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BEST VALUE REVIEW: YEAR 1  
CUSTOMER CARE

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Report of the Town Clerk (Lead Director)

1. PUROSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Member approval of this review's Improvement Options and Implementation Action Plan. To provide an assessment of the review against the Audit Commission's "*Seeing Is Believing*" criteria.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 After reviewing its first year as a unitary authority, the Council (in May 1998) identified Customer Care as a key area for improvement. The Council had been inward-looking during reorganisation and had implemented large budget cuts. A residents' survey had shown a drop in public satisfaction and, even though the level was reasonable compared with other authorities, local government is generally perceived poorly by the public.
- 2.2 The Council reviewed its progress on Customer Care (P&R: November 1999) and adopted an aim and objectives for improvement on a consistent, Council-wide basis. These were incorporated into the terms of reference for this review (**Appendix 2**).
- 2.3 Every service's relationship with its users is within this review, except schools. The Customer Services Centre, Central Switchboard and Social Services Switchboard were identified for full review.
- 2.4 Improving Customer Care is a cultural issue, which needs to be addressed continuously to an annual cycle of action, monitoring, consultation and assessment. The critical success factor will be a noticeable cultural shift towards being a more customer-focussed organisation which deals with people as individuals (as opposed to focussing on applying rigid procedures to people). Such a shift will, realistically, take two or three years. These factors will indicate progress:
- (1) The outputs of Council-wide arrangements for monitoring every service's performance against core standards and targets (except schools).
  - (2) The trend of public and service users' views from an agreed set of consultation arrangements, internal and external, including periodic public opinion surveys of residents
  - (3) The existence of active ambassadors of a customer-focussed approach in all areas, including amongst senior Members and Officers.
  - (4) Evidence that annual action plans have led to significant changes in the way services are delivered to empower employees to deal with people as individuals.
  - (5) Employees at all levels feeling increasingly involved in developing good customer care in their areas, and empowered to deal with people as individuals.
  - (6) Communications and service access arrangements which address the needs and reasonable preferences (systematically established) of all sections of the community in

ways and at times which give them maximum convenience and choice (including through ICT).

- 2.5 Six improvement Options are now proposed. These are summarised in **Appendix 3**, to which Form 6C is attached providing reasons for each option, supporting information and an Implementation Action Plan. ICT can provide new ways of improving Customer Care and increasing user choice. The options are service-led, but ICT is a vital component of some, and is directly addressed in Option 5.
- 2.6 Emerging and final draft improvement options were put to the Strategic Planning and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 14 November 2000 and 3 January 2001 and its views (**Appendix 4**) have been taken into account. The trades unions have provided views on this review (**Appendix 5**). The views of an independent consultant have also been obtained (**Appendix 6**). Cross-review issues have been considered (**Appendix 7**). The service has been assessed against the likely inspection criteria (**Appendix 8**).
- 2.7 The most recent survey evidence suggests that, at 55%, the Council has maintained the 1997 level of residents' overall satisfaction with the way it runs things. This compares favourably with the rest of local government. A modest improvement to 56% is proposed as the 2001/02 target, since the cultural change needed for greater gains will take time to achieve. Satisfaction with complaints handling remains disappointingly low, at 30%, and a more ambitious target of 35% is proposed for 2001/02. Improvement Option 2 includes a review of complaints procedures to ensure a non-defensive, problem-solving approach.
- 2.8 The key to improvement in Customer Care and to achieving the Council's strategic aim, is the Improvement Action Plan. This will only be effectively implemented with a strong lead from senior Members and officers, and with a corporate lead officer, who has adequate time, support and departmental commitment. Since consulting the Scrutiny Committee, the timescales in the Action Plan have been put back to allow time for establishing the necessary arrangements and for scoping the work.

### **3. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 There are no specific legal implications.
- 3.2 The services being directly reviewed (CSC and Switchboards) have a budget of £345,000. It might be possible to achieve in excess of 2% savings (£6,900) by merging the Central and Social Services Switchboards (see Improvement Option 4 and supporting information). This is dependent on a move of the Social Services headquarters from Grey Friars to NWC. Alternatively, the review of translation and interpretation (Improvement Option 6) could, in due course, yield savings from the auxiliary interpreters scheme.
- 3.3 There are several options for reinvesting any savings to help to pump-price the Implementation Action Plan. For example, there will need to be guidance, training and a communications exercise (Improvement Option 1). There are also several low cost options, such as a possible challenge fund (Improvement Option 2). Other aspects of translation and interpretation may require more expenditure.
- 3.4 It is assumed that most of the costs of the Implementation Action Plan can be found over time by refocusing existing budgets, or as part of other planned projects (such as those under the ICT Strategy). The main financial implications will flow from Improvement Option 4, and will depend on the outcomes of reviews relating to the switchboards and the CSC, and of the feasibility study into mini-CSCs.

## 4. EQUALITY

4.1 Equality of access to the Council and its services has been addressed in the review as summarised in **Appendix 1**. The following Improvement Options and Implementation Action Plan are specifically relevant:

- Option 1(1) and (4)
- Option 2 (2)
- Option 3 (1)
- Option 4 (1) (b)
- Option 5 (1)
- Option 6

## 5. SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

5.1 The Improvement & Development Agency (I&DeA) Sustainability and Best Value Checklist has been applied to the review. It comprises a range of topics, three of which are relevant to this subject.

- (1) **Reducing the need to travel by improving or adding local facilities:** the potential offered by local public access kiosks, information points, and development of ICT and the Internet could reduce the need for people to travel into the city centre to access information from the City Council and the use of paper through the use of on-line transactions
- (2) **Being registered with or adhering to the principles of EMAS or ISO 140001:** the City Council currently applies EMAS in a structured way across all of its services and practices. In terms of Customer Care this will mean the application of procedures particularly in relation to paper consumption and travel.
- (3) **Increasing equality of information access by communicating in differing ways as appropriate:** the proposed Customer Care standards and working practices will attempt to ensure that communication with diverse communities will be sensitive and appropriate to their needs.

## 6. SUPPORTING PAPERS

6.1 The following are attached:

- Appendix 1: Equalities Issues
- Appendix 2: Aim, objectives and terms of reference
- Appendix 3: Improvement Options and Implementation Action Plan (Form 6C)
- Appendix 4: Scrutiny Committee's views
- Appendix 5: Trades union comments on the review
- Appendix 6: Independent consultee's comments on the review
- Appendix 7: Cross-review issues
- Appendix 8: Assessment against inspection criteria
- Appendix 9: Inventory of further documents and evidence.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That the Improvement Options and the Implementation Action Plan in **Appendix 2** be approved, timescales being subject to the identification of a corporate lead officer and adequate support.
- 7.2 That the views of the Strategic Planning and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee be considered (**Appendix 3**) and any further action be identified.

- 7.3 That the 2001/02 target for residents' overall satisfaction be 56% and the target for satisfaction with the handling of complaints be 35%.

## **CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW EQUALITIES ISSUES**

The Review recognises that Leicester is a city rich in cultural diversity, a situation which at once confers real benefits to the city in terms of the breadth of available experiences, peoples, traditions and beliefs. With that comes the real challenge and responsibility of ensuring that all of the city's residents and visitors have equal access to information and services, regardless of their cultural background and ability.

