

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All

Cabinet

12 May 2008

The Council's Customer Access Strategy - A one council approach to customer service

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (INFORMATION)

1. The Council's Customer Access Strategy

The Council's Customer Access Strategy was first published in 2005. The updated strategy (attached) reviews our achievements and disappointments since 2005 and sets an ambitious programme of activities to achieve a *One Council, One Contact* experience of Customer Access.

2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Agree the vision, aims and objectives of the refreshed Customer Access Strategy 2008 - 2011.
- 2.2 Note in particular the telephone access strategy that aims to reduce the number of externally advertised numbers and move the majority of all initial council contact into a contact centre environment.
- 2.3 Recognise the progress made in implementing the Council's existing Customer Access Strategy since its launch in 2005.
- 2.4 Request a six monthly progress report in October 2008 and a full annual review in April 2009.
- 2.5 Approve the virement of the corporate budget for the Customer Transformation Fund to the Resources Department as follows:

2008/09:	£800k;
Future years:	£1m per annum

3. Report

3.1 A one council approach to customer service

The Council's customers are the people in the community we serve. No matter who they are, all of our customers are entitled to a council that provides the highest level of customer care.

Although focused primarily on access to council services via the telephone, personal visit or on-line, this strategy (attached) is more than just a plan to improve customer access. It is part of a wider programme to transform the way we work.

3.2 Our vision

One Council, One Contact

3.3 Aim

Everyone who deals with the council will recognise that we did everything we could to help.

3.3 Objectives of the Customer Access Strategy 2008 - 2011

Last year a peer review of the council described staff in the council's Customer Service Centres as 'exemplary' because of the positive way they handled visitors and dealt with complex, often challenging enquiries. Customer feedback supports the view that this team will go that extra mile to help. We want everyone who deals with the council, which ever service, to feel this positive about their experience.

The 2008/9 budget settlement includes a considerable sum of money to improve customer access arrangements and to improve the customer experience. The Customer Access Strategy (attached) looks at what we have achieved over recent years, recognises our current strengths and weaknesses and outlines what we need to do to achieve our vision of *One Council, One Contact*.

We have two main priorities for 2008/9: the first is to improve telephone access to council services (we know that over 70% of our customers prefer to contact the council by telephone and that current telephone arrangements are less than ideal), by recruiting additional staff, developing comprehensive training programmes, investing in new interactive technology and improving the links between the back office and the front office to ensure that information and advice available to the front of house staff is of the highest quality. The second priority is to improve the council's management of complaints – we need to welcome and learn from all customer feedback, positive and negative.

The strategy describes a three year programme of work and includes a detailed work programme for the period April 2008 – April 2009.

Listed below is what we aim to achieve by April 2009

- 95% of all enquiries to Customer Services will be resolved in one click, one call or one visit¹.
- 75% (currently 70%) of residents will say they find Council staff helpful, 75% (currently 56%) will say that its easy to get hold of the right person and 75% (currently 63%) will say they find it easy to get hold of the information they need on the website².

¹ Customer Services aim to resolve all enquiries in one click, one call or one visit. This principle will underpin the transfer of all services from the back office to Customer Services and processes will be put in place for each new service area that transfers in order to continue to support this ambitious target. (The national recommended target is 80%).

² This is report from the MORI survey of council residents. In 2005 855 residents were contacted.

- Customer's will be able to phone the council and talk to a Customer Services Officer 8am – 8pm, Monday – Saturday. 95% of all calls will be answered (currently 90%).
- We will have seen a quantifiable improvement in the Council Tax/ Housing Benefits telephone call handling performance. At least 70% of all calls will be answered (currently 50%)
- We will have strengthened the council's comments, compliments and complaints management system. Roles and responsibilities will be clear and we will have in place a single corporate complaints system recording all non-statutory complaints.
- The numbers of complaints, compliments and comments received by the council will increase as the public recognise the value of telling us how they feel. A greater percentage of complaints will get resolved at the first stage in the council's two stage complaints process i.e. the complainant won't feel the need to escalate the complaint.
- Services will be able to demonstrate tangible examples of service improvement as a result of complaints or comments. These examples will regularly feature in internal and external council publications. All complaints will be administered via a single corporate system with performance data electronically supplied to the council's PerformancePlus performance management system.

In addition:

- We will have opened a Customer Service Centre in Charnwood as part of the LIFT initiative.
- We will have completed a pilot of extended opening hours in the NWC CSC. If the public demand justifies extending the hours, permanent operating arrangements will have been put in place.
- Customer information on Leicester.gov.uk will be more complete and robust processes will exist to keep it up to date.

