

APPENDIX G
Agenda Item No. 10

**BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CUSTOMER CARE
STAGE 2 (DETAILED REVIEW) AND STAGE 3
(IMPROVEMENT PLAN)**

Director of Corporate Resources

(1.) Purpose

- 1.1 The Cabinet received and resolved to approve the Best Value Review of Customer Care Stage 2 (Detailed Review) Report and Stage 3 (Improvement Plan) and to refer the Cabinet Report to the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee for comment and review.

(2.) Recommendation/For decision

- 2.1 The Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee is requested to comment and review the Stage 2 (Detailed Review) Report and the Stage 3 (Improvement Plan) for the Best Value Review of Customer Care.

(3.) Supporting Information

- 3.1 At its meeting of the 3rd August 2004, the Cabinet received and resolved to approve the Best Value Review of Customer Care Stage 2 Report and Stage 3 Improvement Plan.
- 3.2 Cabinet agreed to refer the Cabinet Report to the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee for comment and review.
- 3.3 The Cabinet Report is appended to this report for Scrutiny Members to consider.

(4.) Resource Implications

- 4.1 Resource implications are contained within the original Cabinet Report attached.

(5.) Response to Key Aims and Outcomes

- 5.1 The Best Value Review of Customer Care forms part of the agreed programme for Best Value Reviews. It falls under the Council's Local Communities Key Aim and the outcome of providing Council services that meet the needs of the whole community and the corporate Aspiration of being customer focused.

Contact Officer: Lesley Yates 01296 585665
Background Documents: Cabinet Report – Best Value Review of Customer Care Stage 1, 1st June 2004
Resources and Corporate Performance Report Stage 1, 14th June 2004
Cabinet Report – Best Value Review of Customer Care Stage 2
Report and Stage 3 Improvement Plan, 3rd August 2004
Master Document files containing Notes of Review Team Meetings
and associated documents and assessments.

Appendix 1 – Report to Cabinet 3rd August 2004

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CUSTOMER CARE STAGES 2 AND 3

Director of Corporate Resources

(1.) Purpose

To report the findings of Stage 2 (Detailed Review) and Stage 3 (Improvement Plan) of the Best Value Review of Customer Care and to seek Cabinet approval of the recommendations.

(2.) Recommendation/For decision

(2.1) That Cabinet note the comments received from the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee on the Stage 1 Report of the Best Value Review of Customer Care.

(2.2) That Cabinet receive the report of the findings of Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the Best Value Review of Customer Care together with the recommendations for the improvement of customer care across the Council.

(2.3) That Cabinet approve the recommendations of the Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the Best Value Review of Customer Care.

(2.4) That Cabinet agree that the Stage 2 Detailed Review Report and the Stage 3 Improvement Plan for the Best Value Review of Customer Care be presented to the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee for comment and review at its meeting of 13th October 2004.

(3.) Background

(3.1) At their meeting of 1st June 2004, Cabinet approved recommendations for the detailed review of selected topics in the Stage 2 of the Best Value Review of Customer Care. The topics were:

1. Customer Care Action Plan (Customer care vision, key areas for improvement, and BVR Customer Care Stage 3 – Improvement Plan).
- 1a. Customer Access (Access hours, access for customer in rural areas, access for ethnic minorities and hard-to-reach groups, and out-of-hours service).
- 1b. Customer Care Standards (customer care standards, monitoring and improvement, areas of poor performance, Members use of standards, and learning from performance data).
- 1c. Training (Customer Care Champions, customer care induction training, and role of NVQs).
2. Complaints Administration (Procedures, IT system, Complaints Officer, plan for re-launch of corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures, and Service Liaison Officers).
3. E-mail Services (corporate approach to e-mail handling and communications via the website).

(2.2) The Stage 1 Report was presented to the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 14th June 2004 for comment.

(4.) Comments from Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee

- (4.1) The Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee resolved:
- (1) That the Cabinet decision to approve the Stage 1 report for the Best Value Review of Customer Care and its recommendations for Stage 2 of the Review be noted.
 - (2) That their comments (see paragraph 4.2 below) be taken into account when undertaking Stage 2 of the Best Value Review of Customer Care.
- (4.2) The Review Team welcomed the Scrutiny Committee’s comments. Table 1, below, details the comments made by the Committee and highlights the Review Team’s suggested way forward for those items requiring action:

Scrutiny Committee Comment	Suggested Way Forward
Members Questionnaire – Members had found that this questionnaire had been difficult both to use and understand and questions might not have been appropriate in all cases.	Noted.
Meetings with External Bodies – There was no reference to Parish or Town Councils nor to the Local Government Association.	The Review has discussed at some length the views expressed by Parish and Town Councils. The Review Team had used the Parishes/Town Councils Survey of November/December 2003 as the basis for its discussion. Stage 2 recommendations will include references to closer working with Parish and Town Councils.
Telephone Service - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was felt that an out-of-hours service for planning enforcement would be useful. • At present the telephone system offered no call back to operator if a telephone went answered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • References to out-of-hours service will be included within the Stage 2 report. • The technical issue around call back will be referred to the Telephone Project Board for consideration within Phase 3 of its implementation work.
E-mail Service – It was felt that a standard e-mail layout or template for Members might prove useful.	Addressed within Stage 2.
Complaints – Whilst the complaints procedure seemed to serve people well there was no mention of satisfied customers. Such mention would provide a more balanced approach.	Complaints satisfaction monitoring will be addressed through the 3 year BVPI survey conducted on behalf of the ODPM. The results will be included within future performance indicator reporting against the Key Aims and Outcomes.

