



Notice of meeting of

Executive Member For Corporate Services and Advisory Panel

To:	Councillors Healey (Chair of Advisory Panel), Moore (Executive Member), Pierce (Vice-Chair), Firth and Gunnell
Date:	Tuesday, 21 October 2008
Time:	5.30 pm
Venue:	The Guildhall, York

AGENDA

Notice to Members - Calling In:

Members are reminded that, should they wish to call in any item on this agenda, notice must be given to Democracy Support Group by:

10:00 am on Monday, 20 October 2008, if an item is called in *before* a decision is taken, *or*

4:00 pm on Thursday, 23 October 2008, if an item is called in *after* a decision has been taken.

Items called in will be considered by the Scrutiny Management Committee.

1. Declarations of Interest

At this point, members are asked to declare any personal or prejudicial interests they may have in the business on this agenda.

2. Minutes (Pages 1 - 4)

To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Member for Corporate Services and Advisory Panel held on 9 September 2008.

3. Public Participation

At this point in the meeting members of the public who have registered their wish to speak regarding an item on the agenda or an issue within the Executive Member's remit can do so. The deadline for registering is Monday, 20 October 2008, at 5.00 pm.

4. Forward Plan Update (Pages 5 - 8)

To receive an update on the Resources Directorate items which are listed on the Forward Plan.

Executive Member to consider the advice of the Advisory Panel upon the following items of business and to make a decision on those items or to note the information as required:

ITEMS FOR DECISION

5. Corporate Customer Strategy (Pages 9 - 80)

This report seeks Members' views on a draft Corporate Customer Strategy, which sets out a proposed 'Vision' for the future delivery of efficient, customer focused services.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

6. National Non-Domestic Rates, Sundry Debtors, Council Tax & Overpaid Housing Benefit and Car Park Charges - Accounts Submitted for Write-off (Pages 81 - 84)

This report provides details of the value of irrecoverable accounts under £2,000 that have been written off under delegated authority in the current financial year.

7. Update on Gershon Efficiency Savings (Pages 85 - 90)

This report provides an update on progress against the Gershon efficiency targets, in the light of the final 2007/08 outturn, and outlines the steps being taken to ensure that the Council achieves the harder targets.

URGENT BUSINESS

8. Any Other Matters which the Chair decides are urgent under the Local Government Act 1972.

Democracy Officer:

Name: Fiona Young

Contact details:

- Telephone – (01904) 551027
- E-mail – fiona.young@york.gov.uk

For more information about any of the following please contact the Democracy Officer responsible for servicing this meeting:

- Registering to speak
- Business of the meeting
- Any special arrangements
- Copies of reports

Contact details are set out above.

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- register by contacting the Democracy Officer (whose name and contact details can be found on the agenda for the meeting) **no later than 5.00 pm** on the last working day before the meeting;
- ensure that what you want to say speak relates to an item of business on the agenda or an issue which the committee has power to consider (speak to the Democracy Officer for advice on this);
- find out about the rules for public speaking from the Democracy Officer.

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Further information about what's being discussed at this meeting

All the reports which Members will be considering are available for viewing online on the Council's website. Alternatively, copies of individual reports or the full agenda are available from Democratic Services. Contact the Democracy Officer whose name and contact details are given on the agenda for the meeting. **Please note a small charge may be made for full copies of the agenda requested to cover administration costs.**

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Holding the Executive to Account

The majority of councillors are not appointed to the Executive (38 out of 47). Any 3 non-Executive councillors can 'call-in' an item of business from a published Executive (or Executive Member Advisory Panel (EMAP)) agenda. The Executive will still discuss the 'called in' business on the published date and will set out its views for consideration by a specially convened Scrutiny Management Committee (SMC). That SMC meeting will then make its recommendations to the next scheduled Executive meeting in the following week, where a final decision on the 'called-in' business will be made.

Scrutiny Committees

The purpose of all scrutiny and ad-hoc scrutiny committees appointed by the Council is to:

- Monitor the performance and effectiveness of services;
- Review existing policies and assist in the development of new ones, as necessary; and
- Monitor best value continuous service improvement plans

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- Councillors get copies of all agenda and reports for the committees to which they are appointed by the Council;
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City of York Council

Committee Minutes

MEETING	EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES AND ADVISORY PANEL
DATE	9 SEPTEMBER 2008
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS HEALEY (CHAIR OF ADVISORY PANEL), JAMIESON-BALL (EXECUTIVE MEMBER), MOORE, PIERCE AND GUNNELL

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

No interests were declared.

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Member for Corporate Services and Advisory Panel held on 10 June 2008 be approved and signed by the Chair and Executive Member as a correct record.

16. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

17. FORWARD PLAN UPDATE

Members received an update on the Resources Directorate items currently listed on the Forward Plan.

Members queried why the item on Accounts Submitted for Write-off, previously scheduled for the current meeting, appeared to have been removed from the Forward Plan. Officers confirmed that it was intended to bring this item to the next meeting, on 21 October 2008.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan items be noted and that the Plan be updated to included the Accounts Submitted for Write-off item.¹

REASON: For information.

Action Required

1. Update Forward Plan

SA

18. RESOURCES FIRST PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE MONITOR

Members considered a report which provided an update on current in-year progress on the identified aims and key financial and performance indicators for the Resources department, and sought approval for certain adjustments to the Resources capital programme. Officers indicated that, subject to Members' views, it was intended to make future monitoring reports shorter and more focused.

The report summarised the financial position of the department by service plan area. A net underspend of £113k was forecast, compared to a budget of £6,483k. This was due mainly to savings identified within the Information Technology and Telecommunications (ITT) area, resulting from efficiency improvements and the cancellation of funded projects. A forecast overspend of £188k in Property Services was a concern, but similar projections in previous years had been resolved by the year's end. With regard to performance, achievements highlighted included a continuing improvement in the processing times for benefits claims and in call handling statistics

Details of the 2008/09 capital programme were set out in Annex 4 to the report. An underspend of £12,239k was projected against the approved capital programme of £18,773k, due mainly to the delay on the Hungate project caused by withdrawal of the planning application. Member approval was sought for slippage of this sum.

During their discussions, Members welcomed what was a generally positive report, particularly with regard to developments in the York Call Centre. They queried and commented on a number of points of detail in the report and the Service Plan at Annex 1, highlighting in particular:

- The recent departmental re-structures and staff changes that had led to difficulties with some projects and problems in collating information;
- The need for the re-structured Revenues and Benefits team to continue promoting new benefits to customers;
- Concerns regarding the continuing vacancies in Property Services and the cost of hiring consultants and agency staff to cover these;
- Concerns about the declining performance in relation to payment of invoices (BVPI 8) (Officers confirmed that the introduction of a 'paperless' FMS system next April was expected to correct this);
- Whether the closure of accounts within statutory timescales should be included in the list of Financial Services' achievements;

Advice of the Advisory Panel

That the Executive Member be advised to:

- (i) Note the current financial situation.
- (ii) Note the performance and achievements set out in the report, and the comments made by Members thereon.

- (iii) Approve the slippage of £12,239k on the capital programme, as set out in paragraph 83 and Annex 4, subject to the approval of the Executive.¹

Decision of the Executive Member

RESOLVED: That the advice of the Advisory Panel be accepted and endorsed.

REASON: In accordance with the Council's budgetary and performance monitoring procedures.

Action Required

1. Adjust the budget on the ledger (subject to Executive approval) SA

19. CHAIR'S REMARKS

Through the Chair, Members welcomed Ian Floyd, the new Director of Resources, and Pauline Stuchfield, the new Head of Audit and Risk Management, and extended their thanks to Sian Hansom, the outgoing Head of Finance, for her work in this post.

P Healey, Chair of Advisory Panel

C Jamieson-Ball, Executive Member

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 6.40 pm].

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CITY OF YORK COUNCIL - RESOURCES FORWARD PLAN

	TITLE OF REPORT	RESPONSIBLE DIVISION/ REPORT AUTHOR	FOR DECISION/ INFORMATION	FIRST DEADLINE FOR REPORTS TO DIRECTOR & CHAIR OR EARLIEST DISTRIBUTION DATE	RMT/QCG/CMT DATE	EMAP	EBS	EXEC	COMMENTS/ GENERATED BY
1	IT Strategy 2007-2012	IT&T Roy Grant	Members are asked to agree the strategic objectives for use of technology in the Council over the next 5 years which will drive our investment in IT	31/10/08	CMT 12/11/2008		EBS 25/11/2008	EXEC 02/12/2008	Requested by Report Author Deferred from 23/10/07, 15/01/2008, 26/02/2008, 24/04/2008, 17/06/2008, 23/09/2008 & 21/10/2008 because of Acting Up Arrangements/Pressure of Work and to accommodate/include outcomes of a recent ext review of ITT Services into Strategy.
2	IT Development Plan 2009/10	IT&T Steven Sangster	Members are asked to agree the funding of IT projects for 2008/9 for the whole of CYC. Members will be asked to review the benefits and risks associated with each proposal and decide which ones to fund.	07/11/08	CMT 19/11/2008		EBS 25/11/2008	EXEC 02/12/2007	Business Cycle Deferred from 23/10/07 because of Acting Up Arrangements/Pressure of Work