Communications activities - external

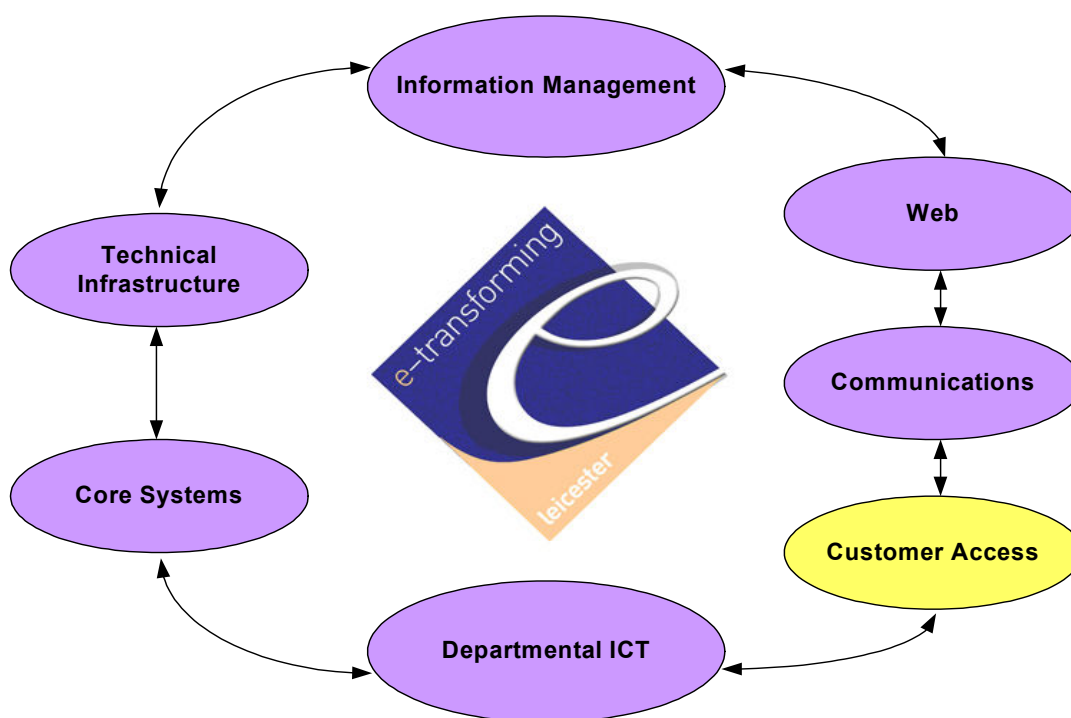
- A 'We want to hear from you' campaign to encourage Leicester visitors and citizens to tell us what they think of us will be established in LINK and a programme of work will be in place to further raise its profile.
- There will be a high profile campaign to promote Customer Services, in particular the extended telephone opening hours and the neighbourhood CSCs.

Communications activities - internal

- Awareness of the One Council, One Contact initiative will be widespread. An internal 'How can we help?' initiative will be well established. This will include consideration of a Best Practice award, training events for front line staff etc.
- An internal Think Web! Campaign to emphasise the importance of the web in service provision will have concluded. Web editor roles will have been formally established and quality standards improved.

3.4 Context

This Customer Access Strategy is one of a family of strategies within the e-transforming Leicester Strategic Framework. This framework is about using information and communication technologies to improve the way we work and to modernise the way we provide services to the public.



3.6 Governance arrangements

The Service Director responsible for Customer Access is Jill Craig, Service Director (Information).

The Cabinet lead for Customer Access is Mary Draycott, Deputy Leader.

Implementation of this strategy and the complementary Web Strategy will be managed as a PRINCE II project with a full time project manager.

All project documentation will be accessible on the council's Intranet at [//insite/e-transformingLeicester](http://insite/e-transformingLeicester)

Key stakeholder groups include Cabinet, Directors' Board, the Council's Strategic Resources Group, Heads of ICT, the Council's Complaints Group and the Council's Customer Care Group and Neighbourhood Managers.

The strategy will be reviewed annually.

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications (Andy Morley, Financial Services)

4.1.1 The Council's budget for the period 2008-2011 includes the following growth items, of relevance to this report:

GROWTH ITEM	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12 onwards
	£'000	£'000	£'000	p.a £'000
Customer transformation fund	800.0	1,000.0	1,000.0	1,000.0
Corporate complaints handling	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Communications and marketing	200.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

4.1.2 The sums set out in the above table will be applied towards the objectives of the Customer Access Strategy. Appendix B to the report sets out the proposed action plan for 2008/09, including some specific proposals for spending the allocation for the year.

4.1.3 The Council's framework for budget monitoring requires regular reporting on the expenditure incurred against all growth items included in the Revenue Budget Strategy, and this will be one of the ways in which progress in implementing the strategy is monitored and reported to members.

4.1.4 The budget for the Customer Transformation Fund was approved as a Corporate Budget, pending a consideration of how the fund would be managed. It will be managed by the Service Director, Information, within the Resources Department, and a budget virement is now required in order to reflect this. (see recommendation in para 2.6 above)

4.2 Legal Implications (Rebecca Jenkyn, Legal Services. Ext. 296378.)

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References Within Supporting information
Equal Opportunities	Yes	Equality of access is a key principle of the customer access strategy (see App A)
Policy	No	
Sustainable and Environmental	No	
Crime and Disorder	No	
Human Rights Act	No	

Elderly/People on Low Income	No	
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6. Report Author

**Jill Craig
Service Director, Information**

Key Decision	No
Reason	N/A
Appeared in Forward Plan	N/A
Executive or Council Decision	Executive