

Leicester  
City Council

## WARDS AFFECTED

*All*

### FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:

Cabinet

6 September 2010

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## One Council Customer Service Promise and Standards

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### Report of the Director of Change & Programme Management

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for a new One Council Customer Service Promise and revised Customer Service Standards. The report sets out details of the consultation process that has been followed to develop the promise and standards, and seeks support for development of a pilot that will help test out the best approach to managing and improving performance in relation to the standards.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to:

- 2.1 Recommend approval of the new One Council Customer Service Promise (section 3.5)
- 2.2 Recommend approval of the revised Customer Service Standards (section 3.6)
- 2.3 Support the development of a pilot improvement initiative that will contribute to the development of the corporate performance management framework in the area of customer service (section 3.7)

#### 3. Report

##### 3.1 Background

Service standards play an important role in ensuring that quality services are delivered to customers. Service standards guide managers on how they should design their systems and processes, guide staff on how they must undertake their work and empower customers to demand good service by relying on the knowledge that the people running the Council have laid down what should be done.

The Council has had corporate customer service standards for many years. These cover the common interactions between a customer and the Council. Staff are required to comply with the corporate standards and managers are expected to monitor performance to ensure the standards are met.

In 2008/9 a baselining review of customer service policy and practice was undertaken by the ODI team and found:

- Some services were applying and promoting customer service standards that were different from the agreed corporate standards in substance and style;
- Our customers were receiving ambiguous messages about the standards of service they should expect from the Council;
- Our staff and managers were getting confusing and conflicting messages about the level of service they should be providing;
- The Council, as a whole, did not have a strong and coherent customer service culture, and;
- LCC Mori Surveys have consistently shown a significant level of dissatisfaction with aspects of LCC customer service (see Appendix 1).

### **3.2 One Council Culture Change Project**

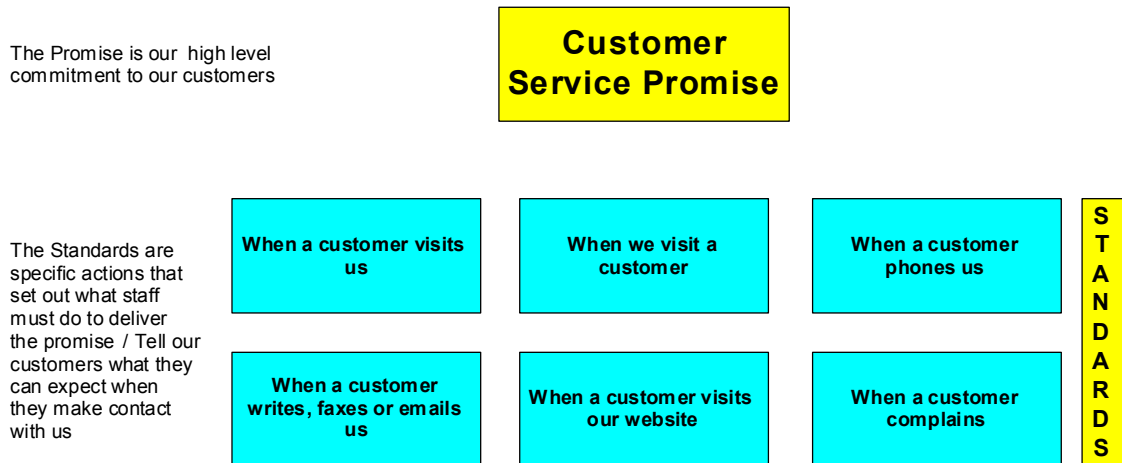
The One Council Culture Change Project was set up, as part of the One Council One Contact (OCOC) Programme within ODI, and tasked with

**“Developing a One Council approach to customer services  
in that we have  
one set of standards  
and a structure and culture which supports these”.**

The terms of reference for the project are shown at Appendix 2. Achieving good customer service should be an important expectation, and even in times where resources become constrained there should be no reason that we cannot strive to provide excellent customer service.

### 3.3 Customer Service Standards Framework

After researching best practice in other leading local authorities, the ODI OCOC Team developed proposals for a customer service standards framework, consisting of a promise and detailed standards. This approach was approved by SMB on 13 April 2010.



The Customer Service Promise is a new development for LCC and is a set of eight high level commitments that tell our customers what they should expect when they interact with the Council. It covers the different methods that customers use to interact with us, including for example use of the website, which was not covered in the previous framework. The Promise sets out the commitments in plain and memorable language which would be understandable across the whole community. These are commitments that apply across the Council irrespective of the service provided and against which the quality of the Council's customer service is to be assessed. It is envisaged that corporate monitoring of performance against the Promise will be based around the MORI survey and surveys undertaken in divisions.

The City Council customer service standards were last revised in consultation with Services and customers in 2007. These are in place and Services are expected to comply with these (until such time if any that they are amended or replaced). In the Customer Service Standards framework the Standards tell our staff some key actions they must do in order to deliver the Customer Promise and tell our customers in detail the minimum level of service they can expect when they make contact with us.