CITY OF YORK COUNCIL - RESOURCES FORWARD PLAN

	TITLE OF REPORT	RESPONSIBLE DIVISION/ REPORT AUTHOR	FOR DECISION/ INFORMATION	FIRST DEADLINE FOR REPORTS TO DIRECTOR & CHAIR OR EARLIEST DISTRIBUTION DATE	RMT/QCG/CMT DATE	EMAP	EBS	EXEC	COMMENTS/ GENERATED BY
3	Corporate Strategy Refresh	Audit & Risk Management Janna Eastment	Members are asked to consider the changes to the refreshed corporate strategy, in order for the actions to be taken forward and completed.	07/11/08	CMT 19/11/2008		EBS 25/11/2008	EXEC 02/12/2007	Report at the Request of the Author
4	Risk Management Quarterly Monitoring Report	Audit & Risk Management David Walker	To provide CMT with progress on managing the agreed key corporate risks	29/11/08	CMT 10/12/2008	Audit & Governance Committee 13/01/2009			Business Cycle
5	Second Resources Finance and Performance Monitor	Patrick Looker/ Barbara Boyce	To provide Members with a further update on current in-year progress relating to identified aims and key financial & performance indicators	20/11/08		Corporate EMAP 09/12/2008			Business Cycle

CITY OF YORK COUNCIL - RESOURCES FORWARD PLAN

	TITLE OF REPORT	RESPONSIBLE DIVISION/ REPORT AUTHOR	FOR DECISION/ INFORMATION	FIRST DEADLINE FOR REPORTS TO DIRECTOR & CHAIR OR EARLIEST DISTRIBUTION DATE	RMT/QCG/CMT DATE	EMAP	EBS	EXEC	COMMENTS/ GENERATED BY
6	Procurement Mid Term Monitoring Report	Audit & Risk Management David Walker	To update Members on progress against the Procurement Strategy Action Plan and the Corporate Procurement Team Development & Work Programme 2008/09	20/11/08		Corporate EMAP 09/12/2008			Business Cycle
7	Insurance mid Term Monitoring Report	Audit & Risk Management David Walker/Lisa Nyhan	To update Members on progress In the Insurance Section	20/11/08		Corporate EMAP 09/12/2008			Business Cycle
8	Treasury Management Monitoring Report	Finance Ross Brown	To update Members on the performance of the treasury management function for the 1st seven months of the year and provide a projected outturn to 31st March 2009.	20/11/08		Corporate EMAP 09/12/2008			Business Cycle

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Executive Member for Corporate Services and Advisory Panel

21st October 2008

Report of the Assistant Director of Resources - Easy@york Programme Director

Corporate Customer Strategy

Summary

1. This report sets out the draft Corporate Customer Strategy for shaping by Members. It sets out a proposed Vision for how we will deliver customer focussed, efficient services to customers, improving upon work we have already commenced, to transform our services to customers, to design services around their needs and to embed customer focus within the regular mechanisms of service design, resource planning and performance management.
2. Members' views will be incorporated into the draft before it is then consulted upon with a range of customer groups over the Autumn. The final strategy will then be presented back to Executive for agreement in December 2008.
3. A revised Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy is also attached at Annex 1.
4. The report was considered by Executive on 7th October who agreed:
 - the corporate customer complaints and feedback policy
 - the draft strategy to be used to consult and engage customers as per the plan set out in para 16 of the report
 - the working up of a delivery plan as set out in section 8 of the strategy
 - that a report proposing a final version of the strategy be brought back to Executive in December 2008

Background

5. In 2002, CYC undertook a best value review of Access to Services which eventually resulted in the establishment of the easy@york Programme. This programme developed a Customer Access Strategy which set out our vision for improved customer services through joining up services and offering improved channels and hours of access. The strap line was "The Customer is never in the wrong place."
6. At the time, the strategic focus was primarily upon access. Since then the Customer Service agenda within local Government has matured and become

more all encompassing. We have also delivered a large proportion of our Customer Access objectives. It is therefore appropriate to update our Customer Strategy and restate our vision for the future of Customer Services in York.