<p>Customer Service Standards – Across the Council it still appeared that staff were willing to pass customers around rather than take ownership of a problem. However, it was noted that the current culture change programme was seeking to address this.</p>	<p>The issue highlighted will be addressed through the Cultural Change Programme, Heads of Service Meeting, Managers Forum and service improvement plans, as well as Stage 2 for the Best Value Review of Customer Care.</p>
<p>Cultural Change – It was felt that cultural change was very important as its principles should bind together the results of the whole review.</p>	<p>The importance of the Cultural Change Programme will be acknowledged with Stage 2 and will include recommendations for future improvement in the Council’s performance.</p>

(5.) Stage 2 Key Findings and Recommendations

- (5.1) Following Cabinet approval of Stage 1, the Review Team programmed a series of meetings to assess the Council’s performance in relation to each topic, to identify differing options where these were relevant and to make recommendations for improvement. The discussions centered upon improving outcomes against the Council’s Local Communities Key Aim and the outcome of providing Council services that meet the needs of the whole community, and its organisational aspiration to be customer focused.
- (5.2) The key findings of this process and the Review Team’s recommendations are summarised in the charts, numbered 1 to 10, within Appendix 1.

(6.) Stage 3 Improvement Plan

- (6.1) Following on from the completion of the Stage 2 Detailed Review, the Review Team prepared the Stage 3 Improvement Plan.
- (6.2) Overall, the review has identified 6 key areas for improvement in Customer Care across the Council:
 - **Customer Care Vision** – to drive improvement against the 9 personal qualities across the whole organisation.
 - **Customer Access** – to improve access to Council services, particularly for hard-to-reach groups.
 - **Customer Care Standards** – to ensure continued improvement against the corporate Customer Care Standards.
 - **Complaints Administration** – to refine and re-launch the corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures to ensure an effective process and to introduce the procedures to Members.
 - **New Technology** – to review developments in information technology where benefit and improvement for customers and staff can be demonstrated in a cost effective manner.
 - **Learning Organisation** – to analyse performance data to drive forward informed service improvement in customer care and to enhance the delivery of training in customer care.
- (6.3) In total, 33 improvement actions have been highlighted. The full list of improvement actions is included in Appendix 3 to this report. Together these keys areas of

improvement and the associated improvement actions represent the overall Best Value Review of Customer Care Stage 3 Improvement Plan.

(7.) Reasons for Recommendations

(7.1) The recommendations contained within Stage 2 and Stage 3 are made in order to complete the Best Value Review of Customer Care and provide the focus for on-going improvement across the whole Council.

(8.) Resource Implications

(7.1) The programme of actions set out in the Stage 3 Improvement Plan covers a wide range of initiatives, some of which have not yet been fully funded. Other initiatives have already secured approval for additional investment (i.e. complaints procedure work, appointment of part-time Complaints Officer) or can be contained within existing budgets. The Improvement Plan includes items where requirements for new funding have already been identified.

(7.2) Improvements that are most likely to give rise to financial implications in the future (these may be savings as well as requirements for additional funding) include:

- Implications of the assessment of customer access times and out-of-hours arrangements.
- Initiatives coming forward from the partnership work of the Customer First Steering Board.
- Proposals arising from future reviews of developments in new technologies.
- Improvements recommended as a result of performance monitoring analysis.

(7.3) It is proposed, therefore, to identify additional resource requirements as the feasibility of the initiatives is examined. Further reports will be brought to Cabinet in the future for decision and/or assessment, as appropriate.

(9.) Response to Key Aims and Outcomes

The Best Value Review of Customer Care forms part of the agreed programme for Best Value Reviews. It falls under the Council's Local Communities Key Aim and the outcome of providing Council services that meet the needs of the whole community and the corporate Aspiration of being customer focused.

Contact Officer: Lesley Yates 01296 585770

Background Documents:

Cabinet Report – Best Value Review of Customer Care Stage 1, 1st June 2004

Resources and Corporate Performance Report Stage 1, 14th June 2004

Master Document files containing Notes of Review Team Meetings and associated documents and assessments.

**Appendix 1 Stage 2 Detailed Review
Key Findings and Recommendations**

1. Customer Care Vision

Assessment
The Council has developed its rationale in relation to customer care through its previous objective “Improving Customer Care”, the modernisation agenda, individual services’ Best Value Reviews and, more recently, through Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
The Council has reviewed its Key Aims and Outcomes and defined its Aspirations for the future. In particular, it has identified providing “services that meet the needs of the whole community” (and, therefore, are accessible) as an outcome under the Key Aim relating to Local Communities, and “being customer focused” as an organisational Aspiration.
In its Comprehensive Performance Assessment report the Audit Commission concluded that the Council has high standards of customer care and has maintained a substantial commitment to improve customer care.
Having completed many of the original approved recommendations under the heading of improving customer care (Customer Service Centre, Customer Care Standards, Compliments, Comments and Complaints procedures, and so on), the Council would benefit from updating its customer care vision for the future.