It has always been anticipated that Services will add to the customer service standards where there are specific customer interactions (not catered for in the corporate set) and Service Managers consider it beneficial to set standards for staff and promote these to customers. Rationalisation and consolidation of these would be achieved through periodic corporate reviews of customer service standards in operation.

The OCOC Team have undertaken detailed consultation and engagement with a range of stakeholders to develop the promise and to refresh the existing customer service standards. This includes customers, members, managers and officers involved in delivering services.

Full details on how the Promise and Revised Customer Service Standards have been developed and the feedback received from key stakeholders during the work that took place between December 2009 and July 2010 are shown in Appendix 3.

### 3.4 Acceptability Testing on the Promise

Having developed a proposed Promise and refreshed standards acceptability testing was undertaken in June 2010 to check that the Promise was acceptable to our customers and to Councillors. The ODI OCOC Team consulted with:

- Leicester citizens through the online “Have your Say” consultation facility;
- The People Panel, Housing user groups, Voluntary Action Leicester and Library users; and
- The Leader and Members through workshops, 1-1 meetings and questionnaires.

In total we received 252 responses from customers and 18 responses from Councillors. The consultation exercise showed high levels of acceptability of the promises both from customers (see table 1) and Councillors (see table 2).

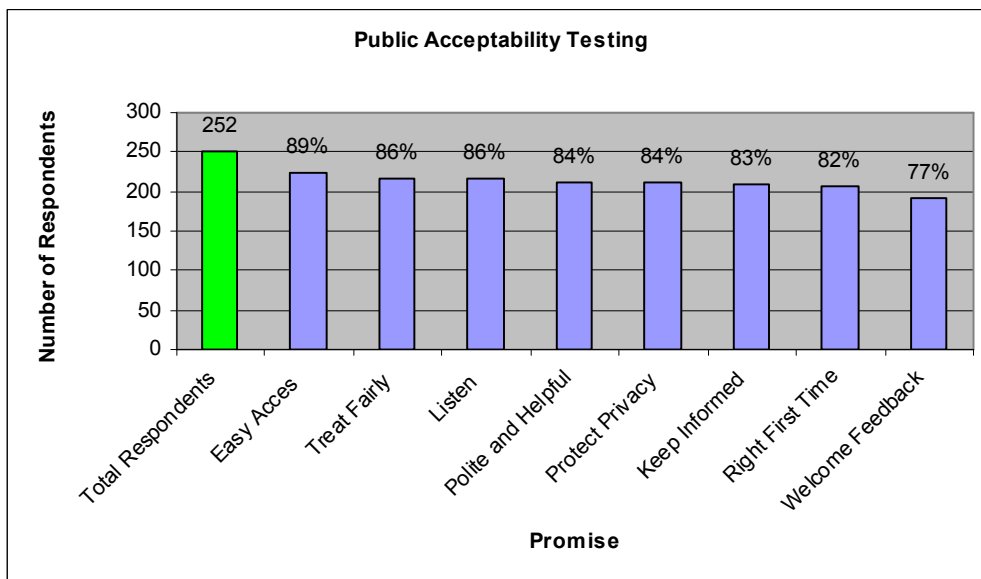


Table 1: Customer Acceptability

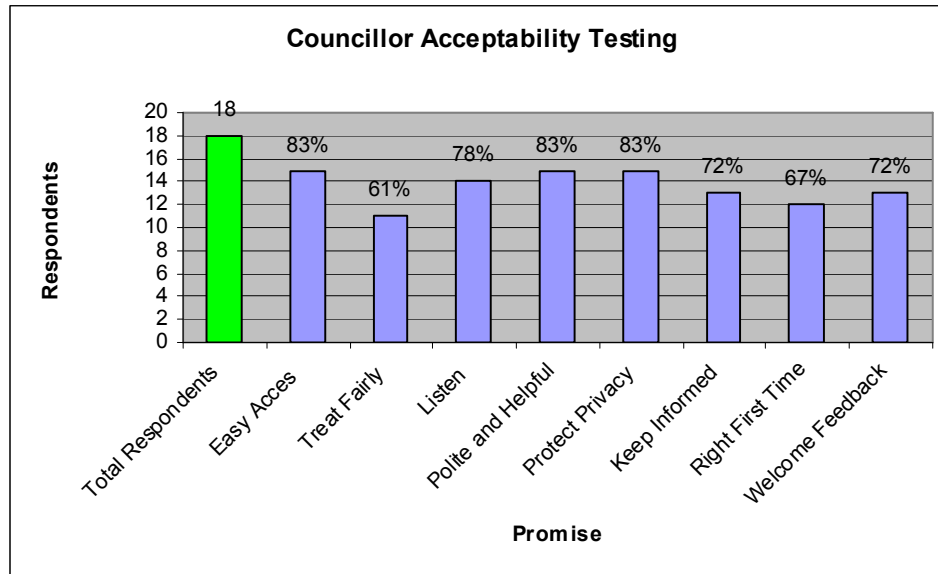


Table 2: Councillor Acceptability

### 3.5 The proposed One Council Customer Service Promise

The table below sets out the new Promise which is being proposed for adoption by Cabinet.