7. The Strategy is comprehensive and ambitious but it is also achievable. CYC are well positioned to build on the work of easy@york and to exploit the opportunities for improvement offered by our move to a new Headquarters. We have the potential to achieve excellence in the field of customer services, to meet and exceed the expectations of customers.
8. The Strategy as drafted reflects our detailed ambitions and seeks to capture the ways we will deliver the vision. This is by necessity quite complex and the document is not a customer facing document. If Members agree the content of the strategy then it is recommended that a summarised, customer friendly version be developed to express the vision we foresee and the commitments we will make, in a format that Customers can readily grasp and relate to. There are many examples of how this has been achieved within the Council. A recent example of excellence is the Homelessness Strategy which is both rich in meaning, visually attractive and accessible to customers.
9. The delivery plan for the Strategy is still in development. If Members agree the content of the strategy then further work will be undertaken to
 - Define programmes of work to integrate the strategy into service planning, budget setting and performance management arrangements
 - Establish robust Performance management standards and targets for Customer Service delivery
 - Consult Customers
10. This will then be brought back to Executive in December for final agreement.

Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy

11. The current Complaints policy is outdated and does not reflect the importance of using customer feedback, be that positive or negative, to identify failure, express customer requirements and shape future service delivery. Over the last year, a working group has developed a revised policy to reflect the importance of handling customer feedback and complaints well, attempting to resolve problems and provide customer satisfaction whilst routinely capturing feedback and using it constructively to improve services for the future.
12. The revised policy has been rigorously assessed and developed by a cross Directorate staff group who are currently responsible for managing complaints and feedback.
13. Members are asked to agree this policy so that it can be implemented. The implementation will be supported by the development of e-forms to ensure all feedback is captured in a consistent way and progress can be easily tracked. This work will be undertaken as part of the easy@york programme.

Corporate Objectives

14. The Corporate Strategy contains a Customer value, to deliver what our customers want. The Customer Strategy is an articulation of what we mean and what we will do to deliver this element of the corporate Strategy.

Financial Implications

15. There are no specific financial implications of this draft strategy, though building a comprehensive delivery plan may involve further requests for funding which will be brought forward as part of the annual budget cycle or as specific reports for member decision.

Implications

16. The implications of Phase 2 of the easy programme are: -
- **Financial** - None at this stage
 - **Human Resources (HR)** - Any changes to staff terms and conditions arising from increasing access to services would need to be separately discussed with Unions
 - **Equalities** – the Equalities team have been involved in the development of this strategy and a desktop EIA is being completed. Full EIA assessment will take place in November. Work is required to integrate the customer strategy into the Equalities Delivery Plan
 - **Legal** – No implications
 - **Crime and Disorder** – no implications
 - **Information Technology (IT)** – All incorporated into the Easy@york programme, the new headquarters project or individual IT development projects already agreed. Expansion of EDMS and Mobile working may need further consideration
 - **Risk Management** – no implications at this stage as this is a draft strategy

Consultation

17. We will use a mix of methods to engage and consult with customer on the content of this strategy, including postal surveys, face-to-face interviews, on-line surveys, focus groups, workshop and phone surveys. Our planned activities for engaging and consulting on the Customer Services Strategy include: -

Participate in the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) fair	November 2008
Question in Place Survey on customers preferred method of contacting the council by type of request	Results due early 2009
Workshops/discussion groups with service areas	Ongoing
Phone survey(s)	October/

November 2008

Mail survey e.g. Talkabout

October /
November 2008

Workshop(s)/discussion group(s) with customers/residents
(especially targeting those hard to reach sections of our
community)

October/
November 2008

Putting the Customer First Engagement Group

Autumn 2008

EMAP input requested

- 18. Members of EMAP are asked for their views on the Draft Customer Strategy and the outline consultation plan.

Contact Details

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Manager
Dept Name Resources
Tel No. 553407

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Chief Officer's name Tracey Carter
Title Assistant Director of Resources -

Report Approved

Date

23rd Sept 08

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Customer Access Strategy 2005

Annexes

Draft Customer Service Strategy..... Annex A

(This includes the following Annexes:

Revised Customer complaints and feedback policy.....Annex 1

Proposed Customer First standards and behaviours.....Annex 2

Customer First measures and targets.....Annex 3

NI14 roll-out plan.....Annex 4

Customer Excellence StandardsAnnex 5)



Customer Service Strategy

2008 to 2013

1 Introduction

One of City of York Council's core values in its current Corporate Strategy is to 'deliver what our customers want'.

The objective of the draft Customer Strategy contained in this document is to:

- explain what we mean by this customer value
- demonstrate what we are committed to delivering for our customers
- communicate a clear vision to guide the development of improved Customer Service across all Council services
- set out design principles to drive the transformation and improvement of services
- set a high level delivery plan for the implementation of the Customer Strategy

The council's customers may be internal or external, but ultimately all our services are delivered for the benefit of the people of York. Our customers are those people for whom we work to commission, contract, deliver, and enable services. They may be local citizens, or people coming in to the area to work or visit. They may be direct service users, employees of the council, employees of other organisations, elected members or partners.