**The Review also recognises that the city's population is constantly changing and that the needs of newcomers to the city, refugees and asylum seekers in particular, are included in the development of Customer Care Improvements.**

The Improvement Options proposed will ensure that the Council is able to respond to the diverse cultures within the city, and will enable the Council to fulfil its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The development of Customer Care Standards (Improvement Option 1) will be cross-referenced to the Chief Executive's work (initiated by the previous Corporate Equalities Team) in respect of services to disabled people, and will cover Braille, BSL, minicomms, readers, and audio tape facilities.

Monitoring of performance against Standards, within a programme of reporting and accountability, will ensure that equality of access to information for all sections of the community is consistently under scrutiny.

There is recognition that training and briefing on Customer Care for front line staff, and their line managers, will need to include cultural diversity awareness; this has a direct link to issues emerging from the Communications & Promotions Review in terms of the methods and style that the Council might develop in terms of its Communication strategies and plans. The success of training and briefing in raising staff and managers' awareness of equality issues within Customer Care may best be measured through departmental Personnel and Training sections, through the arrangements for training de-briefing with managers, and via ERDS.

The creation of a Customer Focussed Culture (Improvement Option 2) is built upon the involvement of departmental "Champions" and the integration of Customer Care within the business and departmental action planning processes. This can also be linked to departmental equality initiatives and monitored as part of the cycle of performance management.

Feedback on future performance on Customer Care (Improvement Option 3) by way of consultation with customers is proposed as a way of building in continuity of focus on Customer care. This will require attention to ensure that the range of consultees is truly representative of the whole community within the city, and that in particular the views of marginalized and excluded groups are not overlooked.

Monitoring performance in comparison with external organisations is also proposed, and it will be beneficial to identify those organisations to whom equality in customer service is also important, and who are seen as leaders in that respect in their field.

Improvements to the Customer Services Centre and Switchboards (Option 4) include reviewing and re-shaping the services provided by CSC. Any developments will need to take into account the language and access needs of all customers, but specifically taking into account issues arising from cultural diversity and disability.

Given the expressions of interest in extending the use of telecommunications as a means of access to the Council, there will be a need to improve and extend access by Minicom and other ICT based techniques.

This area for Improvement links to the development of ICT (Improvement Option 5), which has as one of its objectives the improvement of access by removing barriers of language, skills, and physical ability.

This development has the potential to improve and extend access to all members of the public, but will need to ensure that the needs of the most marginalized and excluded are at the centre of any new initiatives. ICT can be a power for good, but by its very nature it can also exclude those people for whom accessibility can be a major difficulty.

Developments in ICT will be carefully monitored to ensure that equality of access and a focus on the user needs of the customer, as opposed to the technological needs of the Council, are the driving forces for change.

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW****AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND TERMS OF REFERENCE****Strategic Aim**

1. The Customer Care strategic aim is to improve and modernise the Council's relationships with the public and arrangements for access to local public services so that they:
  - Meet the different and reasonable expectations of everyone who contacts the Council or needs access to local services;
  - Help people to realise that the Council cares about them as individuals and aims to treat them fairly, courteously and helpfully;
  - Help to provide gateways to information about and access to all local public services;
  - Are continuously assessed and adapted to meet changing needs and best practice.

**Objectives**

2. In order to achieve this aim, the Council has a Customer Care Programme with the following Objectives:
  - (1) To establish the current views of Members, employees and all sections of the public, in order to assess the suitability of the Council's current arrangements and identify where action is needed to achieve the Council's aim.
  - (2) To develop a continuous programme of induction, staff and management guidance, communications, training and participation so that all Members and employees can contribute to a culture of public service to people as individuals and to high standards of Customer Care.
  - (3) To develop and secure commitment across the Council to corporate Customer Care standards and targets which, locally applied, will lead to people being treated in accordance with the Council's aim.
  - (4) To establish a rolling process of corporate and departmental action plans and targets, with clear, monitored outcomes, in order to implement the corporate standards according to local circumstances.
  - (5) To prepare an analysis of the options for rationalising the Council's reception and telephone access points, with a view to continuously increasing public choice and convenience in obtaining information about and access to local public services.

- (6) To develop a costed strategy and rolling, monitored action plan for improving Council communications and access to local public services through better use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).
- (7) To establish a process for consultation, co-ordination and monitoring of the way the Council affords access to people with special requirements, to ensure that action plans are addressing these requirements adequately and consistently.
- (8) To identify and assess alternative approaches to Customer Care.
- (9) To identify Customer Care performance indicators, five year targets and options for comparing performance with other public and private sector organisations.
- (10) To prepare an Implementation Plan for proposed changes and for continuous improvement towards the targets.

3. In summary these Objectives will:

- Establish the views of all concerned;
- Define corporate standards, PIs and targets;
- Set up rolling corporate and departmental action plans to monitor and continuously improve performance;
- Create a programme of staff guidance and training;
- Improve letters, phone contact and reception areas;
- Ensure equality of access;
- Offer more ways and more convenient access, using ICT;
- Provide a gateway to all local public services.



## TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The next stage of the Customer Care Programme is to establish the arrangements needed to achieve the Objectives through continuous improvement, with proposals and an Improvement Plan brought to Members in November 2000. This will be undertaken through two teams:

➤ **Standards Team:**

Research; consultation; developing Customer Care standards and targets; establishing corporate and departmental action plans for continuous improvement; generating a customer-focussed culture (guidelines, training, motivating techniques); improving written and telephonic communications; improving direct customer contact in reception areas and in the field; minimising communications barriers (including those for translation and interpretation).

➤ **Convenient Access Team:**

Gateway access to Council Services (central and local, all methods); Customer Services Centre and switchboards (role, location, relationship with services); streamlining access to all public services (in partnership with other agencies).

➤ **Equality of Access:**

Both teams will ensure that equality of access is integrated and properly addressed in their outcomes.

5. The detailed terms of reference and outcomes required of these teams are:

**Standards Team**

- (1) To compare the Council's approach to customer relations with that of other authorities and organisations, and identify options for improvement, including comparisons of equality of access provision, and identification of areas for improvement. This will exclude specialist research into multi-agency access points, which will be commissioned by the Convenient Access Team (*Objectives 7 & 8*).
- (2) To identify the views of Members, employees and the public in relation to the issues, being addressed by the Review Teams, and propose arrangements for regularly obtaining such views (*Objective 1*).
- (3) To review the Council's written, telephonic and face to face communications (in reception areas) and identify how they can best achieve the overall aim and make proposals which can be incorporated into the arrangements for generating a customer focussed culture and into corporate and departmental action plans, ensuring equality of access issues are addressed (*Objectives 2, 3, 5 & 7*) including:
  - Ensuring courtesy and helpfulness
  - Identifying "right first time" techniques for putting people in contact
  - Making departmental boundaries irrelevant to the user
  - Ensuring confidentiality when required.

