finish Group's review. Specifically recommendations 1, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

- c) Accepts recommendations 3 and 17 which will be addressed in the delivery of the Customer Excellence Strategy.
- d) Accepts in principle recommendations 2, 7, 9, 18 and 19 which will be reviewed by the One Stop Shop Transformation Project Team. However, Cabinet may need to make a further decision on staff uniforms in the One Stop Shop if this cannot be met within existing budgets.
- e) Rejects recommendation 8 as a Health and Safety Review has previously been done for Cliftonville House and all Display Screen Equipment risk assessments in the Contact Centre have been completed.
- f) Accepts recommendation 16 to include a review of the Council's Core Documents on the Overview and Scrutiny 3 Work plan.
- g) Advises that no further action is required in respect of recommendation 11 to offer documents in tape or compact disc format as this is already covered within existing policy.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

3.1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny 3, Customer Services Task and Finish Group reviewed the success of the investments made in the Council's Customer Service function since 2005. The review took place during the development of the Council's Customer Excellence Strategy (approved at Cabinet on 18th March 2009) and prior to immediate preparation for the Access to Services inspection.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 The Task and Finish Group report highlights that the Council's Customer Service function is providing value for money and noted that customer satisfaction is good and improving. Recommendations were made to further improve the customer experience.

3.2.2 The group noted that there were a large number of information leaflets in production and that the information could be conveyed in more cost effective ways. The Group recommended a review of core documents to ensure that leaflets are in plain English and follow the same corporate style.

3.2.3 The group commended the work of the Councillor Contact Centre and expressed a wish for awareness training for more councillors to make use of it.

3.2.4 The group were impressed by staff uniforms in the best practice One Stop Shops that they visited and have recommended that uniforms be provided to

NBC staff in the One Stop Shop so that customers can identify them with a corporate image. .

3.3 Choices (Options)

- 3.3.1 Delivery of the Council's Customer Excellence Strategy and efficiency savings for 2009/10 makes the majority of the recommendations of the task and finish group essential. Indeed many of the actions have been completed or are included in the 2009/10 service plan for Customer Services.
- 3.3.2 The recommendation for One Stop Shop staff to wear uniform would have a cost implication which is not included in the current budget. If cabinet support this recommendation in principle, then a further report on the cost implications will need to be presented.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 The response to the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny 3, Customer Services Task and Finish Group will have no implications on Council policy.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 Recommendation 19 to introduce a corporate uniform in the One Stop Shop would have an impact on resources as this is not currently budgeted for. The options for uniform would be reviewed by the One Stop Shop Transformation Group and presented back to Cabinet if costs cannot be met within existing budgets.
- 4.2.2 Other recommendations with cost implications, such as a queuing system and plasma screens in the One Stop Shop can be met in part within the £250,000 capital project to transform the One Stop Shop. The capital bid includes for ongoing revenue expenditure to maintain technology and systems installed in the transformation project. Options will be presented to Cabinet if costs cannot be met within the capital budget.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 No legal issues have been identified as a result of the recommendations in the report.

4.4 Equality

- 4.4.1 The recommendations in this report will enhance the experience of customers contacting the Council in that information will be more accessible and a queuing system in the One Stop Shop will improve the experience for deaf and hard of hearing customers who may currently experience problems.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

None

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

The response to the recommendations helps deliver the Council's ambition to become one of the best Council's by 2013. The key management aim to provide excellent customer service is also aided by this response.

4.7 Other Implications

None

5. Background Papers

5.1 Customer Excellence Strategy

Cheryl Doran, Assistant Head of Customer Services and ICT, extension 7234

Appendix 1

Customer Service Task and Finish Group Recommendations

1. In order to ascertain whether a good Customer Service Facility is being provided by Northampton Borough Council, benchmarking against the family group be undertaken.
2. A cost saving exercise regarding the number of leaflets produced be undertaken and consideration given to alternatives such as information made available electronically and the installation of plasma screens in the One Stop Shop to display relevant information.
3. A higher promotion of customer focus throughout the whole Authority be introduced by promoting the Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012.
4. The Complaints Policy Procedure be updated.
5. The Customer Services Leaflets and Customer Feedback forms be updated and contain Officers' posts rather than the inclusion of Officers' names.
6. In depth training for all Customer Services staff be strengthened, in particular training for staff on how to deal with job related stresses.
7. The front desk based in the One Stop Shop deals with simple queries such as receiving customer's additional paperwork and completed forms.
8. A Health and Safety report for Cliftonville House be produced for environmental issues such as the lighting, heating and air conditioning systems, along with the cleanliness of the premise.
9. The Task and Finish Group informs Cabinet of its support for the introduction of an automated queuing system at the One Stop Shop at Northampton Borough Council.
10. A team from Customer Services be set up to work with managers to draw up Service Level Agreements around customer focus.
11. The provision of Council documents are translated into formats suitable for a range of disabled customers be strengthened, by offering the facility of tapes or compact discs of requested Council documents being provided to those such customers.
12. Customer Services Officers be allocated sufficient time to keep up to date with 'Regulatory changes' using the new computer trainer system.
13. A questionnaire be sent to customers after complaint resolution, all services be sent a copy on which to comment.
14. All councillors to be reminded to use the Councillor Contact Centre rather than contacting individual departments/services. This is necessary to ensure that accurate information about the service provision is provided.

15. Training for Councillors on how to use the Councillor Contact Centre and the whole Customer Service Process be given. The same training be given to the Political Assistants and Leader's Secretary.
16. It be recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee that a Review of all Council core documents and leaflets be added to the Work Programme for 2009/10. The purpose of the review would be to ensure that all documents are produced in plain English and follow the same corporate style.
17. A copy of this report be sent to the Chief Executive, Head of Customer Services, Northamptonshire County Council and all those who have participated in this review.
18. The Task and Finish Group welcomes the capital resource of £250,000 for improvements to the One Stop Shop.
19. That resources be allocated for the provision of uniforms for front line Customer Services Officers, identifying a corporate image. Staff be consulted on the style of the uniform.