This document is for:

- Customers
- Staff
- Council Members
- Partner organisations

All of the above groups will be consulted on the Customer Service Strategy and their views and feedback reflected in the final version.

The Strategy will set the framework for the physical, organisational and business process design that will be developed to identify and respond to customers needs and deliver high quality customer-focused service across all Council services in the Customer Centre at the Council's new HQ.

The Strategy will be a living document and during its lifetime it will be refreshed to reflect progress towards the objectives and respond to new requirements.

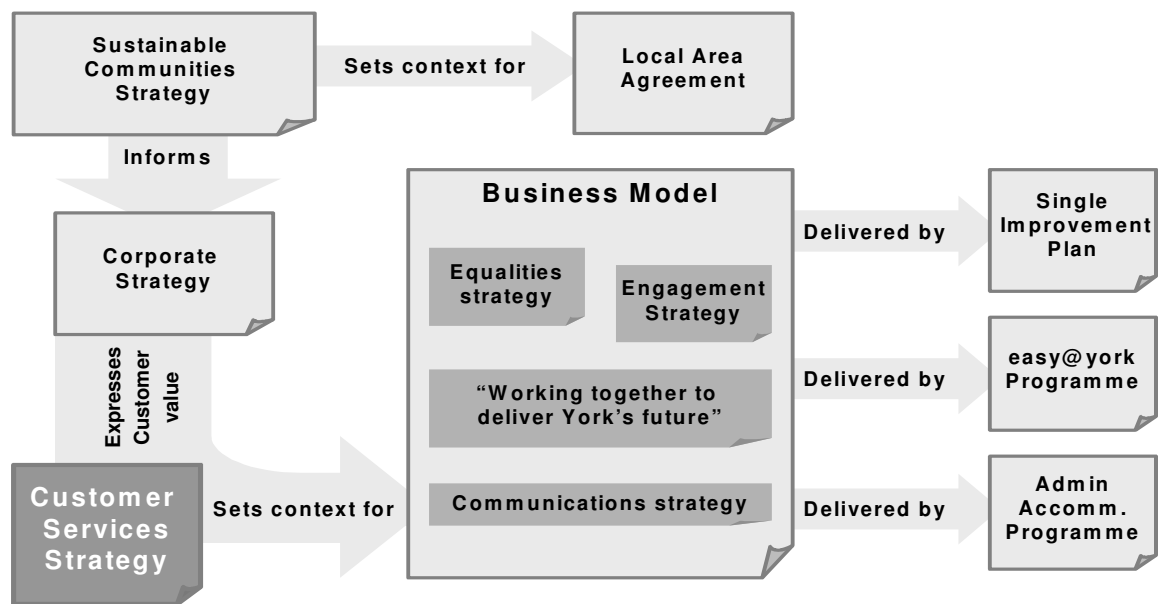
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2 Where are we now?

2.1 Where does the strategy fit within the Council's corporate strategy framework?

This may need revising when the Corporate Strategy is revised in the next few months



The refreshed Corporate Strategy 2007–2011 sets out the council's vision and provides us with clarity about where we want to go as a Council and the changes we will make to the way we deliver services. Having this clear sense of direction is important for setting out our intentions and ensuring we remain in control of steering change towards them. The corporate Vision consists of two elements:

- The Values that we hold as a council and that will underpin change
- The Direction Statements which show where we are going

Our Values show what we believe in and also set out the priorities for improving our internal business. They focus on four key things which are central to what we are trying to achieve across the whole organisation. Each of the values has a chief officer champion responsible for delivering a programme of improvement.

The customer value 'delivering what our customers want' is the first of these values. The Customer Service strategy further articulates the council's vision for customer service and the customer values that will underpin change. Together with the corporate strategy, these set the context for other customer-related strategies in the Business Model.

Implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will be through:

- Embedding a customer focused approach into all the strands of the Single Improvement Plan and into service planning and performance management
- Delivering specific customer improvements through priority service projects including the new Headquarters project and the easy@york programme.

2.2 What is Customer Service like now?

City of York Council has a long track record of good customer services. Its performance record speaks for itself in that it delivers a wide range of top quality services to the people of York. For many years we have applied and monitored our Customer First Standards, designed to ensure that all services focus on the end point of their services – their customers.