🚩 Cabinet are asked to approve the Promise as set out in the table below.

<b>Promise proposed for adoption by the City Council from October 2010</b>
We will:
1. Be polite, professional and helpful
2. Listen to you so we can better understand your needs
3. Aim to get things right first time
4. Keep you informed
5. Treat you fairly and with respect
6. Make it easy to access our services
7. Protect your confidential information and privacy
8. Welcome your feedback and tell you how it has made a difference

### 3.6 The Proposed One Council Customer Service Standards

The table below sets out the revised customer service standards which are being proposed for adoption by Cabinet.

✚ Cabinet are asked to approve the Standards as set out in the tables below.

#### A. GENERAL

Current Standards	Proposed Standards
	<b>When you contact us:</b>
	1. When you contact us we aim to deal with your enquiry fully, and if this is not possible we will attempt to agree on a course of action to satisfy your enquiry.
	2. If we cannot help you for any reason, we will always tell you why.
<b>When you are waiting for a service or response:</b>  We will advise the customer about when they can expect to receive the service they have requested and keep them informed of any changes to this.	3. When you are waiting for a service, we will tell you when you can expect to receive the service requested, and will keep you informed of any changes to this.

#### B. TELEPHONE CHANNEL

When we answer the Telephone:	When you phone us:
We will answer within 20 seconds.	1. We will answer your call within 20 seconds (6 rings).  This means:  A. The call is answered within 20 seconds by a member of staff where there are no automated facilities <b>OR</b> ;  B. The call is answered within 20 seconds by a member of staff before an automated telephone system answers; <b>OR</b> ;  C. The call is answered within 20 seconds by an automated telephone message, telling you how long the wait is going to be or that you are in a queue, and the call will be answered shortly.
We will greet the caller in a courteous manner, giving our name or section as appropriate.	2. We will greet you politely, giving the name of the organisation / section and the person's name.
	3. We will always confirm the identity of the caller, if we are discussing your personal information.
We will only transfer a call if we are sure who to transfer the call to. Otherwise we will arrange to call the customer back.	4. We will only transfer your call, if we are sure who to transfer the call to. Otherwise we will arrange to call you back.

We will arrange to call back or write to the customer if an immediate response is not possible. This contact will be made in an accessible way to meet the customer's needs, e.g. minicom, fax or interpreter if appropriate.	5.If we need to call you back or write to you, we will ensure this contact is made in an accessible way to meet your needs e.g. email, fax, letter or interpreter.
	6.When our lines are closed we will ensure that you are greeted with a helpful recorded message explaining service opening hours and alternative access methods e.g. the council's web site.
	7. All voicemail answering messages will be kept up to date.

### C. FACE-to-FACE

When you visit our reception areas:	When you visit us:
We will have helpful and welcoming staff wearing name badges.	1.We will have helpful and welcoming staff wearing name badges.
	2 We will greet you on arrival, to ensure you know where to go, and what to expect.
We aim not to let customers wait any longer than 15 minutes but, if necessary, we will keep them informed about any delay.	3. You will be seen within 15 minutes from arrival, and kept informed of any delays.
	4.If you attend a prearranged meeting you will wait no longer than 10 minutes.
	5.If we are unable to keep an appointment, we will contact you as soon as possible, to apologise and to arrange another appointment.
	6.We will make sure you can discuss matters in private with us, if you need to.
<b>Upon your visit our reception areas will:</b>	
* be clearly signposted;	7.Our reception areas will be clearly signposted, accessible, clean, and welcoming, with up to date information relevant to you.
* be accessible, clean and tidy;	
* clearly display information about other relevant services, including those provided by other agencies, and how to contact them;	
* have a freephone, and access to a minicom in main reception areas to allow customers to contact other Council Offices;	8.We will have a free phone in our main reception areas to allow you to contact other Council Services.
* have information about Council services in different languages, where appropriate	9.We will provide you with information about Council Services in different languages in the most cost effective way.
* offer interpreters and ensure they are available if booked in advance;	10.We will offer you a face to face interpreter, when we know in advance that you are coming to see us. Otherwise we will offer you a telephone interpretation service when you visit our offices.
* preserve confidentiality where requested, and advertise this fact widely so that customers know they can ask for this to be done; and	<b>Covered by the PROMISE</b>
* cater for the needs of visiting children and babies as far as possible.	

