

## Agenda item No. 5

Title: **External Audit Reports - Audit Commission – Customer Focus Inspection 2006/07**

Portfolio holder: **Cllr Andrew Davis**

Reporting officer: **Sharon Larkin – Head of HR & Customer Services**

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### **Purpose**

To consider a progress report from the Audit Commission on Customer Focus.

### **Background**

In 2005 the Audit Commission carried out an inspection of the Council's approach to customer focus in conjunction with studies in the other councils in Wiltshire. In a report published in October 2005 it concluded that the Council provided a 'fair' level of customer-focussed services with promising prospects for further improvement.

In November 2006, the Audit Commission undertook a follow up inspection to assess the progress on the recommendations made in the original inspection report. The report attached at appendix 1 sets out the Audit Commission's conclusions and recommendations.

Overall, the report is very positive and concludes that the Council is making good progress in carrying forward its customer focus agenda. It particularly highlights the Council's clear vision and strategy for West Wiltshire, the increased investment to support customer focus, the work being done to understand customer needs and how the Council actively works with neighbouring authorities to improve access and customer focus.

The report has been discussed with the Corporate Management Team and the portfolio holder for customer services. It will be brought to the attention of all members via the members information sheet and it will be available to view on the Council's website.

### **Key Issues**

The following are the recommendations made by the Audit Commission which are being addressed by the Council:-

- Monitoring the impact of the new Customer Service Unit against its targets and its influence on customer satisfaction overall; and
- Developing the use of the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) to provide effective management information.

### **Effect on strategies and codes**

The report and recommendations of the Audit Commission support the current Customer Services Strategy.

### **Risk management implications**

These are referred to in the individual reports

### **Finance and performance implications**

There are no financial implications.

### **Legal and human rights implications**

There are no direct legal or human rights implications.

### **Next steps**

- Ongoing monitoring of the performance indicators contained within the Customer Services Service Plan and other relevant performance indicators within the Council's Performance Plan.
- Providing training for staff that use the CRM System to ensure consistency.
- Setting up a system to monitor complaints through the CRM system.

### **Recommendations**

The Customer Focus Inspection report 2006/07 is noted.

Performance Detailed Report

Date

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# Customer Focus

**West Wiltshire District Council**

**Audit Year 2006/07**

- Audit Commission descriptor to be inserted by Publishing-

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## Summary Report

### Introduction

- Customer focus is about refocusing services around the needs of all sections of the community. An accessible and user-focused organisation places the customer at the heart of the service delivery, it knows what local people want and has organised itself to deliver this. Developing a more user-focused approach is not just a regulatory obligation. It is also part of good management and providing high-quality services.
- Access to local information and services remains a key issue for local government. Local people often find access to Council services difficult and confusing. Local people are not clear about how to access the right service in councils particularly in areas where there are two tiers of local government.
- Local people are demanding easier access and more access outside traditional core hours. The government also see customer access as important and have identified seven key tests of the success of the local government of the future in service delivery. Other national drivers include the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, the national e-government strategy and the ODPM priority outcomes that local authorities were expected to achieve by December 2005.

### Background

- Improving customer focus was seen as a key improvement priority for the Council following the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004. We therefore carried out an inspection of the Council's approach to customer focus in 2005 in conjunction with studies in the other councils in Wiltshire. The Audit Commission report of October 2005 concluded that the Council provided a 'fair' level of customer-focused services with promising prospects for further improvement. It recommended the Council:
  - define a long-term vision and strategy for delivering the customer first priority, that:
    - reflects the needs and aspirations of customers, local communities, and

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## Main conclusions

- 6 The Council is making good progress in carrying forward its customer focus agenda. It has developed a clear priority on customer focus in its vision and strategy for West Wiltshire. It has increased investment in customer focus, for example through an improved IT infrastructure. The Council has developed its understanding of customer needs with particular emphasis on developing its approach to equalities and diversity. The Council works actively with neighbouring authorities to improve access and support better customer focus.

## Recommendations

- 7 As a result of this follow up inspection we recommend the Council:
  - monitors the impact of the new Customer Service Unit against its targets and its influence on customer satisfaction overall; and
  - develops the use of the Customer Relationship Management system to provide effective management information..

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11 ~~The Council has improved~~ the IT infrastructure available to support its customer focus work. It has commissioned a new telephony system for the entire council and Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) technology which will be available to a range of council services. This is aimed at improving the ability of the council to respond effectively to customer enquiries and meet their needs, increase customer friendliness, make the council easier to contact and improve management information. This is due to be introduced in mid-2007. The Council also has plans to extend services such as payments and bookings available by phone or internet.

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12 The Council has developed its understanding of customer needs. It has used information from regular surveys - People's Voice, general satisfaction, housing needs - and specific consultation exercises, for example on sites for new affordable housing. These consultations have been conducted within a new council framework, the Statement of Community Involvement. It has introduced a new range of councillor 'surgeries' to improve feedback from the community.

13 The Council is developing its approach to equalities and diversity. Its internal planning framework now includes the requirement for a specific section in service plans to ensure equality and diversity is addressed. It has achieved level 2 of the local government Equality standard, and full compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. Specific initiatives have been started to support and engage under-represented groups for example, Polish migrant workers. Equality and diversity awareness training has been rolled out across the Council for all existing staff. For all new staff an equalities module is included in the induction training.

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17 The Council seeks to learn from its own experiences and those of others. The Customer First managers Forum and the Wiltshire Improvement Partnership provide forums for learning and development. The WIP was successful in gaining a £316k grant for joint capacity building work in Wiltshire. This includes work to improve partnerships by reviewing governance (including roles, constitutions and risks) and performance management arrangements, particularly in LSPs. This work will help to ensure LAA targets and outcomes are achieved for the community from April 2007. A significant element of this work will be to share learning and experiences across the partner organisations and elsewhere.

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## Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
	<Recommendation Title>					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor the impact of the new Customer Service Unit against its targets and its influence on customer satisfaction overall;</li> </ul>	2				
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