- (4) To review the Council's arrangements for removing communications barriers to access to its services (including those for translation and interpretation) and make realistic proposals for the optimum arrangements (*Objective 7*).
- (5) To propose minimum corporate Customer Care standards which are challenging but have general support across the Council (*Objective 3*).
- (6) To propose arrangements for generating a customer focussed culture which will lead to people being treated in accordance with the overall aim (*Objectives 2 and 3*), including:
  - Suggestions for leadership action and for harnessing the knowledge and ideas of staff at all levels.
  - A consistent and positive approach to handling complaints, to monitoring complaints and taking remedial action, and to reviewing and improving complaints procedures.
  - Preparation of staff and management guidance.
  - A continuous programme of induction, training and communications.
- (7) To propose arrangements for continuous improvements through corporate and departmental action plans, including an annual cycle of monitoring and review (*Objective 4*).
- (8) To propose a process for continuous consultation, co-ordination and assessment of the way the Council affords access to everyone, so that improvements are systematically identified and incorporated into corporate and departmental action plans (*Objective 7*).

### **Convenient Access Team**

- (1) To thoroughly review the purpose and effectiveness of the Customer Services Centre and Switchboard, assess how far they meet the needs of users and identify potential improvements (*Objectives 1, 5, 7 & 10*).

The review will:

- Identify the views of Members, employees and the public through a series of consultation exercises (some of which will be led by the Standards Team);
- Ensure that equality of access issues are addressed;
- Identify the most appropriate location for a principal public access point;
- Question the relationship that exists between the Customer Services Centre and the main Switchboard to ensure that the needs of services users are being met in the most efficient and effective matter;
- Assess whether the move of the Social Services switchboard to New Walk Centre presents any scope to improve service delivery and reduce costs;

### **APPENDIX 2 (CONT'D)**

- Assess the services currently available through the Centre and the merits of extending these to include other service areas;

- Review the needs of service users in outlying estates and how these are currently being met.
- (2) To investigate and make recommendations for improving the effectiveness of signposting to Council services (i.e. how easy is it for service users to find where they want to go and who they need to talk to). The investigation will include reviews of road signposting to Council buildings; the local telephone directory; our Internet site; etc. Equality of access will be addressed (*Objective 5 & 7*).

This study will support the work of the Standards Team.

- (3) To consider the options for providing gateway access to Council services, including a review of Public Access Terminals, the Internet, Call Centres, advice surgeries, etc. (*Objectives 6, 7 & 10*).

This will involve:

- Learning from the experience of other local authorities.
  - A cost benefit analysis of options.
- (4) To establish working relationships with other statutory agencies (the Police, Health Authority, etc) and evaluate the potential of closer working to streamline public access to all government services (*Objectives 5, 6, 8 & 10*). This will include exploration of potential links with the Braunstone New Deal project. In practice progress on this dimension of the review will be limited in 2000, and the emphasis of this stage will be on building a partnership approach.

## CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS

Best value Form 6C is attached, modified for the outcomes of this review. It contains Improvement Action Plans for:

- Option 1: Core standards and targets, with staff support and a framework for monitoring and improvement (including complaints and equality of access).
- Option 2: Creating a customer-focussed culture through “*ambassadors*” and action plans which promote improvements and generate employee enthusiasm.
- Option 3: Collecting and responding to feedback and good practice, through systematic assessment of user views, comparator authorities and residents’ surveys (also providing evidence of progress towards the Council’s strategic Customer Care aim).
- Option 4: Review of the Customer Services Centre and Switchboards, reshaping its style and relationship with Departments maximising access through ICT and assessing the feasibility of a city-wide network of centres.
- Option 5: Using ICT to maximise public access to local public services and remove barriers to access.
- Option 6: Ensuring equality of access to services by seeking the views of hard to reach groups, a programme to provide access for the disabled and a review of translation and interpretation services.

**Improvement Option 1: Establishment of Core Customer Care Standards**

- Description**
- (1) A set of core standards and targets (attached).
  - (2) A Council-wide framework for achieving the standards in each service.
  - (3) Supporting guidance, training and induction arrangements.
  - (4) An annual monitoring and reporting cycle which ensure that lessons are learnt and that improvements are identified and actioned (including reporting of complaints and of equality of access issues).

**Reasons for Proposing this Option**

Minimum Core Standards ensure consistency and can be applied to suit each service and its users. They should be realistic, yet challenging and need to be backed by guidance and training. The process of applying and monitoring them raises staff awareness of Customer Care and involves them in finding local ways of raising standards. Whilst there is good practice in some services, the Council is not currently consistent in its overall approach and does not systematically assess how well it is doing and take steps to improve.

Attached is a summary of how the standards were developed, who was consulted, the main views of consultees and why the standards are consider to be realistic, yet challenging.

Comparator information from 4 other authorities<sup>1</sup> indicates that all have corporate standards for Customer Care, and all have systems for monitoring performance against those standards. By adopting corporate standards and a mechanism for monitoring performance the City Council would bring itself in line with its neighbours and with Southampton.

*See also Improvement Option 3.*

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<sup>1</sup> Nottingham, Coventry, Derby, Southampton; all 4 are members of the Leicester "family" of authorities

**Action Plan to Implement this Option**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
(1) Adopt standards and targets	Cabinet	February 2001
(2) Develop Council-wide framework	Corporate lead officer	For implementation from 1 July 2001
(3) Prepare guidance training and induction arrangements.	Corporate lead officer	By July 2001
(4) Set up annual monitoring and reporting cycle.	(a) Corporate lead officer (defining process and responsibilities).	(a) By July 2001
	(b) Each Director (Departmental and reporting as defined, and taking improvement action identified).	(b) To an annual cycle, defined within (a)

**Our Aim**

Leicester City Council aims to treat everyone fairly, courteously, helpfully and as an individual. We aim to create a friendly atmosphere, free from any form of discrimination, where we can be open and honest with you.

**Our Standards****When we receive letters and e:mails**

We will respond or let you know how we are dealing with the matter within ten working days. If we cannot send a full response within ten days, we will explain why.

*Our target for 2001/02 is to achieve this standard 90% of the time.*

We will write in language 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.

We will give the name of the person or section to contact and provide a telephone number.

**When you are waiting for a service or response**

If an early response is not possible, we will tell you the likely time and explain the procedure. We will contact you at that time and inform you of any changes as they occur.

**When we answer the telephone**

We will answer within six rings.

*Our target for 2001/02 is to achieve this standard 90% of the time.*

We will greet you in a courteous manner, giving you our name or section, as appropriate.

We will arrange to call you back or write to you if an immediate response is not possible.

We will only transfer your call if we are sure we can get you to the right place first time. Otherwise we will arrange to call you back.

**When we visit you in your home or business**

We will make an appointment with you, in advance where this is possible.

We will identify ourselves as Council employees with a name badge or warrant card.

When we arrive, we will explain who we are and the purpose of the visit.

We will be polite and friendly and conduct our business with you efficiently.

We will let you know what will happen next as a result of our visit.

**Our reception areas**

We aim to keep you waiting for no more than 15 minutes and will keep you informed about any delay.

*Our target is to do this 90% of the time.*

Our reception areas will:

Be clearly signposted

Have welcoming and helpful staff, wearing name badges

Be accessible, clean and tidy

Have information about Council services in different languages

Offer interpreters and ensure they are available if booked in advance

Have a free phone and access to a minicom in all main reception areas for you to contact other City Council offices.

Preserve confidentiality where requested.

Cater for the needs of visiting children and babies as far as possible.

**For disabled people**

We will ensure that disabled people have access to our services.

**Your Help In Achieving Our Aim**

Please:

- Remain calm and patient if things go wrong. This will help us to help you more quickly.
- Supply us with the information we need as far as you can.
- Attend appointments we arrange for you, or let us know if you cannot attend.
- Tell us when we get things right and when we get things wrong.