## D. AT HOME OR BUSINESS

When we visit your home or business we will:	When we visit you:
	1. Where a face to face meeting with one of our staff is necessary, and it is not possible for you to visit us, then we will offer you a home or business visit.
We will make appointments, in advance wherever possible. We will identify ourselves as Council employees with a name badge or warrant card or agreed password if appropriate. When we arrive, we will explain who we are and the purpose of our visit.	2. If appropriate, we will always try to visit by appointment and will clearly explain the purpose of our visit. If we anticipate a delay, we will aim to let you know at least one hour before the time of the appointment.
	3. We will let you know as soon as possible if an appointment has to be rearranged.
	4. We will identify ourselves to you as council employees with a name badge, warrant card or agreed password if appropriate.
	5. We will provide a direct point of contact, so that you can check the identity of the visitor, before allowing entry into the your property.
We will be polite, friendly, and conduct our business efficiently.	<b>Covered by the PROMISE</b>
We will let the customer know what will happen next as a result of our visit.	6. We will let you know at the end of the visit what will happen next, and keep you informed of progress.

## E. WEB CHANNEL

When you visit our website:	When you visit our website:
<b>NEW STANDARDS</b>	1. The information on our website will be up to date and easy for you to understand.
	2. We will aim to design our web services so that you are only three clicks away from the information you need.
	3. We will promptly publish information on the website when access to our services and facilities changes, or is disrupted.
	4. Where you can make a payment online, we will make it easy for you to carry out transactions on line.
	5. Our website will be secure so you can be confident that your personal information is safe when undertaking transactions.
	6. Our website will tell you all the ways in which you can access our services including mobile phone and digital television.



## F. LETTERS AND EMAILS

When we receive your letters and emails:	When you write or email us:
We will respond, or let the customer know how we are dealing with the matter, within ten working days.	1. When you send us a letter, we will contact you within <b>10</b> working days at the very latest, with a full response. <b>OR</b> let you know what is happening with the enquiry, how long it is likely to take to complete, and the name and contact details of the person dealing with it.
	2. If you e-mail a publicised email address, then you will receive an automatic message informing you of our standard for responding to email enquiries.
	3. When you email us, we will contact you within <b>5</b> working days at the very latest, with a full response. <b>OR</b> let you know what is happening with the enquiry, how long it is likely to take to complete, and the name and contact details of the person dealing with it.
<p>We will write in a way that is easy to understand and use languages other than English when appropriate. We will arrange for Braille, large print or audio formats when requested.</p> <p>We will advertise widely the fact that alternative formats are available if people ask for them.</p> <p>We will give the name of the person or section to contact and provide a telephone or minicom number.</p>	<p>4. If we know that your preferred language is not English or you need a response in a different format, i.e. large print or audio, then we will try to respond to you within 10 working days, but it may take us longer to do so.</p> <p>5. We will write to you in Plain English and always give you the name and full contact details of the person sending you the letter or email.</p>

## G. EQUALITIES

Providing Equal Access	Providing Equal Access
We will ensure that all customers have access to our services and we will not discriminate on the grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation.	1. We will ensure that you have an equal opportunity to access our information and, if appropriate, our services irrespective of your age, disability, gender or gender identity, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation.

## H. DEALING WITH CUSTOMER COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS COMPLAINTS

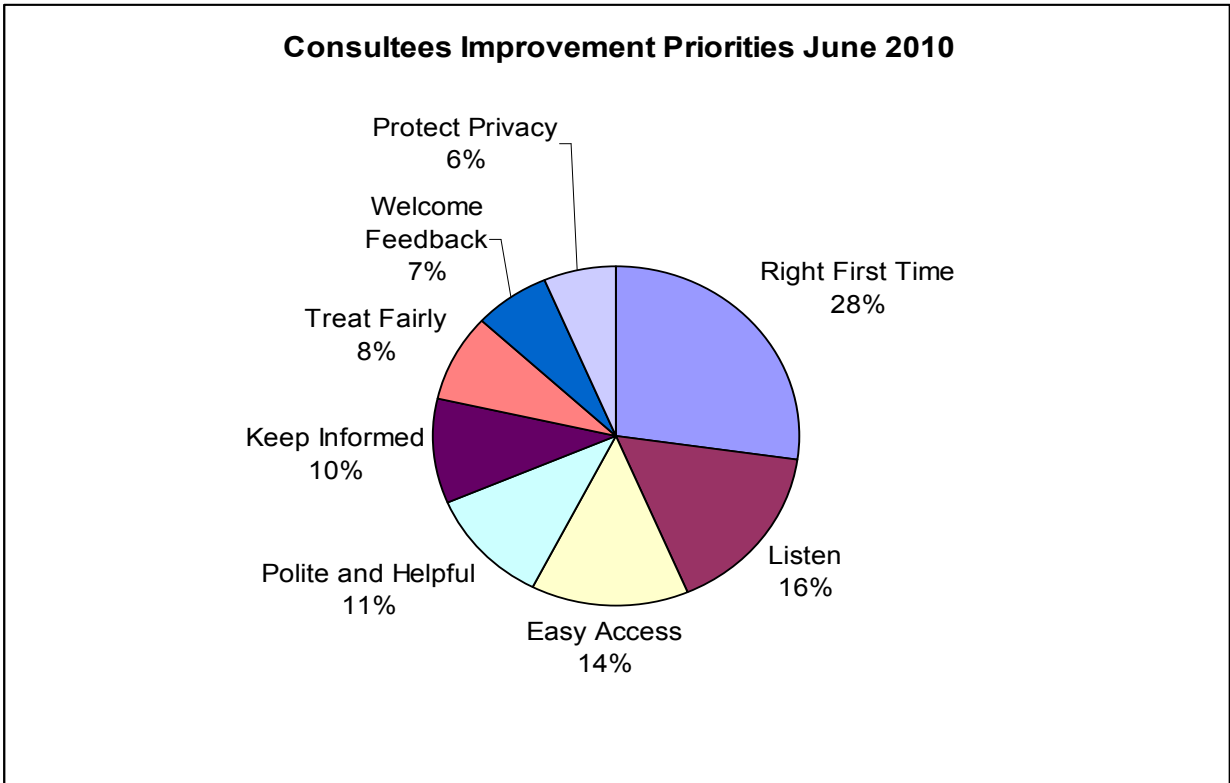
	<b>If you want to make a Comment, Compliment or Complaint</b>
	1. Every member of staff will be able to inform you about where they can make a comment, compliment or complaint.
	2. We would like to know when we get it right. We welcome suggestions you may have on how we can improve our services.
	3. If you are dissatisfied with our service, you have the right for it to be investigated.
	4. Once a complaint has been made an acknowledgement will then be sent to you within 24 hours telling you the name and telephone number of the person to be contacted in the event of any further queries on your complaint.
	5. We will notify you in writing of the outcome of the investigation within 10 working days at the very latest of the complaint being received. If we cannot complete an investigation within 10 working days we will tell you why.
	6. On conclusion of an investigation we will inform you of what you can do next, if you remain dissatisfied.
	7. If we have got things wrong, then we will apologise, and try to put things right.