Rationale/Options Considered
The Review Team concluded that the best way to enhance the Council’s customer care in future would be to focus upon the 9 personal qualities defined within its organisational aspirations, namely:
Customer Focused: listening, reliability, taking responsibility, seeking out improvement.
Focused on outcomes and performance: planning and measuring, challenging poor performance.
Outward looking: being creative.
Strategic: being aware of the bigger picture.
Enabling: enlisting help and support.
The personal qualities also form the baseline for the cultural change programme. The Team concluded that customer care values and the cultural change qualities were concurrent.
The Customer Care Standards and personal qualities reflect in everything we do and impact upon the reputation of the Council. Every contact that customers have with the Council should leave them with a positive feeling and a positive experience, even where difficult messages and decisions have to be presented. Showing courtesy and

taking responsibility for customer enquiries were imperative to the future reputation of the Council as a professional organisation. It is important that customers know what is going to happen with their enquiry/request for service/complaint and have the next stage in a process explained to them. Where changes will happen the customer should be kept updated and informed.

Whilst many officers in the Council demonstrated the personal qualities required, there were a small number that did not. It is the responsibility of managers and staff to challenge poor behaviour and negative attitudes to customer care, with managers utilising formal procedures where improvement is not demonstrated.

A further initiative should be developed to positively promote the Council's customer vision amongst staff, e.g. a mouse mat.

Recommendations

- V1. To continue communication and promotion of the nine personal qualities across the organisation.
- V2. All services to continue to drive improvement against the nine personal qualities within their areas of responsibility.
- V3. All services to ensure that improvements in their areas of work in relation to customer care are addressed through the service planning process.
- V4. All line managers (Heads of Service, Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors) to ensure that targets are set for individual performance against the customer service standards and to reinforce the nine personal qualities through the formal staff appraisal procedure.
- V5. To monitor service delivery and performance against the customer care standards at both corporate and local levels, and to challenge and review poor performance, utilising formal procedures where improvement is not demonstrated.
- V6. To look at additional internal promotion of the corporate personal qualities, e.g. a mouse mat.

2. Customer Access

Assessment

Differences between service access hours, employment contract hours and telephone switchboard hours have existed within the Council for many years. When staff moved to 66 High Street, the corporate requirement was that all services had to provide telephone coverage from 08.30 and 17.30pm every working day. The flexi-time policy enables staff to commence and finish their working day beyond contract hours and services can use this to provide the cover required. After 3 years it is clear that not all services follow this requirement. It was also noted that some officers have clocked into work but do not answer ringing telephones, a behaviour that is contrary to the corporate customer care standards. The current position for access hours across services is summarised in Appendix 2 to the report.

In addition to the Best Value Review process, Management Team has commenced consideration of out-of-hours service. At the time of writing this report, Directors are engaging with their Heads of Service to look at the issues and the practical difficulties

i) To align service availability hours to switchboard hours (i.e. service contactable by switchboard with customer call between 08.30 and 17.30 Monday to Friday.

ii) To extend service availability further .

The assessment includes the review of possible solutions such as the further utilisation of existing policies e.g. Mobile and Home Working, Flexi-Time Scheme, as well as any cost implications.

Rationale/Options Considered

A range of options to rectify the situation were considered by the Review Team:

i) Shortening the Switchboard hours to concord with existing office hours.

ii) Consideration of the need to re-negotiate contracts of employment.

iii) Re-enforcing the flexi-cover system where different staff prefer early starts or late finishes to ensure adequate coverage 08.30 to 17.30 Monday to Friday.

iv) Staff actively encouraged to divert their telephones to colleagues when they are out of the office and to answer colleague's telephones when they have not been diverted.

v) Explore the benefits of unified messaging and new technologies.

Recommendations

A1. Service teams to work together and to arrange to answer each others telephone calls when officers are not in the office. At the very least messages can be taken for a call-back when the officer returns to their desk. Officers must ensure that they return telephone calls. This will help to develop a more consistent approach across the organisation.

A2. In the longer term, to give consideration to the re-negotiation of contracts of employment and to the links between flexible working and flexi-time privileges.

A3. To take into consideration the findings from the on-going review of access hours by Management Team.

A4. To review the role of new technology to assist service delivery e.g. mobile and home working project, unified-messaging and other developments.

3. Access for Customers in Rural Areas

Assessment

Customers from rural areas access Council services by a variety of methods, including by telephone, by e-mail, via the website and by letter. The majority contacted the Council by telephone. The Area Offices at Buckingham and Winslow encouraged face-to-face access within these areas of the Vale. E-mail and contact via the Website has been steadily increasing, particularly encouraged by the development of e-payment methods.

Survey work undertaken in November/December 2003 revealed variable levels of satisfaction amongst Parish and Town Councils in their interactions with the Council.

The Communications Strategy, approved by Cabinet in early 2004, covers a range of initiatives in relation to hard-to-reach groups and particularly to people living in rural areas.

The Council is currently working with Buckinghamshire County Council, through the Customer First Steering Board, to provide a 'joined-up' customer access point in Buckingham.

Development was continuing across the authority to enable 24 hour electronic access to services under the IEG programme. Of particular interest was the proposed introduction of the 'On-Line Planning' capability.

Rationale/Options Considered

Options to enhance customer access from rural areas included:

- i) A Mobile Customer Service Centre where a number of agencies work together in joint service delivery. This option could be explored through the IEG work in IT Services, as well as through the Customer First Steering Board. Mobile technology developments can enable electronic payments, web and systems access and contact with officers by telephone.
- ii) Closer links with Parish and Town Councils either through parish websites (24 hour service), video-conferencing or mini-kiosks enabling electronic access.
- iii) AVDC officers were working closely with Buckinghamshire County Council in order to provide a joint customer access point in Buckingham. BCC had been successful in securing funding from the Learning and Skills Council for a development around the former Magistrates Court and the Library.