**Monitoring and reviewing**

We will monitor and review our targets and arrangements for customer care and will publish our performance against these targets. We will seek views from members of the public every year to make sure that our standards meet people's reasonable expectations.

**Complaints and compliments**

We would like to know if you think we have fallen below our standards, or have given particularly good service. Complaints and Compliments leaflets are available at our reception areas or from our Customer Services Centre (252 6480) (Minicom 252 6480).



**CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS****Background information to the development of the Standards.**

Work undertaken by the Customer Care Working Party identified a lack of corporate guidance on what was expected by the Council of front line staff. In addition, with the discontinuation of the Council Charter some years ago and the removal of certain Audit Commission PIs more recently, there remains no corporate measurement of our performance in dealing with customers.

Consultation was undertaken during 1998/9 with managers and front line workers about what constituted good customer care, and the current proposed Standards are developed from this basis.

Consultation on the draft Standards was undertaken through service managers and focus groups of staff during 1999. Suggestions were incorporated and a further round of consultations took place during September this year. More than 200 Heads of Service were contacted, and 33 replied. Nearly 50% said that the Standards were acceptable. Some managers had concerns about specific service areas' ability to conform, for instance, it is not always possible to make appointments. Again, suggestions have been incorporated where possible and the final version is now ready for submission to Members. A discussion about exemptions will need to be undertaken at some point.

**Targets**

Targets are based on previous performance against ACPIs. There was some view that we should not be happy with publicising anything less than 100%, (8 managers said this in the last round of consultation), however 90% gives us room to improve, without appearing too easily achievable. We would have the opportunity to increase our target each year, (say by 2% per year, taking us to 98% in year 5), but should ideally wait for the first set of figures before setting targets beyond next year.

We have previously had mechanisms in place for collecting telephone and letter monitoring information, which we used for the Audit Commission indicators. Most respondents seem to think these would be acceptable for continued use. For monitoring response times at reception points, some sort of mystery shopper exercise may need to be put in place.

**Improvement Option 2: Creating a Customer- Focussed Culture**

- Description** (1) A network of Member and Officer “*Customer Care Ambassadors*” covering all services.
- (2) An annual cycle of corporate and departmental action plans, promoted by the “*Ambassadors*” to:
- Generate employee enthusiasm and empowerment;
  - Identify local improvements;
  - Review standard documents and processes;
  - Promote appropriate changes to the way services are delivered to ensure people are dealt with as individuals;
  - Ensure high levels of satisfaction with the way complaints are handled, with a more problem-solving, caring approach, opposed to defensiveness and excessive formality.

**Reasons for Proposing this Option**

Improving Customer Care depends on a cultural shift away from the procedure-focussed towards customer-focussed. Front line employees must be empowered with the flexibility to deal with service users as individuals, rather than the recipients of standard procedures. This needs the commitment and ideas of front line staff, the backing of their managers and leadership from the top. “*Champions*” would help to drive this process and promote the necessary Council-wide and service-specific approaches.

Attached is a summary of some approaches tried so far, and some further ideas collated during the review.

## Action Plan to Implement this Option

Task	Responsibility	Timescale
(1) Identify “Ambassadors” and agree their role.	Corporate lead officer	By 1 April 2001
(2) Set up (as part of business planning) annual cycle of corporate and departmental action plans, including reviews of documentation and consideration of a “Challenge Fund” and staff “Quality circles”	(a) Corporate lead officer (define process)  (b) “Ambassadors” (develop, promote and review action plans).	(a) By July 2001  (b) Develop initial plans by September 2001, then promote and review annually.
(3) Redesign the Council’s listings in the telephone directory and Yellow Pages, and review addresses on the Council’s website.	Corporate lead officer#	By July 2001
(4) Review of complaints procedures to ensure a problem-solving, non-defensive approach.	Corporate lead officer	By July 2001

A range of ideas was suggested by the Customer Care Working Party and by consultees during the review. Some were consulted on. For example, in the managers' survey, 20% of respondents indicated that they had considered and/or implemented reward schemes for staff.

### **Mystery Shopping**

An Officer acting as a *"mystery shopper"* investigated the accessibility of Council services in terms of how simple it was for customers to find the Council building they required, or to speak to the appropriate Officer for answers to enquiries. A range of different areas were investigated, such as Telephone Directory and Yellow Pages listings, signposting in the City Centre and the City Council Internet site.

Out of this exercise came several recommendations which can easily be put into practice.

- The redesign of Council listings in the Telephone Directory and Yellow Pages
- A review of City Centre signposting to Council buildings
- A review of Council addresses on the Internet site
- Redesign of location maps to be sent with recruitment literature and other correspondence.

Once the Customer Care standards have been introduced and staff briefed or trained as appropriate, it is suggested that we may be able to set up reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities to undertake *"mystery shopper"* surveys. These would involve checking the facilities at reception points and/or the response of staff against an agreed good practice list. Front line staff should be involved in deciding what constitutes good practice.

### **Review of Written Correspondence**

A trawl of *"standard"* letters from all Departments has already been completed. Looking for both good and bad practice, it is suggested that experienced officers in each Department review a sample of letters from another Department to check for Plain English, clear layout and simple instructions, etc.

### **Challenge Fund**

To engage front line employees and their managers in thinking positively about customer care, a fund could be considered. This could be accessed for low cost improvements to help customers. The fund would be administered by the *"Champions"* of customer care, with bids being assessed against agreed criteria.

### **Quality Circles**

Part of the work of each Department's *"Champion"* could be to ensure that he/she is kept up to date with developments on the front line through regular contact with service providers in quality circles.

**Improvement Option 3: Collecting and Responding to Feedback and Good Practice**

- Description** (1) A periodic programme of corporate and departmental assessment of public and service user views and satisfaction, to inform the annual cycle of business planning, Customer Care reporting and Improvement Action Plans (including arrangements for obtaining the views of hard to reach groups).
- (2) An agreed group of comparator authorities with arrangements for periodically comparing performance and approaches.
- (3) Arrangements for monitoring good practice in public and private organisations, to inform the annual cycle of reporting and Improvement Action Plans.
- (4) Overall assessment of public satisfaction through the Council's periodic residents' surveys.

**Reasons for Proposing this Option**

A considerable amount of user consultation and comparison of approach takes place across the Council. This option is to ensure that this is systematically used to inform Customer Care improvements in a transparent way. It will also provide much of the evidence needed to show how the Council is progressing towards its aim and objectives.

The comparative information, views and satisfaction levels gathered through this review, provide a baseline. The detailed findings are outlined in the BV5B form on stakeholder consultation. In addition, the MORI survey in 1998 provided a comparison of Leicester People's views on contact with the public in the 3 areas of efficiency, helpfulness and ease of contact, this is outlined in form BV5D. In all three areas there is potential for improvement and 4 other authorities (Nottingham, Derby, Coventry and Southampton) provide useful benchmarks against which Leicester can compare its performance over the coming 3 years.

Information from the "*family*" of authorities indicates that 3 of the 4 (not Southampton) compare their standards with the private sector, and 3 have benchmarking arrangements with other Councils. By adopting a mechanism for comparing performance against the private sector locally, and by entering into on-going benchmarking arrangements, Leicester will bring itself into line with members of its family.