### 3.7 Customer Service Improvement Priorities

The OCOC Culture Change Project includes a work stream to develop a Customer Service Performance Management Framework that integrates with the corporate approach to performance management. High level proposals based on the corporate management model of 'Analyse, Plan, Do, Review' were prepared and tested with Strategic Directors and Divisional Directors in April 2010. The high level proposal envisages an annual assessment of customer service performance leading to the development of service improvement plans and the initiation of appropriate service improvement activities.

Regular monitoring of performance against the standards is primarily a function of operational managers. SMB noted that the suite of standards was extensive and that corporate monitoring arrangements should be reasonable and proportionate for the purpose of corporate oversight of performance. It is envisaged that a number of the standards will be incorporated in the basket of corporate health indicators which is currently under review.

As part of consultations with senior managers and the acceptability testing in June 2010 with customers and councillors the ODI OCOC Team requested consultees to identify the one commitment in the Promise which they regarded as requiring most improvement. The reason for this was to explore the possibility of running a pilot service improvement project.



The most popular improvement priority by a significant margin – across customers and Councillors - was "Get things right first time". Amongst LCC managers 50% of respondents chose this as the priority.

A number of Heads of Service have registered an interest in working with the ODI OCOC Team on a short duration pilot improvement initiative focused on “get things right first time”. It is envisaged that this work will contribute to the development of the Corporate Performance Management Framework in the area of customer service.

**✚ Cabinet are asked to approve the proposal for a pilot improvement initiative.**

#### **4. Communication Plan**

The ODI OCOC Team are aiming to achieve comprehensive public, Councillor and staff awareness of the Customer Promise, and understanding among key staff groups of how it and the revised Standards affect them and what action they need to take. A focused and single-minded approach to communications over the coming months is key to progressing the Council's vision of improved services and increased customer satisfaction.

The ODI OCOC Team is consulting with the City Council's marketing and communications staff to help define the key messages and the elements of the promotional campaign. OCOC, ODI and SMB will receive progress reports on the developing promotional campaign. The broad proposals are as follows.

##### Managers and Staff – Aug – Sept

In the lead in to the public launch, throughout August and September the ODI OCOC Team are proposing a range of promotional activities focused on managers and staff to make them aware of the Promise and Standards before the launch and to ensure they know what actions need to be taken (e.g. removal of outdated standards posters, amendments to websites) at the end of September.

##### Councillors – Sept

A separate stream of work is envisaged with Councillors. Councillors are recognised as key stakeholders in the Council's customer service in that they interact with many customers in their surgeries and at ward meetings. The ODI OCOC team will be looking to develop materials that will assist Councillors to promote the message among constituents, for example, through posters at council surgeries and ward meetings.

##### Public - Oct

The key event in the promotional campaign is the public launch of the Promise and Standards in the week commencing 4 October 2010. This is National Customer Service Week. It is envisaged that an annual campaign will also be developed to raise awareness of the promise and standards throughout the year

Beyond the immediate promotional launch the ODI OCOC Team are looking to embed the Promise and Standards in other developments, namely, the behavioural competency framework for LCC staff and the Employee Code of Practice.