In 2003 The Council launched an extremely successful programme of Customer Service transformation - easy@york which has established the York Customer Centre (YCC), which provides a single first point of telephone contact for all Council services and delivers a full service for

- Revenues
- Benefits
- Street Services such as refuse and cleansing
- Planning

The Service has recently been accredited under the national “Putting the Customer First “ initiative. The Programme has already delivered major improvements in the customer experience,

- More joined up services
- More channels of access – e.g web
- More efficient and cost effective services
- Faster services
- More consistent services

Other service areas are also providing excellent customer services and initiatives such as; - - *need to insert list of innovative initiatives and service excellence e.g*

Neighbourhood Pride Unit – ward budgets

Personalisation of social care

Environmental Health, Trading Standards & licensing – Charter mark from Cabinet Office

The Easy@york Programme was driven by customer research and consultation - addressing many of the problems they identified and involving customers in designing new services. The Programme developed a Customer Access Strategy which set out how the Council would seek to offer

*DRAFT***Annex A**

more choice of access, and join services up in the customers' eyes. The strap line for this strategy was "The Customer is never in the wrong place". This was an effective driver for change but many aspects of this strategy have now been delivered and its focus primarily on access no longer sums up the larger objectives that the organisation has for delivering excellent customer services. We need to join together our Customer Access Strategy and our corporate Customer standards into one strategy that supports the delivery of the customer value in the corporate strategy. A new Customer Strategy is required for the Council which sets out our vision for delivering excellence to our customers.

Though standards in York are generally high we still have the following challenges and there are still major improvements that can be made. :-

- We do not understand enough about the specific profile and makeup of our localities and communities
- Some services are not designed with the customer as the primary focus
- We are still partially shaped by our organisational structure rather than customer need
- Though customers are satisfied with individual services, satisfaction with the Council as a whole needs to improve. This suggests that we are seen as less than the sum of our parts.
- Some services can be made more efficient and removing failure and making services more direct for the customer to access will reduce cost
- We have a primary point of phone contact (the York Customer Centre or YCC) but only certain services are handled in depth
- Increasing volume of web transactions which betrays latent demand for this method of accessing services. The web could be exploited by more services in the future
- Improved web site but some content wanted by customers is still not available
- We have multiple points of face-to-face contact around the City centre. Customers still have to be signposted between sites and there are some accessibility issues
- We do not use text messaging as a contact channel
- We have a lot of email contact which is unstructured, inefficient and difficult to track and report
- Our handling of white mail is fragmented and we have not yet implemented corporate Electronic Document Management System (EDMS)
- A full choice of channels is only available for services that have been redesigned by easy@york
- We have made good efficiencies where we have transformed services but this is partial – many services have not been reviewed in the light of changing customer requirements and patterns of behaviour
- We still have customer information in many places – we have no single view of the customer
- Limited hours of phone or Face to face contact

- It is likely that we will be relocating into a single headquarters where face-to-face contact will have to be joined up, as we cannot run individual receptions for each service. It would be inefficient and entirely inadequate for our customers.

With these challenges in mind we have developed a new Customer Strategy that will set out our vision for Customer Service delivery in City of York Council in the future. To develop this strategy we have looked at national drivers and trends, local customer research, best practice as applied in other leading authorities and we have learnt from our own success and weaknesses.

3 What are the drivers for change?

Customer Expectations

The expectations of customers are increasing. Customers want to access services at times that are most convenient to them, as well as in places and in ways that most suit their needs. They expect the council to use technology to make things easier and quicker, to join services up where relevant and to deliver value for money. They expect council services to be delivered in physically accessible, modern, fit-for purpose buildings with professional, polite and friendly staff. They want the Council to respond quickly, get it right first time, treat them as individuals and not make them jump through hoops.

Local Drivers

The Council is committed in the Corporate Strategy to deliver 'what customers want' and this value demonstrates our belief that customer service should be a priority focus that drives the improvement of services across the Council.

The improvement in customer service that has been achieved to date (described above in *Where are we now?*) was reflected in the 2008 Resident's Opinion Survey by a 17% increase in overall customer satisfaction with the Council in the last two years. But with 65% of customers satisfied overall we still have room for improvement to meet our customers' expectations and we must ensure that our services address the needs of *all* sections of the community.

To fulfil our community leadership role effectively, the council needs to further strengthen its relationships with customers and communities and create more opportunities to engage and involve local communities in the way we develop and deliver our services. This is the way we will ensure that we offer the right services in the best way possible.

The council's reputation in the local community and nationally depends on our ability to do this whilst ensuring that we are increasing the efficiency of our

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organisation and processes in order to deliver the value for money services that our citizens deserve.

National and External drivers

There are a plethora of National Agendas that reference customer satisfaction, consultation and feedback as future targets. These national initiatives increasingly recognise the importance of improving customer services.