This approach aims to integrate the Best Value principle of Consultation into the Council's working practices and performance management arrangements, and places public perceptions of our services and staff at the heart of service monitoring, review, and planning.

**Action Plan to Implement this Option**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
(1) Programme for assessing user views and satisfaction.	(a) Corporate lead officer, with CXO public consultation lead (developing programme).  (b) Each Director (undertaking assessments)	(a) By July 2001  (b) As required by the programme.
(2) Establish comparator authority and private sector arrangements.	Corporate lead officer	By July 2001
(3) Establish arrangements for monitoring good practice.	Corporate lead officer	By July 2001
(4) Assess public satisfaction through residents' surveys.	CXO public consultation lead	As part of periodic surveys.

**Improvement Option 4: Review of the Customer Services Centre and Switchboards**

- Description** (1) Review of the Customer Services Centre (CSC) and Switchboards with a view to establishing a single point of electronic access and physical city centre access to all Council services and information, including:
- (a) Reassessment and revision of the relationship between the CSC and services so as to maximise the services and information visitors can access first time, and to minimise the number of Council offices they need to visit.
  - (b) Reshaping of the style of the CSC (after considering all options) so as to provide the most convenient and realistic opening hours, minimise queuing, ensure confidentiality where necessary, and provide for the convenience and special needs of all visitors.
  - (c) Review the relationship between the CSC and other city centre reception points and security teams so as to achieve the most effective, efficient and secure arrangements for visitors.
  - (d) Review the Central and Social Services Switchboards so as to achieve the most effective and efficient configuration and relationship with the CSC.
- (2) Improvement of city centre signposting to Council buildings.
- (3) Assessment of the opportunities for and viability of developing existing Council facilities into a network of local CSCs, so as to maximise the services and information visitors can access first time in all parts of the City (covering, as far as possible, all local public services).

**Reasons for Proposing this Option**

Views gathered during this review indicate that about 70% of people prefer to contact the Council by telephone; the majority do not want a single number, but rather one number for each Department or service area. About 18% of people prefer to visit the Council and they prefer to be able to access all services in one conveniently located place. Views have been given on the location, style and opening hours of the CSC. A summary of information on the CSC and Switchboards is **attached**.

Several exercises were undertaken in order to investigate the customer perception of the Customer Services Centre and assess future potential. These include:

- User surveys – 1995, 1997 and July 2000
- Switchboard monitoring – July 2000
- Analysis of enquiry volumes split departmentally for period 1994/2000
- Activity Analysis of Customer Services Centre

The results of these exercises are provided in Best Value Form 5B.

In the event, expensive call centre solutions do not seem to be favoured by the public, who prefer an improvement of the current broad arrangements, and the addition of local CSCs in non-city centre locations.

### Action Plan for Implementing this Option

Task	Responsibility	Timescale
(1) Review of the CSC and Switchboard, taking into account the implications of the review of Central Admin Buildings.	Customer Services Manager	Departmental discussions by 31 May 2001. Analysis of options and action plan decision by September 2001.
(2) Improve city centre signposting, and redesign the Council's location maps.	AD (Corporate Property & Business Services)	Proposals and action plan by 31 May 2001.
(3) Feasibility study of mini-CSC network, including opportunities for partnership arrangements.	Corporate lead officer	Initial options by 30 September 2001
(4) Include relevant targets and projects in the ICT Strategy.	AD (IT Services)	Strategy approved, including timescales for projects by 1 April 2001.



## SUMMARY OF INFORMATION ON THE CUSTOMER SERVICES CENTRE &amp; SWITCHBOARDS

70% of public respondents contact the Council by telephone, a figure which is reflected consistently across a number of surveys, and 71% of public respondents said they would like to contact the Council by electronic means (access terminals, e:mail, or internet).

42% of public respondents said they would prefer a single telephone number for each service, and 29% said they would prefer a call centre approach. The Mystery Shopper survey found that telephone directory listings, internal and external, were not sufficiently clear or comprehensive.

**This suggests that developments and enhancements in ICT and telecommunications would bring improvements in customer care in ways highlighted by the public.**

88% of public respondents said that the Customer Services Centre capacity to deal with all enquiries in one location was useful to them, and 85% of users found the service excellent or very good; 63% of managers said they felt the CSC was good/very good in the service they provided.

The CSC Focus Group suggested that the range of information and services available at the CSC could be extended to improve the availability of services in one location, under one roof, with improved ease of access to the Council.

**This suggests that the one stop approach to providing services at CSC is valued by the public but could be further enhanced by extending the range of services available, making public access easier.**

Responses from the CSC Focus Group, the Customer Care Survey, and the Elected Members Survey, indicate that practical changes at the CSC would improve customer care for the public in a service valued for its accessibility and "one stop" benefits. These include queuing arrangements, facilities for children, toileting, private interview facilities, and extended opening hours.

Evidence on the costs of the two switchboards suggests the possibility of achieving budget savings from a merger, but this is dependent on the future occupancy of the Greyfriars building. The technical nature of the link between New Walk Centre and Greyfriars is such that a transfer of the switchboard service to NWC would not result in savings, whilst Greyfriars is occupied.

**However, the vacation of Greyfriars would mean that a single switchboard could operate, thereby saving a significant proportion of the £58,000 maintenance/running costs, largely associated with the dedicated lines to the building. There might also be marginal savings in the direct costs of £37,000 on staffing and revenue. This excludes calls estimated at £45,000 which would be redistributed with the transfer of system users to other premises.**

Further detail on these figures is available in form BV5A3 and report Grey42.

Evidence from the Elected Members Survey, LINK questionnaire, and Customer Care Survey suggests that a range of neighbourhood or community based satellite sites, providing access to information on Council services, would be welcomed by the public. This would complement the centre CSC and links directly to the potential afforded by developments in ICT.

**This suggests that the Council should investigate the feasibility of community based access points using existing facilities and premises, linked to the ICT and Internet Strategies, and the wider developments in public access ICT in Colleges, Schools and Libraries.**

Further information on all these proposals is available in forms BV5A, C, D and in the ICT Strategy, Action Plan, and Internet Strategy.

**Improvement Option 5: Development of ICT Initiatives for Customer Care**

- Description** (1) Use of the ICT Strategy to maximise public access to local public services, including:
- (a) Making the Council and its services more accessible
  - (b) Increasing choice in and encouraging the use of electronic services
  - (c) Ensuring that all customers are included b overcoming barriers of language, skill and physical ability.
- (2) Setting and monitoring targets for enabling the public to deal electronically with the Council.
- (3) Implementing projects to support this Improvement Option.

**Reasons for Proposing this Option**

A Customer Care week survey in 1999 indicates respondents would favour more use made of information technology. Views gathered during this review indicate about 39% of people said they would like to contact the Council via Public Access Terminals (or kiosks), 22% via e:mail and 10% via the Internet (web sites). 35% said that opening hours from 8am would suit them and 30% wanted all day Saturday opening.

The use of ICT in other authorities has been investigated, including call-centres. A summary is **attached**.

Various electronic means for the public to contact the Council are being implemented, piloted or evaluated. These include development of interactive services through the Council's Internet web site, a trial of self-help kiosks in the Customer Services Centre and a Library, and consultation on the development of a web portal for the City of Leicester to give access to a broad range of information and services in Leicester.