#### **5. Training**

Effective communication is one strand to embedding the promise and standards into everyday practice, but they need to be reinforced through effective staff training. Work is also underway within the ODI OCOC Team to develop the training offer to incorporate a clear focus on the Promise and Standards.

##### Mandatory E-Module - Awareness Raising

The ODI OCOC Team have commenced work with City Learning on the production of a Mandatory e-training module to support awareness raising among staff. It is envisaged that

this will start to be rolled out to staff in September and that all staff with access to PCs would have completed the module by the end of December 2010.

#### Corporate Induction

The newly revised corporate induction includes the Council's customer service standards and the material will be amended in line with the Promise and Standards adopted by Cabinet.

#### The Training Core Offer

A high level mapping exercise has been undertaken of the Customer Service Promise and the City Learning suite of training courses. There is a good correlation between the training courses available to front line/operational staff and the Customer Service Promise.

Before the 'customer service' training offer is finalised further, more detailed examination is required of the content of the current training courses.

The City Learning team's capacity to design and deliver a significant level of new training interventions to support the Customer Service Promise and revised Standards is limited in the period October-March 2011 due to other scheduled initiatives, e.g. roll out of the new appraisal scheme. The commissioning of external suppliers may be required.

#### Managers toolkit

The correlation between training courses available for managers and the Customer Service Promise is weaker. For example, there is no internal provision of training courses to equip managers with the knowledge/skills to 'get things right first time' such as 'business process re-engineering' and 'lean systems approaches'.

Further consideration of the development needs of managers as regards delivery of service improvement is required.

## **6. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1. Financial Implications**

The recommendations contained within this report do not require any additional resources to those approved as part of the 2010/11 budget in February 2010. It is likely that service managers may need to re prioritise resources to ensure certain standards are met such as ensuring that information on websites is up to date and emails responded to within 5 days.

However, consideration should be given to the recent budget announcements and in-year reductions to the Council's funding before making further commitments in 2010, pending a review of the budget position for 2010/11 by Cabinet.

Alison Greenhill  
(Interim Chief Accountant)

### **6.2 Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications. Peter Nicholls (Director of Legal Services)

### 6.3 Climate Change Implications

This report does not contain any significant climate change implications and therefore should not have a detrimental effect on the Council's climate change targets.

Helen Lansdown, Senior Environmental Consultant - Sustainable Procurement

## 7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph references within the report
Equal Opportunities Policy	<b>yes</b>	See below 7.1
Sustainable and Environmental		
Crime and Disorder		
Human Rights Act	<b>yes</b>	Promise includes promise to 'protect confidential information and privacy'
Elderly/People on Low Income		Promise includes promise to 'make it easy to access services'
Corporate Parenting		
Health Inequalities Impact		

### 7.1 Meeting our Statutory Equality Duties

Our current equality duties cover race, disability and gender equality and require us to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Promote equal opportunity
- Promote good relations.

*"In terms of the Customer Service Promise and Standards, their inclusive and consistent approach to clarifying our position regarding customer access to information and services to all potential residents in the city, contributes to meeting our duty in regard to promoting equal opportunity.*

*By our front line staff understanding the implications of diversity in regard to responding to Customer Service queries, and clarifying to existing and potential customers how we will respond to their queries by acknowledging and being able to meet their particular communication needs, we are promoting equal opportunity across all equality strands (age, disability, gender or gender identity, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation).*

*By being able to consistently apply these promises and standards across the city, ensuring that different communities have no barriers put in their way to getting this information, we are promoting good relations across the city. Any perceived unfairness regarding the allocation of resources, services or information on how to get those services, can undermine community cohesion across the city. Equality of process in this case contributes to good relations."*

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Officer

## 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

13 April 2010 SMB Report – One Council Customer Service Pledge and Standards Framework

## 9. CONSULTATIONS

Key stakeholder	Date Consulted
<b>Benchmarking authorities</b> Bexley Council, Derbyshire County Council, Kent County Council, Blackburn and Darwen County Council, Westminster City Council, Wandsworth Council, Wigan Council, Sunderland Council, Hartlepool Council, Nottingham City Council, South Tyneside Council.	Nov, Dec 09
Cabinet Briefing	2 Aug 10
Members	Jan, Jun 10
Leader	Jul 10
SMB	Apr, Jul 10
Organisational, Development & Improvement Board (ODI)	Jul 10
Directors	Jan, Feb, Apr, Jun 10
Heads of Service / Service Managers	Jan, Feb, Mar, Jun 10
One Council Contact Board (OCOC)	Apr, Jul 10
Senior Managers Advisory Group (SMAG)	Feb, Apr, Jun 10
One Council One Contact Network group	Jan, May, Jun 10
Leicester City Council Organisational, Development & Improvement Team	Jan, Feb, May 10
All Trade unions	Jun10
St Matthews Tenants Association + Users	Jan, Feb10
Leicester City Primary Care Trust	Jan, Feb10
LCC Leisure Centres, Housing Services, City Learning, 50+ Network Group, Black Workers Group, Gay, Lesbian ,Bisexual and Transgender Group, Disabled Group, Christian Fellowship Group, Christian Fellowship Group, Young Persons Group, Front Line Staff, Customer Services and Contact Centre	Jan, Feb10
Leicester Residents via Have your say on line consultation facility	Jun 10
People Panel (588)	Jun10
Housing user group housing service improvement (43), Revenues & Benefits (200)	Jun10
Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL) user group	Jun10
Libraries user group	Jun10