Recommendations

- R1. To explore the feasibility of providing a Mobile Customer Service Centre including a cost/benefit analysis.
- R2. To utilise existing communications and contact mechanisms to enable closer links with Parish and Town Councils.

- | | |
|-----|--|
| R3. | To continue partnership working with Buckinghamshire County Council on the joint provision of customer services through the Customer First Steering Board. |
| R4. | To review the feasibility and role of new technologies in improving rural access in the future, including links with Parish and Town Councils. |

4. <i>Access for Ethnic Minorities and Hard-to-Reach Groups</i>
--

Assessment

Whilst customer surveys indicated a lower satisfaction rating with Council services amongst ethnic communities, it was felt that the Council provided a range of mechanisms to facilitate their access. The concern centred upon communicating these mechanisms to the public. A Council Communications Strategy had been approved. A database of ethnic minority community groups was being created, together with a range of other initiatives to engage and raise awareness amongst hard-to-reach groups.

Most Council publications contain 2 signposting strap-lines in Urdu and Gujarati to AVREC. Translations can be provided through Communications and Marketing for policies, letters and leaflets, via Buckinghamshire County Council Social Services and the Language Factory. Interpreters can be organised for home and site visits and for meetings in offices, via Communications and Marketing and Buckinghamshire County Council Social Services. AVDC subscribes to EITI who can organise a 2 or 3-way telephone conference with a translator in over 120 languages and dialects within 90 seconds of calling. This service can be accessed by any officer in the Council. Contracts for customer surveys require the availability of translators, where needed.

There was a need to regularly re-iterate the services available to staff in order to assist them to deliver their services professionally to ethnic minorities.

For other hard-to-reach groups there were a range of mechanisms available, including signers, taped communications, Minicom and more. Improvements to access for people with hearing impairment are currently being considered within Phase 3 of the Telephone Project.

Rationale/Options Considered

Given the breadth and depth of the Council's Communications Strategy, the Review Team agreed that a range of initiatives were now in place to address the concerns raised with regard to access for ethnic minorities and hard-to-reach groups. This work area would benefit from inclusion within a future Scrutiny Committee work programme, once the agreed recommendations had been implemented and tested within the community.

With regard to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, the Council had undertaken an assessment of its buildings and a specification was being prepared for tender for necessary works to comply with the Act. This area of work was being undertaken by Property and Operational Services. The Review Team considered that it was important to widely communicate the assessment results and work to be undertaken by the Council, both internally and externally.

Recommendations	
H1.	To continue to promote the mechanisms to facilitate access for ethnic minorities and hard-to-reach groups to staff and to raise awareness amongst the public, e.g. via local radio programmes.
H2.	To continue implementation of the agreed recommendations from the Communications Strategy, with regard to hard-to-reach groups, including ethnic minorities.
H3.	To communicate widely, both internally and externally, the work to be undertaken by the Council under the Disability Discrimination Act, at the appropriate time.
H4.	To refer this subject area for inclusion within a future Scrutiny Committee work programme.

5. *Out-of-Hours Service*

Assessment
Currently, there is a message on the main Council number – 585858 – giving emergency out-of-hours telephone contact numbers – Housing Maintenance, Property Services and Environmental Health. Homelessness cases usually contact the Bucks CC Social Services 24 hour number. Environmental Health have an arrangement with The Message Pad to provide out-of-hours service.
The Council had participated in the BucksConnect pilot out-of-hours service utilising The Message Pad and call-scripting. Although the pilot had closed down, all the data was available to AVDC on call levels and times etc. The pilot had demonstrated the desire of customers to call the Council before going to work and after returning from work – 7am to 8.30am and 5.30pm to 7pm.
The Council was exploring a number of possibilities for out-of-hours telephone enquiries including an assessment by Management Team on the extent to which services can be developed in-house and exploring partnership working with Buckinghamshire County Council through the Customer First Steering Board.

Rationale/Options Considered
Given the on-going work by both Management Team and Customer First Steering Board, the Review Team agreed that detailed recommendations would be presented to Council at a later date. This area of work might form the subject of a future Best Value Review.

Recommendations
O1. To allow Management Team and the Customer First Steering Board to continue their assessment of the provision of out-of-hours services.
O2. To refer out-of-hours service access to a future Best Value Review.

6. Customer Care Standards

Assessment

The Council introduced corporate Customer Care Standards in early 2001 and has reviewed them annually. The last revisions were incorporated in September 2003 with the introduction of the new telephone system.

The Customer Care Standards are comprehensive, addressing face-to-face contact, telephone contact and letters, e-mails, fax and site visiting.

The CPA Report acknowledges the improvements that the Council has made in its customer focus and delivery of customer care.

All services are required to monitor their performance against the Standards. The Standards, together with the corporate personal qualities, are included within the formal appraisal process.

Annual independent compliance monitoring of telephone and e-mail standards is undertaken providing a 'snap-shot' view of current performance. The results are communicated to the Heads of Service for discussion within their local areas. General trends have indicated significant improvement, but there is no room for complacency. Pockets of poorer performance still exist and improvements are required to ensure consistency of approach across the whole organisation. The monitoring and review functions are co-ordinated by the Communications and Marketing Division.