**Action Plan for Implementing this Option**

	<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
(1)	Include relevant targets and projects in the ICT Strategy.	AD (IT Services)	Strategy approved, including timescales for projects by 1 April 2001

Summary of ICT Uses By Other Authorities

The Customer Care Best Value terms of reference assume that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is going to play a key role in improving accessibility to Council services. The abovementioned report presents the findings of research carried out to identify what some other local authorities have done and learnt, how successful or otherwise the projects were and the reasons for the outcomes. It also advises whether similar schemes should be progressed at Leicester.

Local council services are one of the five services people particularly want to see open in the evenings and at weekends. ICT, particularly web technology, allows services to be offered outside of normal office hours without incurring the large costs of employing staff during these periods.

**Lewisham** has been forced to scale back its 'Tellytalk' project which made council services available via community-based video-conferencing kiosks in 12 outlets across the London borough. Tellytalk's lack of success was attributed to a public largely not literate in IT. The project was perceived to have been "technology-driven rather than customer-focused". But following a review and re-launch of the project on a smaller scale usage rates for some Tellytalk services, which include benefits and tax queries, have doubled.

**Leeds** City Council is expanding its electronic service delivery which underpins the "Vision for Leeds", which puts the focus on the citizen. Three years ago, the Council began deploying customer relationship management (CRM) software to enable the Council to get more in touch with local citizens. The CRM software allows Council staff to seamlessly deal with citizens' queries across many departments and agencies - from housing, benefits and social services to GP surgeries. It will streamline and improve the handling of queries from callers ringing the new call centre or visitors calling in at one of the 12 physical customer service points - called One-Stops - situated in the more deprived areas of Leeds.

**Kiosk** technology enables customers to access information at more convenient locations and offers opportunity for cost reduction without impacting on front-line service. Kiosks can be linked into existing web sites to facilitate ease of updating, currency of information, data collection and transaction processing. Many local authorities have or plan to introduce kiosks. We have started a project to trial kiosks in Belgrave Library and the Customer Service Centre Reception. We also intend to include the provision of kiosks as an option when the bus shelter contract is re-tendered later this year.

**Leicester** City Council should start experimenting with innovative ICT projects, particularly using web sites and kiosks, with a view to meeting the Government's targets for electronic delivery of most government services by 2005.

**Improvement Option 6: Equality of Access**

- Description**
- (1) The views of hard to reach groups obtained and taken into account within the Council's consultation programme (Option 3(1)).
  - (2) A realistic programme for ensuring that disabled people can access Council premises.
  - (3) Review of translation and interpretation services (including through the Internet) to ensure there are no communications barriers to assessing services.

**Reasons for Proposing this Option**

Views should be representative of all sections of the community but some groups are hard to reach. Specific action should be taken to find out what they think.

The Council has a rolling annual programme of £100,000 for improving disabled access to premises, but work has not been based on a full audit of requirements and a prioritised, monitored programme taking into account users' views. Such a systematic approach is now required.

Translation and interpretation services have not been reviewed since the Council became unitary. The main components are the Community Languages Unit in the Town Clerk's Department (which translates documents), an interpretation service in Social Services and the Auxiliary Interpreters Scheme in all other Departments except Education. Several significant deficiencies exist in these arrangements including gaps in provision (for example, with additional languages and the needs of disabled people), poor targeting of expenditure, poor quality control and monitoring in some areas and general inconsistencies and inefficiencies. A review of this area, with users' views, is urgently needed, and should not await the Best Value review scheduled for 2001/02.

**Action Plan to Implement this Option**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
(1) Obtain the views of hard to reach groups.	(a) Corporate lead officer, with CXO public consultation lead (developing the programme)  (b) Each Director (obtaining and assessing views).	(a) By July 2001 as part of Option 3, Task (1)  (b) As required by the programme.
(2) Establish programme for ensuring disabled access to premises.	AD (Corporate Property & Business Services)	Complete audit by 28 February 2001. Established Council-wide machinery by 31 May 2001. Propose programme with budget proposals by 30 September 2001.
(3) Undertake review of translation and interpretation services (assessment of needs and comparative information, proposed languages policy and options for its delivery).	Director of Social Services and Town Clerk	By July 2001.

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
VIEWS OF THE PLANNING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2000**

The Town Clerk and Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report updating and informing Members on the process and progress of the Best Value Customer Care Review to date and it outlined the key issues and possible options to be developed for future discussion and inclusion as improvement options.

The Town Clerk gave the meeting a presentation on this item expanding further on the report. It is summarised as follows:

- Customer Care became a priority on reorganisation and it became a strategic aim to create a consistent approach.
- A change of culture was required at all levels of Council organisation to meet the demands of all the Council's customers.
- There were a number of improvement options available and public opinion would help to inform decisions.
- Change needs champions to take action plans forward.
- Public opinion appeared to show a preference for a single point of personal access to Council services with telephone access via a series of main numbers for each service area.
- Ideally, the points of access should be in all parts of the City, probably based on existing facilities.
- Important details such as queuing and signposting needed to be considered, as well as the location of access to services.
- Improving access for hard to reach groups and increased use of technology should be considered.
- This review did not necessarily require a large outlay, but commitment from Members and Managers and empowerment of frontline staff.

Members of the Committee stressed the importance of providing services on a more local basis. It was hoped that consideration would be given to the wider use of Council buildings that were not in the city centre.

Points were raised in relation to the monitoring of best value reviews as a whole. It was requested that the relationship between Best Value and Internal Audit be re-assessed. It was felt that a more consistent approach to Best Value may be achieved by having a body which considers all the Best Value reviews.

A request was made to review the translation and interpretation services at the earliest date possible.

Further comments were made with regard to applying any lessons that have been learnt from this year's reviews. It was hoped that the reviews would be done in a shorter time for corrective action to be taken in the municipal year.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) that the Lead Director's management of the process to date be noted;
- (2) that the Lead Director's proposals for completion of the process be endorsed;
- (3) that the ongoing work on Improvement Options that will be presented to Cabinet in December 2000, be noted;
- (4) that Cabinet be requested to consider a review of translation and interpretation services at the earliest possible date; and
- (5) that methods of co-ordination across Council Departments and the relationship with Internal Audit be given consideration when conducting Best Value reviews.

**MINUTE OF THE METING HELD ON 3 JANUARY 2001**



## CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW JOINT TRADES UNION COMMENTS

Improving customer care is a cultural issue. However, there has been no assessment or evaluation of translation and interpreting services, or indeed of the auxiliary translation scheme to ensure equality of access.

Links also have not been drawn with communications and services to older people Best value reviews. In the latter users stated that they would like local centres (non-city centre) to provide access to other services from the local authority and in a variety of mediums.

This being the case further investigation and consultation into these areas need to be carried out before Option 4 of the proposed improvements options: to review the customer service centre and switchboard can take place.

This would ensure a fully integrated and seamless approach to Customer Care and not exclude asylum seekers, refugees and local communities, etc.

Despite requests made by the unions no financial information has been available to the Core Review Group, so there has been no discussion on how or where savings are to be made. This information has been made available in other best value reviews. It is therefore impossible for the trade union side to assess the impact of any of the service improvement options on the service as a whole or to staff.

## LEAD DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE

A separate review of translation and interpretation services was in train when this BV review began. I hoped to use its results, and so did not initiate further work. In the event, the results were not available and so a full review (which was recommended by the Scrutiny Committee) has been included in Improvement Option 6.