## 10. REPORT AUTHOR

Taj Kennedy, Project Manager, Organisational, Development & Improvement Team

<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Reason</b>	N/A
<b>Appeared in Forward Plan</b>	N/A
<b>Executive or Council Decision</b>	Executive (Cabinet)



## APPENDIX 1

<b>LCC MORI SURVEY</b>		
Was getting hold of the right person easy [2005]	<b>56%</b>	<b>37%</b>
Overall the quality of Council services is good (2008)	<b>57%</b>	<b>21%</b>
Informed about the services, standards and benefits the Council provides (2008)	<b>38%</b>	<b>55%</b>
Informed about who to contact at the Council to find out about services and facilities (2008)	<b>39%</b>	<b>53%</b>
When you last contacted the Council, did you find staff helpful? [2005]	<b>70%</b>	<b>23%</b>
The Council treats all people fairly (2008)	<b>49%</b>	<b>30%</b>
Informed about how to complain (2008)	<b>38%</b>	<b>55%</b>

### Terms of Reference: The One Council Culture Change Project

Aim of Project:

**“Developing a One Council approach to customer services in that we have one set of standards and a structure and culture which supports these”.**

The objectives of the project are:

- a) To review and re-issue corporate customer service standards on a basis of a One Council approach informed by best practice and key stakeholders.
- b) To embed the customer service standards across the organisation through:
  - A customer service performance management framework that integrates with the corporate approach to performance management;
  - A robust communication strategy for internal staff and our external customers and;
  - A customer service training strategy that includes use of E-learning opportunities.

The One Council Culture Change Project along with the transformational projects relating to the web, telephone and face to face channels is expected to deliver consistent level of high quality customer service resulting in:

- Improved customer satisfaction results
- Reduce complaints of poor customer service
- Improved reputation of the council

### **Developing the One Council Customer Service Promise and Standards Dec 09 - Jul 10**

The Promise and the revised Standards have been developed after benchmarking with other excellent authorities, consultations with customers, staff, managers and councillors. This work started in December 2009 and is coming to a close in July 2010. The list of consultations are shown in section 9 of the report.

Benchmarking of LCC's customer service standards against those of other excellent authorities found that:

- We shared a common approach in setting out service standards by access channel;
- We lacked standards for website and email communications;
- LCC's level of service (targets) for specific actions, such as responding to postal and telephone enquiries, were generally in line with those set by other authorities.

In drawing up a revised set of Customer Service Standards the ODI OCOC Team sought to:

- plug gaps in the suite of standards, e.g. web standards;
- clarify the standards (reduce ambiguity about applicability) and;
- mindful of the Council's desire to become an Excellent Council by 2012 to propose levels of service (targets) for a number of the standards which, while realistic, would nevertheless stretch performance.

#### **A. Consultation with Senior Management**

In April 2010, SMB considered the concept of a general Promise and detailed Standards. SMB supported the approach, suggested some changes in wording of the Promise and Standards, supported the proposals to plug gaps in the suite of standards and agreed them, subject to further consultation with and sign up from Divisional Directors.

Divisional Directors responded positively to the concept of a Promise and identified some of the limits to general commitments, for example, that the commitment to protect privacy and confidential information would in some cases be overridden by the duty of safeguarding. This issue had been discussed by SMB in April 2010 and the consensus was that the power of a simple Promise would be undermined by attaching conditions or qualifications to any of the commitments.

As regards the applicability of the standards, officer responses demonstrated the difficulties of designing one set of corporate standards that would be applicable across the diverse range LCC's interactions with customers. What is perfectly reasonable in one interaction would be the opposite in another interaction. For example, a prescription to visit businesses by appointment would completely undermine the effectiveness of those regulatory activities using 'spot checks'. The ODI OCOC Team have sought to write the standards in a way which makes it very clear which customer interaction is covered.

As regards to levels of service, for example response times to letters and emails. There were those who supported tightening them up to drive improvement, those who said the

limited changes proposed would make little or no impact on overall customer satisfaction, those who said these could not be delivered without significant extra resources and those who insisted on collecting quantitative data in order to measure performance.

Given that existing 'levels of service' are broadly in line with those of excellent councils SMB agreed the proposals, on the understanding that delivery of the ODI transformational projects and other corporate initiatives (Performance Management) would enable the 'levels of service' to be re-set at a later point.

## **B. Consultation with Customers and Councillors**

In preparing for political approval, it became clear that the Promise and Standards had changed significantly from those used in the original consultation with customers and councillors in January 2010. There was a possibility that the draft and revisions had diverged from customers expectations.