The Council operates a network of Customer Care Champions who have cascaded training on the Standards to service staff. They also assist managers with training in customer care to new employees of the Council.

Rationale/Options Considered

Use and Communication of Customer Care Standards – It was important to regularly remind staff at all levels of the organisation to maintain the standards throughout their day-to-day work. Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors had an important role to play in their local areas in ensuring the standards were monitored and met consistently. Performance against the Customer Care Standards and discussion of the new personal qualities were included within appraisal procedures. Where managers have sought clarification in relation to the personal qualities, Personnel have offered coaching, as well as revising the Appraiser Training course. Managers should be encouraged to share best practice.

Customer Care Champions - Members were made aware of the existence of the Customer Care Champions within the Council and the role for which they had volunteered. The Champions can play a more dynamic role within their services promoting good customer care. To this end draft terms of reference for Customer Care Champions had been prepared for the future. Such duties would include a more active role in the Induction Programme for new staff covering customer care at AVDC, and meeting at regular intervals in order to discuss common issues and to share best practice.

Introducing the Customer Care Standards to Members - The Review Team discussed:
- The introduction of the Customer Care Standards to Members, including the impact the standards would have on Members e-mails, letters and telephone practice.
- Members would require training on the Customer Care Standards and their implications.
- It was suggested that the introduction of the Customer Care Standards to Members be piloted through Cabinet and rolled out to all Members at a later date.
Monitoring and Review – The Customer Care Standards require monitoring and review to account for changes in performance criteria and the introduction of new services and technologies, for example, developments in Phase 3 of the Telephone Project.

Recommendations
CS1. To undertake regular re-iteration of the Customer Care Standards to all staff across the organisation, e.g. District Line, Managers Forum.
CS2. To refine the role of the Customer Care Champions giving them a clearly defined function in promoting and monitoring customer care within their services.
CS3. To continue to monitor and review the corporate Customer Care Standards annually, taking into account changes and developments as appropriate.
CS4. To prepare and implement a pilot scheme to introduce the Customer Care Standards to Cabinet Members and to roll-out the Customer Care Standards to all Members upon successful completion of the Cabinet pilot.

7. *Learning from Performance Data*

Assessment

Both the performance monitoring reports, outlined above, and a variety of statistical data collected by services enables the Council to measure its performance overall, service performance and the performance of staff against the Customer Care Standards. In particular the Customer Service Centre collects, analyses and reports a wide range of performance data, such as number of enquiries, enquiries by service, customer waiting times and enquiry handling times; income collected over time, by method of payment and by service.

Performance standards relating to complaints are handled separately within section 9 below.

The new telephone system will provide data in the future on a wide range of measures in telephone response, abandonment rates and other information. Such information has never been available before. As over 70% of customer contact is by telephone, this is an important area of future work. Once the information is available, the Council as a whole, and services in particular, will be able to analyse incoming telephone workload, peaks and troughs, and to plan and target resources accordingly to meet customer demand.

Rationale/Options Considered

The Review Team wanted to ensure that accurate and reliable performance data was collected and that services across the Council demonstrated that they can learn from such data. The information was essential in order to accurately align resourcing levels with customer demand. The benefit of such analyses would drive forward improvements in service delivery in an efficient and effective manner.

Recommendations

- L1. To continue to use performance data to drive forward informed service improvement.
- L2. To analyse data and make recommendations for improvement based upon the reporting capabilities of the new telephone system at both corporate and service levels.

8. Training in Customer Care

Assessment and Rationale

Role of Managers/Team Leaders and Supervisors/Manager Training

There appeared to be considerable variation in management style across the authority and the Review Team considered that standards should be set specifically for managers as well as those applied to staff. Further training and development for managers should be explored within and beyond the current Supervisory Development Programme.

Managers also had access to study for a work or career-related qualification under the post-entry training scheme, which may/may not be sponsored by AVDC according to selection criteria and priority. The Council also operated a Career Development Loan Scheme. The Review Team considered that managers should be operating to consistent standards of acceptable performance.

Training in Customer Care

NVQs in Customer Service were discussed and the Review Team considered that, where supervision and assessment could be provided by an outside organisation e.g. Aylesbury College, it would be desirable for front-line staff to be encouraged to gain such qualifications. Three members of staff were sponsored each year within the Customer Services Division to gain NVQ Level 2 or 3 in Customer Care. Such industry standard qualifications can be extended to front-line staff across the whole authority

A proposal was discussed to define a development fund where 50% of the cost of the NVQ would be funded centrally, with the other 50% coming from services' own training budgets. A budget of £2,500 a year would assist in funding the training of approximately 20 staff.

Recommendations

T1. To develop consistent standards of acceptable performance for managers across the authority, providing training and development opportunities to enhance managers' skills.

T2. To explore the provision of joint training opportunities, enabling the development of manager's skills, with Buckinghamshire County Council and the other District Councils.

T3. To enable the Customer Care Champions to train staff on the Customer Care Standards and deliver Induction Training to new staff.

T4. To encourage front-line and other staff across the authority to undertake NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Customer Care, by providing a fund within the Customer Services Division budget. Service managers can apply for 50% match funding enabling up to 20 NVQ places a year, utilizing an external provider and assessor.

