

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE		Report No. 15
Date of Meeting	1 st November 2007	
Title of Report	Improvements in Customer Focus	
Portfolio	Customer and Partners	
Link to Corporate Priorities	Customers	
Key Decision	No	
Executive Workplan Ref	B369	
Public Report	Yes	

Summary of Report

To present to the Executive the proposals and action plan designed to improve the Council's Customer Focus.

Officer Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive:

1. Note the report
2. Endorse the proposal to consolidate the numerous action plans relating to Customer Focus into coherent workstream action plans and to reduce and prioritise the number of actions on the basis of what can be realistically achieved in the time available, and
3. Approve the high-level action plans.

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
None	None	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact Officer	Jackie Tavener, Head of Customer Relations, 01249 706226 jtavener@northwiltshire.gov.uk			

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the Policy Day on 6th September 2007, Members decided that Customer Focus remains a corporate priority and that improvements in this area are to be effected during the transition period prior to vesting day of the new unitary authority. This conclusion informed the priorities and actions set out in the Council's Transitional Corporate Plan, which was approved by the Executive (Budget) on 20th September 2007. This report sets out the proposals designed to improve the Council's Customer Focus together with a high level action plan, which can be used to assess progress in this regard.

2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1 **Option 1:** It is recommended that Members:
1. Note the report
 2. Endorse the proposal to consolidate the numerous action plans relating to Customer Focus into coherent workstream action plans and to reduce and prioritise the number of actions on the basis of what can be realistically achieved in the time available, and
 3. Approve the high-level action plans.
- 2.2 **Option 2:** To suggest an alternative course of action.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 The Council's Customer Focus has been subject to a number of reviews over the last two years. In 2005, the Audit Commission conducted a full inspection and assessed that North Wiltshire District Council provides **fair** customer focused services that have **promising prospects for further improvement**. The report highlighted key recommendations to the Council arising from the inspection. The Council used the report and recommendations as the basis of an improvement action to bring about the required improvements set out in the report. The Audit Commission re-inspected the Council's Customer Focus on the 10th October 2006 and used the recommendations from the original report and the Council's improvement action plan as a basis to establish progress. The main conclusion from the Audit Commission's re-inspection is that the Council is making good progress in carrying forward its customer focus agenda. The Audit Commission made no further specific recommendations except that the Council should continue to develop its approach to customer focus in line with the improvement action plan. Although, the overall assessment was disappointing, the Audit Commission highlighted that both the front of house and customer contact centre were of notable practice.
- 3.2 In addition to the above, a fundamental review of the Council's performance and service delivery was conducted following the appointment of the Chief Executive. As part of this review, consultants were appointed to identify areas for improvement and specific recommendations relating to Customer Focus were highlighted. These recommendations informed the Chief Executive's organisational restructure proposals. Furthermore, action plans exist to continue to meet the Charter Mark National E-Service Delivery Standards and effect the Customer First Partnership values.

4. Proposals for Improving Customer Focus

4.1 The clear recommendations arising from the Audit Commission, the Members' Policy day and the Chief Executive's performance review can be summarised as follows:

- Customer contact across the Council should be rationalised and delivered from a single contact centre under one line of management.
- A high proportion of customer enquiries should be dealt with at the first point of contact.
- Council services should be easily accessible for all customers via the access channel of their choice.
- The design for service delivery should optimise efficiencies and customer choice.
- Communication should be simple, understandable and tailored to the customer's requirements.
- A centralised approach should be adopted for handling customer comments and complaints and feedback used to highlight areas for improvement and the design of service delivery.
- Adopt a council-wide and consistent approach to measuring customer satisfaction at the point of service delivery.
- The Council's Customer Service Charter should clearly communicate the levels of service a customer can expect with performance being monitored and publicised.
- The Council should monitor and measure the qualitative aspects of service provision.

4.2 The proposal for improvement builds upon and consolidates existing action plans, the notable practice already in place and specifically addresses the recommendations highlighted above. These are set out below. The improvements plan at Appendix 1 details the high-level actions required and timescales involved.

- A Customer Liaison Team is to be created to own and improve the handling of the Council's comments and complaints from April 2008. This will include recruitment of a Customer Liaison Manager and two Customer Liaison Officers.
- Govmetric satisfaction system is to be introduced in November 2007. This will provide a consistent mechanism to measure customer satisfaction at the point of delivery categorised by service and access channel.
- Introduce Braxtel's call recording software with effect from October 2007. This will enable telephone calls to be recorded and retrieved to measure the qualitative aspects of service in relation to the Council's Customer Service Charter. In addition, call recording will assist with training staff and in complaint resolution.
- A review of the website to establish self-service options and other opportunities for improvement. This work is to be scoped by the I.T section and therefore timescales and specific actions are still to be determined.
- A review of the Council's Customer Charter. This work is to be scoped by the Communications team and therefore timescales and specific actions are still to be determined.
- A review of council-wide communications. This work is to be scoped by the Communications team and therefore timescales and specific actions are still to be determined.

5. Proposals for Further Improvement

- 5.1 Further improvement proposals are currently under consideration and subject to consultation with team managers, staff and Human Resources. Once this work has been completed, a further report will be presented to the Executive for consideration and approval. This will set out both financial and human resource implications of the proposal.

6. Community & Environmental Implications

- 6.1 Improvements in Customer Focus will have a positive effect on the Council's service delivery and should enhance satisfaction ratings and reputation.

7. Human Resources Implications

- 7.1 The Customer Liaison team will consist of three new posts. These will be funded through the realignment of the existing establishment and budget.

8. Equality & Diversity Implications

- 8.1 Equality Impact Assessments will be conducted to ensure that services are accessible by all customers and that the changes do not have a differential impact on specific groups.

9. Risk Analysis

- 9.1 The main risk associated with this project is that there may be insufficient resource to implement the action plan in the short timescales available. This is due to the fact that no additional funding or resources are available and existing resource may be diverted to other projects including the transition to unitary. It should also be acknowledged that the Council may not be able to retain key members of staff.

Appendices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appendix 1 – Action Plan
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
Transitional Corporate Plan 08/09	Executive Budget 20/09/07	E66