The ODI OCOC Team undertook acceptability testing in June 2010. The outcomes are:

- The consultation exercise showed high levels of acceptability of the Promise and standards both from customers and councillors.
- Two proposed commitments in the Promise have been revised following consultation they are "Get things right first time" and "Welcome your feedback because it helps improve our services"
- Changed the presentation of the commitments in the Promise to reflect the importance indicated by consultees.

Two commitments were subject to significant discussion. They were:

### **"Get things right first time"**

The promise to "Get things right first time" generated significant feedback and active discussion. There was support for this as an ideal to which the Council should aspire.

Views were expressed that given the diversity and complexity of the issues that the Council was tackling, and that decisions and action need to be taken sometimes in the absence of full information, that it was unrealistic even for highly professional staff to always "get things right first time".

A further view was that 'no one is perfect' and an unqualified commitment to 'get things right first time' was an unattainable commitment.

There was a concern that this commitment particularly would be used to criticise and mock the Council unfairly when problems were due to reasons outside our control.

The counter view expressed was that "get things right first time" is a very powerful message used in many other organisations to invigorate service improvement at the Service and individual worker level. Saying something like "aim to get things right first time" would send

the message to the customer that “we’ll try but if we don’t achieve this then this is alright” and provide the unprofessional manager or officer with the excuse “well I did try!”

The arguments are well balanced. In this case the ODI OCOC Team is proposing an amended commitment, namely, **“aim to get things right first time.”**

#### **“Welcome your feedback because it helps to improve our services”**

While the draft commitment to “Welcome your feedback because it helps us to improve our services” received a respectable level of acceptability this was noticeably lower than the others. Some consultees reported that it sounded like ‘management speak’ and was ‘inward looking’.

There has been senior management questioning of whether the Council does enough to tell customers about what we do with their feedback. We may welcome feedback, but what do we do with it when we have got it? In order to keep customers involved in service improvement the Council should provide feedback. The “You said, We did” mentality should be built into our work and feedback should be posted on the web, link magazine, but also in prominent place in the neighborhoods. An adjustment is being proposed based on alternative suggestion by a consultee.

This commitment has been changed to **“Welcome your feedback and tell you how it has made a difference.”**

#### **Other Feedback from Councillors on Customer Service**

Councillors felt that customers should be made to feel valued and treated as an individual. At LCC the service is process driven and too bureaucratic. When dealing with customer queries staff need to take a common sense approach and be flexible in applying policies.

Councillors were frustrated that customers received a poorer level of service than when a Councillor rang on behalf of the customer. They felt that customers should get the “customer service” that is given to councillors and that staff attitudes needed addressing.

There was strong support that we needed a consistent level of customer service across the organisation but also a consistent level of customer service in neighbourhoods across the city. Councillors wanted to know where they fitted into this work – there was a suggestion to develop a section in the standards for staff on “how to deal with a member” but also all councillors should be trained in customer services as part of their induction process.

## APPENDIX 4

### How we intend to implement the Promise and Standards

- Directors have signed up to comply with the Promise and Standards from October 2010.
- In September, all managers will receive a team briefing pack which will include the Promise and revised Standards and a letter from the CEX. The letter will tell managers how we will monitor performance against the standards, what actions need to be taken to promote and comply with the revised corporate standards by the end of September e.g. remove out of date standards posters and leaflets, put arrangements in place to review service owned web content, check that “of hours” messages are still current etc.
- A mandatory E-training module is being developed to raise awareness of good customer service, the Promise and Standards and how we will monitor performance against the standards. It is envisaged it be rolled out to staff in September and that all staff with access to PCs would have completed the module by the end of December 2010.
- The Corporate Induction programme will be amended to include the Promise and revised Standards.
- Regular monitoring of performance against the standards is the function of operational managers. Managers will be expected to undertake regular testing of their services, e.g. through mystery shopping, and to include questions around the Promise and Standards in surveys undertaken in their divisions.
- Arrangements to deliver corporate assurance of compliance with the Promise and Standards are being designed along the lines of an annual targeted audit/inspection programme utilising ‘reality checks’ such as mystery shopping.
- A corporate customer service balanced scorecard will be developed which will be aligned against the Promise and draw on some of the standards to ensure informed reporting of customer service performance. This work will contribute to the review of the basket of corporate health indicators.
- As part of the wider corporate customer service strategy, arrangements for an annual assessment of corporate customer service performance including customer surveys and mystery shopping are being designed and this will lead to the initiation of service migration, channel shift and service improvement projects; and guidance for Service Directors in compiling their service improvement and efficiency plans.
- A pilot improvement initiative focused on “get things right first time” and “avoidable contacts” will be undertaken to trial a corporate approach to improvement and identify key lessons.
- The Team are looking to embed the Promise and Standards in other developments, namely, the behavioural competency framework for LCC staff and the Employee Code of Practice.
- The Promise and Standards adopted at the cabinet meeting on 6 September will be communicated to managers, staff, partner agencies and our customers.