9. Complaints Administration

Assessment

A detailed assessment of the current corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures was undertaken. In general, the Council has the basis of a complaints procedure which compares well with industry standards and those of other Councils. However the CPA Report (June 2004) identified that “There is no overall mechanism in place to learn corporately from customer complaints.”

The post of Complaints Officer had been deleted and the corporate overview had been lost. There remained a network of Service Liaison Officers who co-ordinate response to complaints within their services. Services continue to manage their own complaints but data collected appeared unreliable.

Rationale/Options Considered

The Review Team discussed the complaints administration in some detail and concluded:

- The number of complaints recorded for 2003/2004 were considerably less than previous years.
- The reliability of the statistics for 2003/2004 was questioned given that there has been no Complaints Officer and therefore no overall co-ordination of complaints handling and recording, and data collection.
- The CCCP IT system was no longer functioning.
- That when things ‘went wrong’, they did so spectacularly. Evidence suggested that some complaints should have been resolved long before they got to such a stage.
- Complex and difficult complaints needed more attention.
- Being pro-active – all staff needed to be proactive and take responsibility when receiving a complaint from a customer either for their own service or for another, or indeed a complaint that crosses a number of services. Complaints should be passed to the relevant service for investigation or in the case of cross-departmental complaints, one service should take a lead responsibility to co-ordinate a single response. Staff are the “eyes and ears” of the Council and can alert their services at an early stage of problems arising and improvements required.
- Information should be collected on the number and type of complaints, by service, and whether they were ‘justified’ or ‘unjustified’. Analysis of the complaints should lead to learning actions and improvements in service delivery in a positive manner. Records need to be kept recording the learning gained and improvements resulting.
- A mechanism was required for the monitoring of the progress of complaints, especially for large, difficult and complex complaints
- Councillors received complaints and had an important role to play in complaint handling. Processes, procedures and guidelines were needed for Members as well as officers.
- Handling of complaints under the new Freedom of Information legislation would need to be incorporated into the procedures. The Act comes into force on 1st January 2005.
- Training around the re-launch of the CCC procedure would be required for

Members, officers and Service Liaison Officers (SLOs). All staff require briefing and reminders about following the procedures.

- The role of Service Liaison Officers required clear definition.

- The post of Complaints Officer to be re-instated with a reviewed job description.

- The introduction of complaints performance indicators including levels of customer satisfaction around the handling of complaints.

Recommendations

CO1. To refine and update the corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures.

CO2. To repair the complaints IT system (budget has been allocated)

CO3. To refine the role of Service Liaison Officers.

CO4. To re-launch the corporate Compliments, Comments and Complaints procedures to staff across the Council.

CO5. To prepare and introduce complaints guidelines for Members.

CO6. To re-appoint the post of Complaints Officer.

CO7. To monitor and review performance against a newly defined set of complaints performance indicators.

10. E-mail Services

Assessment

A detailed assessment has been made of the current e-mail handing across the Council. Whilst many services had developed their own procedures for the management of e-mail, there was no corporate approach. Customer Care Standards existed covering e-mail response. Training has been provided to some officers on the management of e-mail and this had been extended by inclusion within the corporate Training Directory.

Rationale/Options Considered

The Review Team considered the following improvements to the way in which the Council handles e-mail:

- A corporate approach to the handling of e-mail utilising public folders, accessible by more than one member of staff per folder, automatic acknowledgement of receipt, and responses given, following the corporate customer care standards.

- Public Folders only should be promoted to the public and used on the website.

- Most officers are accessible by e-mail. Officers can give out their individual e-mail addresses where they wish a customer to contact them directly on particular enquiries.

- Use Public Folder addresses on leaflets and other promotional materials.

- Guidelines should be drawn up for both officers and Members.

- Re-enforce the corporate customer care standards for e-mail to staff and introduce to Members.

- Provide further officer training on the management of e-mails and extend this training to Members.

The Team also considered the need to continue to move towards the aspiration of a “paperless office”. With the gradual introduction of new systems, such as EDMS, over time, the need for using and storing paper records will diminish. Staff need to be encouraged to work on-screen, within safety guidelines, and to use less paper. Double-side copying and printing should be encouraged.

Whilst considering e-mail, the Review Team also gave consideration to a range of electronic developments:

Fax Standards – This was an outdated method of communication with the advent of e-mail. Problems were often experienced when trying to fax to joint telephone/fax lines and the line was engaged. Where documents were not in electronic form, then they should be scanned and then e-mailed. IT Services were looking at the feasibility of computer fax facilities and an assessment was being undertaken about the number of fax machines across the Council and the corresponding telephone lines, costs and usage. Modern technology can be utilised to gain savings for the Council in this area.

New Technologies – the Council may wish to consider the ability to enable SMS and Text Messaging from computers to mobile phones in future. Some examples of the type of applications might be:

- notifying people about refuse collection delays

- reminders around debt collection
- communicating emergency incident situations.
Appropriate standards would be required if such services were introduced. Further research was required.

Recommendations	
E1.	To develop corporate guidelines for the management and handling of e-mails, for officers and Members.
E2.	To re-iterate the Customer Care Standards for e-mail to all staff.
E3.	To encourage the training of officers on the management of e-mail and extend this training to Members.
E4.	To explore the feasibility of replacing old fax machines with computer fax facilities.
E5.	To review new developments in information technology in the future and to make recommendations where benefit and improvement for customers and staff can be realised cost effectively.