People's preference for local access points across the city has been addressed. It is the reason for Improvement Option 4 (3).

This has been substantially a review of how the Council treats people and the value of the services formally reviewed is relatively small (£345,000). 2% amounts to £6,900. The financial implications are addressed in the report.

Links with other reviews are addressed in **Appendix 7**.

## **CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW INDEPENDENT CONSULTEE'S COMMENTS**

### **1 The role of the Independent Consultee.**

The role of the Independent Consultee is outlined in the Guidelines adopted by the Council for the conduct of Best Value Reviews. In it they state:

“The Independent Consultee will be from either another in-house department, peer group authority, consultancy, or academia. They will be responsible for providing challenge throughout the review process reporting directly to both the Core Review Team / Members’ Executive and Scrutiny Committee(s). This Consultee will provide a separate report commenting on the improvements recommended by the Lead Director and the Lead Officer.”

### **2 Choice of Consultee.**

After seeking comments from members of the Review Group the decision to approach Milton Keynes was made on the basis of their experience as a unitary authority, of having undertaken a pilot Best Value Review in Customer Care, and their experience of having reported on the outcomes of the Review. This Review has included, as Independent Consultee, the author of the initial and final reports on Milton Keynes Council’s pilot Review on Customer Care.

Reservations were expressed by Trade Unions that Milton Keynes was not similar to Leicester in terms of population breakdown and communities served; however, the over-riding factor in the choice of Independent Consultee was his experience of having completed a Customer Care Best Value Review in a unitary authority.

### **3 Initial comments on the process of the review: 3 November '00**

The following comments were received from the Independent Consultee, Ian Prosser, and are listed for Members to consider:

- 3.1 The review process appears to have engaged with the key issues in relation to Customer Care overall, but there are a number of specific points which should be considered as follows:
- 3.2 The review appears to examine existing services with a view to their improvement rather than looking in depth at alternative ways to deliver customer care service, particularly in relation to call centres and extended use of email.
- 3.3 As customer surveys indicate that the public prefers telephone contact with the Council our potential to improve telecommunications should be high on the list of Improvement Options for the Council to consider.
- 3.4 If Leicester is committed to maintaining face to face customer contact then a detailed study of providing mini-customer service centres should be undertaken.
- 3.5 With regard to improving Customer Care standards and changing the culture of the organisation, there is a need to emphasise that Customer Care extends beyond the initial point of contact to the “back room” in service departments.

3.6 The Council should explore the possibilities for partnership development in new initiatives, particularly where there may be risk involved, for example financial risk.

**LEAD DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE**

There was strong commitment in Milton Keynes to a call-centre solution. We considered this but did not explore it in full detail since the costs would clearly be large. Nor was it favoured by the public. Our surveys indicated the approach we recommend of separate main numbers for each service area. This allows the Council flexibility and the chance to build on existing arrangements without significant additional expenditure.

Whilst the majority of Leicester people prefer telephone contact, a fifth still prefer visiting an office. Improvements are proposed to both these means of contact. A feasibility study of mini-CSCs is proposed in Improvement Option 4. This is likely to include discussion with partner agencies. A possible partnership with the Post Office is being actively explored.

## **CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW CROSS-REVIEW ISSUES**

Adopting a Customer Care ethos is a fundamental part of serving the public, and there is a need to underpin the Council's interaction with its customers, users, residents, and visitors with a commitment to achieving high standards in customer service and in its working partnerships.

This has direct implications for the way in which the Council communicates in various ways with its public, partners, and local and regional organisations, and in the way that it promotes its services and facilities.

Both the Customer Care and the Communications & Promotions Reviews have identified the impact of customer service issues on marketing and promotions, and the need for future communications strategies and plans to take account of Customer Care Standards.

Similarly, the development and adoption of Customer Care Standards across the Council will need to take account of the proposed improvements in the ways in which the Council communicates and promotes information and services.

A practical example of this is the potential of developing neighbourhood based public access points: the provision of a local facility to enable easier access to Council information and services will improve communication to the public, but will require clear Standards of customer service.

The review of Services to Older People has identified the demand for locally accessible services and access to information from the Council. Here there are clear implications for the Council's future approach to communications and promotion, its provision of information services, its use of ICT in user friendly ways, and the need for customer care Standards to have specific regard to Older People's communication needs.

The potential in a holistic approach to localised services to Older People is a good example of the cross-cutting issues which have emerged separately from the reviews, but which can be addressed by a corporate approach to ensure that the implementation of Improvement Plans is equally holistic.

This places an additional responsibility on the implementation Lead Officers to ensure that the issues arising from communication, customer service, ICT, and local public access points are addressed simultaneously, and over time are able to be monitored.

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
ASSESSMENT AGAINST INSPECTION CRITERIA**

<b>Inspectorate Questions</b>	<b>Responses as a Result of the Review</b>
<p><b>How Good Is The Service?</b></p> <p><b>Are the Authority's aims clear and challenging?</b></p> <p>Has the authority challenged the need for the service?</p> <p>Does the service support corporate aims in the Community Plan?</p>	<p>The fundamental challenge aspect of the BVR has been undertaken in accordance with the agreed procedures (BV2B).</p> <p>While Customer Care is an approach, rather than a services, the scope of the Review included two switchboards and the Customer Services Centre which provide fundamental means of public access to the Council.</p> <p>Alternative ways of approaching these areas were considered and the improvement options reflect the way forward which is preferred by the public, and most realistic for the Council.</p> <p>The Council's responsibility for Community Leadership within the Modernising Agenda makes it incumbent upon it to demonstrate a high level of customer care, ensure customer satisfaction, and gain the confidence of its citizens in all that it does.</p>

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
ASSESSMENT AGAINST INSPECTION CRITERIA**

Inspectorate Questions	Responses as a Result of the Review
<p>Does the service meet these aims?</p> <p>Is there effective performance management?</p> <p>Is the authority delivering?</p>	<p>The customer Services Centre undertakes performance management practices in relation to its work and information is available in the performance of the two switchboards.</p> <p>Procedures have been established for the effective monitoring and management of other services, although there is no effective monitoring of Customer Care standards as yet. The Improvement Options propose that such procedures should be established.</p> <p>Feedback from public consultation exercises indicate a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the Customer Services Centre.</p> <p>MORI (1998) rated Leicester overall as average in comparison with other authorities in respect of staff helpfulness, efficiency and ease of contact. There is scope for improvement and the proposals in the Improvement Options are intended to address this. (See appended tables).</p> <p>There is no monitoring of Customer Care standards in departments and so it is difficult to state definitively whether the authority performs well or not in this area. The Improvement Options are intended to address this.</p> <p>In terms of a “one stop” approach to information service and guidance, the Customer Services Centre provides a service which is highly rated by members of the public, and is felt to be appropriately located.</p>

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
ASSESSMENT AGAINST INSPECTION CRITERIA**