- From April 2009 the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will provide:
 - a catalyst for better local outcomes, more effective partnership working, more responsive services and better value for money;
 - a source of independent assurance for citizens, service users and taxpayers;
 - an independent evidence base for central government on progress against national priorities; and
 - a means of focusing, rationalising and co-ordinating inspection.

CAA will have two main elements, which will inform each other (under consultation until 20th October 2008):

- an area assessment that looks at how well local public services are delivering better results for local people in local priorities, such as health, economic prospects and community safety, and how likely they are to improve in the future; and
 - organisational assessments of individual public bodies. For councils, these will combine use of resources and managing performance themes into a combined assessment of organisational effectiveness.
- The Local Government Reputation Project which addresses the current poor perception of local government.
 - The Efficiency/Value for Money Agenda which drives councils to deliver improvements in service delivery both internally and externally
 - The Choice Agenda which advocates the need for high quality public services that are flexible, accountable and personalised.
 - The drive towards e-enablement of public services which should allow better access to services at lower cost
 - The Varney Report which sets the direction and objectives required to deliver world class services
 - Strong and Prosperous Communities which significantly strengthens the requirement on councils to offer choice and consult and engage with residents to deliver improved services.

City of York Council – Customer Service Strategy - Sept 2008

- Technology – new technologies enable all organisations to deliver and manage customer contact more effectively. They provide opportunities for transformation that were never before possible. Customers are becoming increasingly skilled and aware of the potential of technology and are now demanding a wider range of access channels and service standards. Their rising expectations are being fired by the effective use of technology in all sectors of society.

4 Our Customer Service Vision

The Council's corporate customer value is to 'deliver what our customers want'. We believe that to deliver what our customers want we must promise that:

“Our services will be:

- **Easy to access**
 - **High quality and efficient**
 - **Effectively managed**
 - **Designed for you** ”

Easy to Access

- All of our customers will be able to easily access the services they need through a choice of channels and at a time that is convenient to them

High Quality and efficient

- Our customers will experience services which are delivered consistently, of high quality, efficient and ensure equality of outcomes

Effectively Managed

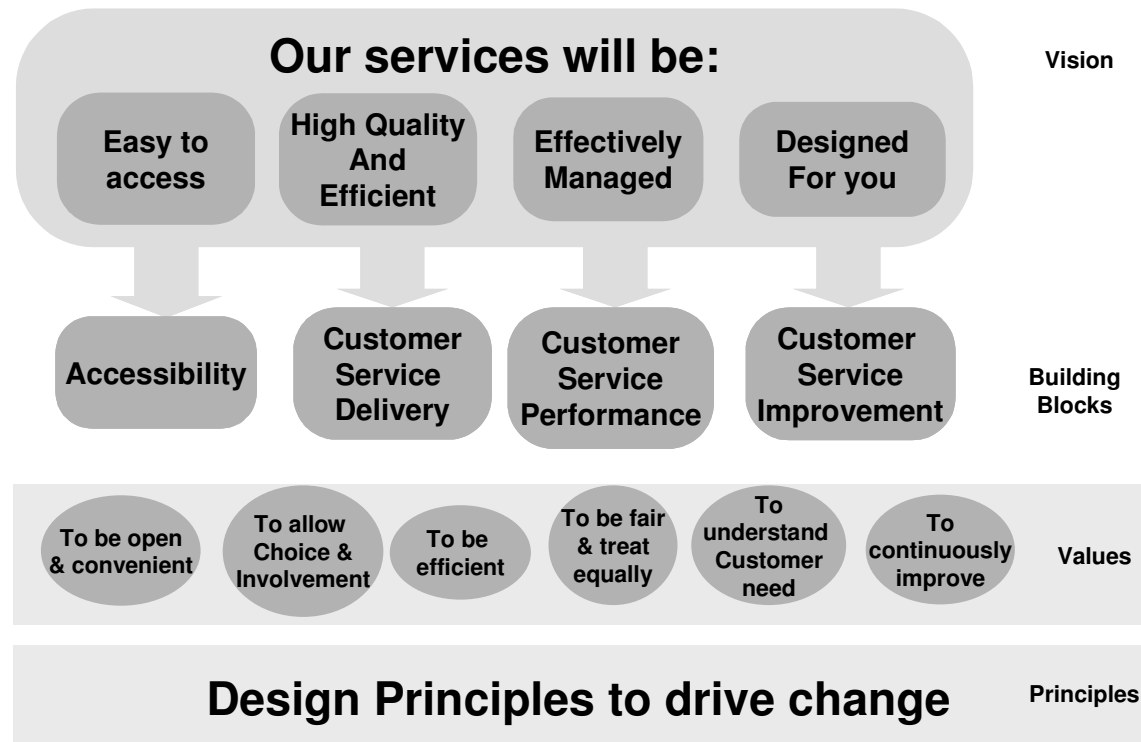
- Our customers will know what service standards to expect; the standards will reflect what matters to our customers; and we will actively manage performance to achieve these standards so that our customers get what they are promised

Designed for you

- We will engage with our customers and involve them in the design of services, use customer insight and business intelligence to achieve transformational and continuous service improvement

5 Delivering the Vision

These objectives map in to four building blocks which will be delivered by applying a set of design principles to the way on which we deliver and develop our services. Running across these building blocks are a series of core values that services will strive to apply at all times. The diagram below shows how these four layers inter-relate.