Appendix 2 Customer Access Hours

1. Face-to-Face

Customer Service Centre, Aylesbury

Monday to Wednesday 8.45am to 5.15pm

Thursday 9.45am to 5.15pm

Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm

Buckingham Area Office

Tuesday & Thursday 9.00am to 1.00pm & 2.00pm to 4.30pm

Friday 9.00am to 1.00pm & 2.00pm to 4.15pm

Winslow Area Office

Monday & Wednesday 9.00am to 1.00pm & 2.00pm to 4.30pm

2. Switchboard Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.30pm

3. Services

Council Tax & NNDR Monday to Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm
Can vary closing time between 4.00pm to 5.15pm
subject to pressures

Housing Benefits Monday 9.00am to 5.00pm
Tuesday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm

Finance Normal office hours for all contacts (in reality can vary
between 8.00am and 6.00pm as staff are available)

Chief Executive's Support Normal office hours for all contacts

Communications & Mktg Normal office hours

Personnel Normal office hours for all contacts (in reality cover
8.30am to 5.30pm as staff are available)
24 hour answer-phone for recruitment
24 hours a day for recruitment website requests, e-mail
of application forms

Administration Normal office hours

Policy and Review Normal office hours

Housing Maintenance Normal office hours

Housing Needs & St.	Normal office hours, excluding training hour 8.45am to 9.45am Thursdays. Appointments for case officers generally. Telephones – normal office hours
Housing Resources	Normal office hours
Housing Tenancy	Normal office hours
Environmental Health	Normal office hours. Appointments for case officers generally. Out-of-hours contract with The Message Pad Standby Service operated 4.45pm Friday to 8.45am Monday
Design Services	Normal office hours Appointments operated for project officers. Building Control - builders know to telephone before 10.00am to speak to their contact officer.
Shopmobility	Weekdays 9.00am to 4.00pm and 9.00am to 1.00pm Saturdays. Extra days at Christmas.
Planning Services	Normal office hours Technicians available and duty planning officer system operated for face-to-face, over and above the CSC capabilities. Surgery at Buckingham Area Office – currently Friday mornings.
Property & Op Services	Normal office hours
Leisure Services	Normal office hours Facilities have individual opening times.

Appendix 3		Stage 3 Improvement Plan	
Improvement Action	Outcomes	Responsibility	Cost

1. Customer Care Vision To drive improvement against the 9 personal qualities across the whole organisation.	1.1 To continue communication and promotion of the 9 personal qualities across the organisation.	Lead: Communications and Marketing General: All Services	Within existing budget arrangements.	Cultural Change Programme. On-going.
	1.2 All services to continue to drive improvement against the 9 personal qualities within their area of responsibility.	Lead: Heads of Service General: Service Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors	Within existing budget arrangements.	Performance Management Programme. Service Planning. On-going.
	1.3 To look at an additional way of promoting the required personal qualities to all staff, e.g. a mouse mat.	Lead: Communications and Marketing	Additional budget requirement of £750.	Cultural Change Programme. By end of March 2005.
	1.4 To monitor service delivery and performance against the Customer Care Standards at both corporate and service level, and to challenge and review poor performance, utilising formal procedures where improvement is not forthcoming.	Lead: Communications and Marketing General: Heads of Service and line managers	Within existing budget arrangements.	Independent customer care surveys and CSC Exit Poll – annual. Services – performance management and monitoring of Customer Care Standards.

<p>2. Customer Access To improve access to Council services, particularly for hard-to-reach groups.</p> <p>reportheadereexample.doc/keep</p>	<p>1.1 To take into consideration the findings of the on-going review into access times and out-of-hours arrangements currently being undertaken by Management Team.</p>	<p>Lead: Management Team/Steve Watson</p>	<p>To identify costs and report these to Cabinet when recommendations formulated.</p>	<p>To be determined.</p>
	<p>2.2 Give consideration to the re-negotiation of contracts of employment and to the links between flexible working and flexi-time privileges, in addressing the inconsistencies in public access hours between face-to-face and telephone services.</p>	<p>Lead: Management Team/Deborah Simpson.</p>	<p>To identify costs and report these to Cabinet when recommendations formulated.</p>	<p>To be determined.</p>
	<p>2.3 All service teams to make formal arrangements for answering telephones when officers are out-of-the-office and to ensure that calls are returned within 24 hours.</p>	<p>Lead: Heads of Service General: Service Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors</p>	<p>Within existing budget arrangements.</p>	<p>All services to have formal arrangements in place by Christmas 2004.</p>
	<p>2.4 To continue implementation of the agreed recommendations from the Communications Strategy, with regard to hard-to-reach groups, including ethnic minorities.</p>	<p>Lead: Communications and Marketing involving relevant services and partners, as appropriate.</p>	<p>Within existing budget arrangements.</p>	<p>As defined within the Communications Strategy.</p>
	<p>2.5 To raise awareness both internally and externally of the mechanisms available to facilitate access for ethnic minorities and hard-to-reach groups.</p>	<p>Lead: Communications and Marketing. General: Customer Care Champions and front-line staff.</p>	<p>Within existing budget arrangements.</p>	<p>Twice a year utilising existing promotional activities e.g. District Line/By-Line. Services: via Customer Care Champions. Front-line staff through their day-to-day work.</p>
	<p>2.6 To communicate widely, both internally and externally, the work to be undertaken by the Council under the Disability Discrimination Act. at</p>	<p>Lead: Property and Operational Services with Communications and Marketing</p>	<p>Within existing budget arrangements.</p>	<p>District Link, District Line. Timescale to be determined upon</p>