<b>Inspectorate Questions</b>	<b>Responses as a Result of the Review</b>
<p>How does its performance compare?</p> <p>How does the authority compare with the top 25%?</p> <p>Has the authority demonstrated cost effectiveness?</p>	<p>There is no relevant comparison for Leicester in this area of service in terms of its <i>“family”</i> of authorities. MORI (1998) compared the authority with a number of other authorities, rating it average or below average in terms of helpfulness, efficiency, and ease of contact.</p> <p>However, in a fourth comparison – satisfaction with the final outcome – Leicester compared better than average when compared with other authorities. (See appended tables).</p> <p>Attempts have been made to compare data from other authorities on cost but the responses have been limited and do not provide a meaningful basis for comparison.</p> <p>However, there are opportunities for follow up benchmarking on cost and these will be pursued as part of the Improvement Options.</p>

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
ASSESSMENT AGAINST INSPECTION CRITERIA**

Inspectorate Questions	Responses as a Result of the Review
<p><b>IS THE SERVICE LIKELY TO IMPROVE?</b></p> <p>Does the BVR drive improvement?</p> <p>Is the BVR process management effectively?</p> <p>Has the authority effectively challenged what it does?</p> <p>Has the authority made rigorous comparisons throughout the review?</p> <p>Has the authority made good use of consultation?</p> <p>How competitive is the authority's choice of procurement?</p>	<p>The process approved by Members has been followed with a series of tasks delegated to members of the Core Review Group. Meetings have been held on a regular basis, and work programmes and tasks have been shared between members of staff. The trade unions have been an integral part of the Review Group and their contributions were constructive and have been welcomed.</p> <p>The Review has been overseen by the Lead Director who has taken a close interest in the proceedings.</p> <p>As outlined in the previous section on "<i>challenge</i>", this function is more of an approach than a service. The approach has been challenged in that a change of culture is proposed, from procedure-led to customer-focused.</p> <p>Attempts have been made to compare the Council's performance and costs with other authorities and the private sector. This has only been partially successful, with the private sector being very reluctant to share information, and only 25% of other authorities replying to requests for information.</p> <p>The authority undertook a range of surveys, questionnaires, and interviews over two years with members of the public, staff, Elected Members, and senior managers in all Departments. The Review has drawn on the results of these initiatives and used them as part of the analysis of the quality of customer care and of the way forward.</p> <p>The Independent Consultee has provided an objective external view on the Review process and the Improvement Options.</p> <p>Customer Care represents the attitudinal approach the Council takes to providing services to the public, and this is not open to procurement. The Customer Services Centre and the two switchboards are specific services within the scope of the Review. Neither has been subjected to market testing. This would not be a productive exercise in view of the nature of the services and the lack of an obvious market to test against.</p>



**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
ASSESSMENT AGAINST INSPECTION CRITERIA**

<b>Inspectorate Questions</b>	<b>Responses as a Result of the Review</b>
<p>How good is the Improvement Plan?</p> <p>Is the authority trying to improve the right things?</p> <p>Are the improvements ambitious enough to get the authority into the top 25%?</p>	<p>Consultation has indicated that the use of telephones to contact the Council are popular with members of the public.</p> <p>Consultation also indicates that the public are interested in electronic means of communicating with the Council. The Government's targets for electronic delivery of services further emphasises the need for action in this area.</p> <p>Comparisons with other authorities shows that Leicester lags behind others in adoption of corporate standards and monitoring of performance in customer care.</p> <p>Examination of the arrangements for switchboards and the auxiliary interpreters scheme shows there is potential for savings and service improvement.</p> <p>The Improvement Options address all these issues in a variety of ways.</p> <p>The application of corporate Customer Care standards, linked to performance management arrangements and annual reporting, are intended to improve the Council's standing in comparison with other authorities, (ie those listed by MORI in 1998).</p>

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
ASSESSMENT AGAINST INSPECTION CRITERIA**

Inspectorate Questions	Responses as a Result of the Review
<p>Will the authority deliver the improvements?</p> <p>Does the Plan have the commitment that it needs from Members and others?</p> <p>Is the Improvement Plan practical?</p> <p>Does the authority have a track record of managing both change and performance?</p>	<p>Members have shown keen interest in the Review and are concerned about the customer care that the Council provides to its citizens. Members are keen to ensure that the services offered is of the highest quality, and as such have questioned whether the Review has identified sufficient and relevant improvements.</p> <p>The Improvement Options include a commitment to establish “<i>Champions</i>” for customer care in all departments, and will include key Elected Members. There is a history of Member and senior officer involvement in a previous working party on Customer Care.</p> <p>Elected Members commitment is intended to be secured through the Cabinet and Scrutiny processes.</p> <p>The Improvement Options set out practical changes in customer care and the subsequent Improvement Plan will specify timescales, responsibilities, work programmes and tasks within a project management framework.</p> <p>The Council has established a comprehensive performance management framework which links strategic objectives with business plans and review processes.</p> <p>It has also established a performance indicator database with will enable the authority to manage its performance in respect of national performance indicators.</p> <p>The Council has experience of managing major change in respect of the preparation for unitary status.</p>

**MORI (1998) COMPARATORS ON HELPFULNESS, EFFICIENCY, EASE OF CONTACT, AND SATISFACTION WITH THE FINAL OUTCOME**

**CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW  
ASSESSMENT AGAINST INSPECTION CRITERIA**

<b>HELPFULNESS</b> %		<b>EFFICIENCY</b> %		<b>EASE OF CONTACT</b> %		<b>SATISFACTION</b> %	
Gateshead	84	Sunderland	76	Gateshead	78	Kingston	64
Birmingham	80	Kingston	71	Kingston	76	Solihull	64
Sunderland	79	Westminster	69	Richmond	73	Sunderland	62
Richmond	78	Solihull	69	Birmingham	70	Richmond	60
Kingston	78	NCC (GB)	68	Solihull	70	Trafford	59
Solihull	78	Portsmouth	67	Portsmouth	69	<b>Leicester</b>	<b>58</b>
NCC (GB)	76	Trafford	65	Sunderland	67	NCC (GB)	58
Sutton ('93)	75	Richmond	65	NCC (BG)	65	Birmingham	57
Trafford	74	Enfield	62	Sandwell	65	Brent	55
Westminster	74	<b>Leicester</b>	<b>60</b>	Tower Hamlets	65	Lewisham	47
Brent	72	Brent	58	Westminster	63	Tower Hamlets	47
Birmingham	72	Birmingham	56	Kingston	62	Wandsworth	46
Wandsworth	72	Tower Hamlets	55	Sutton	61	Camden	41
<b>Leicester</b>	<b>70</b>	Lewisham	52	<b>Leicester</b>	<b>59</b>	Manchester	38
Tower Hamlets	69	Camden	45	Wandsworth	59		
Enfield	68	Manchester	44	Enfield	55		
Sutton ('97)	67			Brent	55		
Lewisham	66			Camden	49		
Sandwell	64			Manchester	41		

## CUSTOMER CARE REVIEW INVENTORY OF FURTHER DOCUMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following documents relating to the Review are located in the Members' Area for information; they are also available via e:mail from the Town Clerk.

BV2b	:	Fundamental Challenge
BV4	:	Service standards, objectives, outcomes
BV5A	:	Service profiles
BV5B	:	Stakeholders
BV5C	:	Supply mapping
BV5D	:	Benchmarking
BV6	:	Improvement Options
Benchmark Councils	:	detailed responses from 4 authorities
Comparator authorities:		list of authorities contacted
ICT Implications for customer care		

Further detailed information on surveys, EFQM workshop, and responses from external organisations is available from the relevant Review Group members, via the Town Clerk.