

# CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

## PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

29TH SEPTEMBER, 2005

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### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

To provide Cabinet with summary information on the proposed Customer Service Strategy.

### Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

### Recommendations

**THAT the strategy and in particular the change management implications be noted and the proposed way forward endorsed.**

### Reasons

The Strategy which is attached as an appendix outlines Herefordshire Council's vision for Customer Service over the next three years. The strategy is designed to be a high level document setting out the over-arching framework for customer service in Herefordshire.

The strategy aims to "Put the Customer First" – at the heart of everything the Council does and recognises the importance of the diversity of customers' needs in Herefordshire. Ease of accessibility, quality and speed of response received are the criteria against which customers measure a service provider.

### Considerations

#### 1. Current Customer Service Strategy

The Customer Service Strategy 2002-2007 sets out an ambitious plan to ensure the Council delivers the UK's best of class customer focused services. The creation of corporate customer service standards aimed to contribute to the Herefordshire Plan by:

- Creating single Customer Access Points in Market Towns for residents and visitors.
- Helping to tackle poverty and isolation by reducing the need to travel.
- Working in partnership with other bodies to improve the health and well being of residents.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Julie Holmes, Head of ICT Services on 01432 260225

- Working with community groups to develop and shape the future of Herefordshire.

2. By 2007 the goals to have been achieved included:

- Implementation of an appropriate phone contact service.
- Info Shops/Points in all Market Towns and Hereford City.

Achievements to date include:

- Info Shops/Points have been implemented in the Market Towns and in Hereford City. The last to open in December 2004 was a combined Library, Leisure and Info Point in Bromyard.
- CRM for some front line services in these Info Shops/Points with limited scope and poor user acceptance.

3. However, lack of focus and competing priorities has meant that the previous Customer Services Strategy failed to deliver:

- An appropriate phone contact service.
- A robust, corporate and integrated customer relationship management environment. The CRM application implemented has not been further developed or integrated with further back office transactional systems.
- Reporting for the Info Shops. This has been lost due to other system implementations (eg Academy implementation in Revenues and Benefits)
- A Complaint and Compliment systems. These were simply not included. These have now been specified and are in the process of being implemented following extensive consultation.
- Community access points in the more rural communities further to delays in securing funding with the Herefordshire in Touch programme.

4. Releasing Resources to the Front Line” – Sir Peter Gershon – April 2004

Whilst Councils across England have been focused on delivering improved service to customers through Customer Service Centres; CRM and e-government; the above report has been published which sets out the efficiency agenda putting an emphasis on transactional services i.e. all the processing that happens in the “back office” e.g. revenues and benefits, housing management, planning, parking etc. Logically the two go hand-in hand because many of the “benefits” (service improvements and savings) from investment in web sites, contact centres and CRM systems can only be realised once back office processes have been redesigned and fully integrated with customer service. Looked at together with corporate support services the need for an integrated “architecture” to support frontline delivery emerges.

5. Current Service Provision

Reviews have been undertaken to assess the service currently provided to the customers of Herefordshire Council. Inbound telephone statistics have been reviewed as have the number of services undertaken by the individual Info Shops

and points to give insight into the range of services that we are able to provide “Face to Face”.

#### 6. Customer Service Strategy 2005-2008

Council services should be integrated, responsive, customer focused and cost effective, concentrating on the needs of the customers rather than those of the service providers. The Council must ensure we meet people’s needs appropriately, on time and first time by developing a customer focused culture and using technology to assist with this vision. To achieve this vision several objectives need to be met:

- Create an organisation with the skills, processes and culture to deliver better access to improved public services.
- Make it more convenient, easier and quicker for the citizens of Herefordshire to deal with the Council.
- Make sure that all citizens have equal access to the services they need.
- Make sure that access to the Council services is the same from wherever in the County the citizen is making contact.
- Provide more responsive, more reliable and more satisfying public services that meet the expectations of the citizens for better access to better quality public services.
- Deliver better access to better quality public services in the most cost-effective way.
- Provide an Info by Phone Service - between the hours of 7.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. which will handle all non face-to-face enquiries and requests.

#### 7. The Way Forward – Delivering the Strategy

This strategy aims to focus the organisation around the customer, rather than structure everything around individual services, as the Council do currently. The changes required to achieve this fall into four main categories:

- Cultural - Change Management – the attitudes the Council has and the way the Council behaves.
- Process – Business Process Re-engineering – the way the Council do things.
- Organisational – Change Management – where the Council is located and how is structured.
- Technological – the ICT systems the Council uses to support its transactions.

8. Our goal must be to provide levels of customer service that are among the highest of any council in England. Delivery of this strategy will enable us to achieve this.

9. The strategy represents a step change in service delivery, and although comprehensive programmes in Change Management, Communications and Business Process Re-engineering are key, it is not a leap into the dark. The technology already exists which will support us to make these changes and is

already in use by other authorities.

10. The Council must ensure the right levels of resources are made available to support the required service and will be building on the specialist customer service roles already established in the Info Shops. There will be more opportunities for those people who enjoy dealing with customers to do so and they will have the means to provide better service. There will be increased opportunities for back office service staff to focus on their areas of specialism freed up from much of the routine work and direct phone calls, which will be transferred to the Info front end, leaving the specialists to concentrate on the more complex issues for which they are trained.
11. The Council must also acknowledge that things change. Customers' needs alter and their expectations increase. New technology opens up new possibilities for service delivery. Therefore the strategy will require regular review to ensure the Council is kept aware of new developments and can evaluate the customer service improvement opportunities.
12. A feasibility study into the potential use of the ground floor at Garrick House as an Info Shop for Hereford City is ongoing. Initial findings suggest that this should be a good option offering flexibility in the delivery of integrated front line services. Preliminary planning for the project would see a go-live for the facility in May/June 2006 subject to survey and funding.
13. The Council must understand that this Strategy addresses the services to go through both the Info by Phone and Info Shops/Points. Most importantly, it is not intended to relate to individuals or accommodation.

## **Alternative Options**

None

## **Risk Management**

None

## **Consultees**

None

## **Background Papers**

None