3. Customer Care Standards To ensure continued improvement in performance against the corporate Customer Care Standards.	3.1 To undertake regular re-iteration of the Customer Care Standards to all staff across the organisation.	Lead: Customer Services Manager, Customer Care Champions.	Within existing budget arrangements.	Twice a year – District Line, quarterly meetings of the Customer Care Champions.
	3.2 To refine the role of the Customer Care Champions giving them a clearly defined function in promoting and monitoring customer care within their services and to include this function formally within their job descriptions.	Lead: Customer Services Manager, Customer Care Champions.	Within existing budget arrangements.	Complete by end of March 2005. Quarterly meetings of Customer Care Champions to commence September 2004.
	3.3 To continue to monitor and review the corporate Customer Care Standards annually, taking into account changes and developments, as appropriate.	Lead: Communications and Marketing. General: Heads of Service	Within existing budget arrangements.	Customer Surveys and Mystery Shopper monitoring – annual.
	3.4 To prepare and implement a pilot scheme to introduce the corporate Customer Care Standards to Cabinet Members and then to roll out the Standards to all Members upon successful completion of the pilot.	Lead: Customer Services Manager	Within existing budget arrangements.	Pilot preparation by end of March 2005. Commence Pilot April 2005. Assess Pilot September 2005 and all Members by April 2006.

4. Complaints Administration To refine and re-launch the corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures to ensure an effective process and introduce the procedures to Members.	4.1 To refine and update the corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures.	Lead: Customer Services Manager with Chief Executive's Support, IT Services and Communications and Marketing as appropriate.	2004-2005 £10,000 approved for the improvement and re-launch of the complaints procedures.	Complete by end March 2005.
	4.2 To repair the complaints IT system.			
	4.3 To refine the role of Service Liaison Officers.			
	4.4 To re-launch the corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedures to staff.			
	4.5 To prepare and introduce the complaints guidelines to Members.	Lead: Customer Service Manager with Communications and Marketing	Within existing budgets.	Agree process by end March 2005. Commence from April 2005.
	4.6 To review the job description for and to advertise the post of Complaints Officer.	Lead: Customer Services Manager in consultation with Personnel and Chief Executive's Support.	£20,000 budgeted and agreed for 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 for appointment of part time Complaints Officer.	Advertise in January 2005 Appoint April 2005
	4.7 To monitor and review performance against a newly defined set of complaints performance indicators.	Lead: Customer Services Manager with Communications and Marketing, and Policy and Best Value Review Officer.	Within existing budget arrangements.	Quarterly from September 2004. Annually April – March.

5. New Technology To review developments in information technology where benefit and improvement for customers and staff can be demonstrated in a cost effective manner.	5.1 To review developments in e-mail, fax and SMS information technology.	Lead: IT Services	To identify recommendations and costs, and to report to ITMAG following the normal process and to Cabinet, when appropriate.	IEG Strategy. Timescale to be determined.
	5.2 To review development in new technology to assist service delivery e.g. Mobile and Flexi Place Project, unified messaging, as well as those enabling access from rural areas, such as mini-kiosks and video-links.	Lead: IT Services	To identify recommendations and costs, and to report to ITMAG following the normal process and to Cabinet, when appropriate.	IEG Strategy. Timescale to be determined.
	5.3 To develop corporate guidelines for the management and handling of e-mails, for officers and Members.	Lead: Customer Services Manager	Within existing budget arrangements.	By end of March 2005.
	5.4 To encourage further training for officers on the management of e-mail and extend training to Members.	Lead: Personnel Division	Course has been included within AVDC's Training Programme from 2004/2005 onwards.	On-going.

6. Learning Organisation To analyse performance data to drive forward informed service improvement in customer care and to enhance the delivery of training in customer care.	6.1 To continue to use performance data to drive forward informed service improvement.	Lead: Heads of Service	Within existing budget arrangements.	Continuous assessment and improvement. Service Plans.
	6.2 To analyse data and make recommendations for improvement based upon the reporting capabilities of the new telephone system, at both corporate and service levels.	Lead: Customer Services Manager, IT Services Division plus service managers of mini-call centres.	To identify costs and report these to Cabinet when recommendations have be formulated.	Commence monthly analysis from September 2004. Annual at the end of each financial year.
	6.3 To develop consistent standards of acceptable performance for managers across the authority, providing training and development opportunities to enhance managers skills.	Lead: Personnel Division.	Within existing budget arrangements.	To be determined. Delivery may be in Partnership with other Buckinghamshire authorities, where feasible.
	6.4 To enable the Customer Care Champions to train staff on the Customer Care Standards and deliver Induction Training to new staff.	Lead: Customer Services Manager with Personnel Division	Within existing budget arrangements.	Train Customer Care Champions by the end of March 2005. Delivery: on-going.
	6.5 To encourage front-line and other staff across the authority to undertake NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Customer Care, by providing a fund within the Customer Service Division budget. Service managers can apply for 50% match funding enabling up to 20 NVQ places a year. The Council will use an external NVQ provider and assessor.	Lead: Customer Services Division, in consultation with Personnel Division.	Additional budget requirement of £2,500	If budget approved, commence from 2005/2006 financial year.