5.1 The Building Blocks

To support the delivery of the Customer Service Vision we have identified the four building blocks of the strategy. These will all be underpinned by a series of design principles which will be used to shape services for the future.

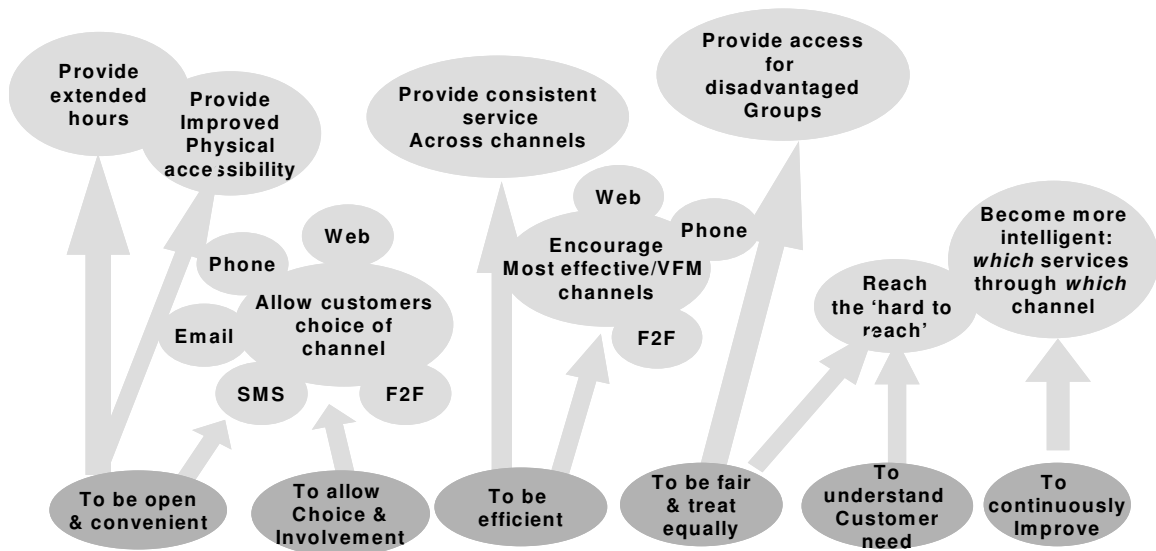
The 4 building blocks are:

- Accessibility – how we make sure all customers can access the services they need
- Delivery – how we make sure that the services we deliver are consistent, high quality, efficient and ensure equality of outcomes
- Performance – how we make sure that customers know what service standards to expect, that the standards reflect what matters to our customers and how we monitor and manage this performance
- Improvement – how we make sure that we use customer insight and business intelligence to achieve service transformation and continuous service improvement

5.2 Design Principles

The customer service design principles will be used as the design template when re-engineering customer service delivery both in transformational change programmes such as easy@york and also in ongoing service improvement delivered through the annual service planning mechanism.

5.2.1 Design principles - Accessibility



Services will be designed to ensure that:

Customers have a choice of access channels appropriate to the service and to their needs:

- The availability of all appropriate channels including phone, web, email, face to face, mail and SMS will be considered when designing services.
- Offer a mix of conventional and electronic channels

Channel access meets accessibility and diversity standards

- The physical design of the new Customer Centre will be fully accessible and DDA compliant.
- The website will satisfy W3C accessibility guidelines
- Customer information will be made available and presented in formats that customers can understand Channels will be available at times to suit our customers
- Extended opening hours for face to face and or phone channels will be developed in line with the demand from our customers to access services outside the existing core hours.
- A balance will be achieved between customer demand and cost effectiveness

The customer experience is consistent regardless of channel

- They get the same information and service regardless of channel and can use a mix of channels for the same request.

The use of value for money channels will be encouraged and promoted

- The availability of services through new channels (eg a new transaction on the website) will be promoted so customers know this service is available
- Staff in the YCC will support customers in the use of self-service facilities

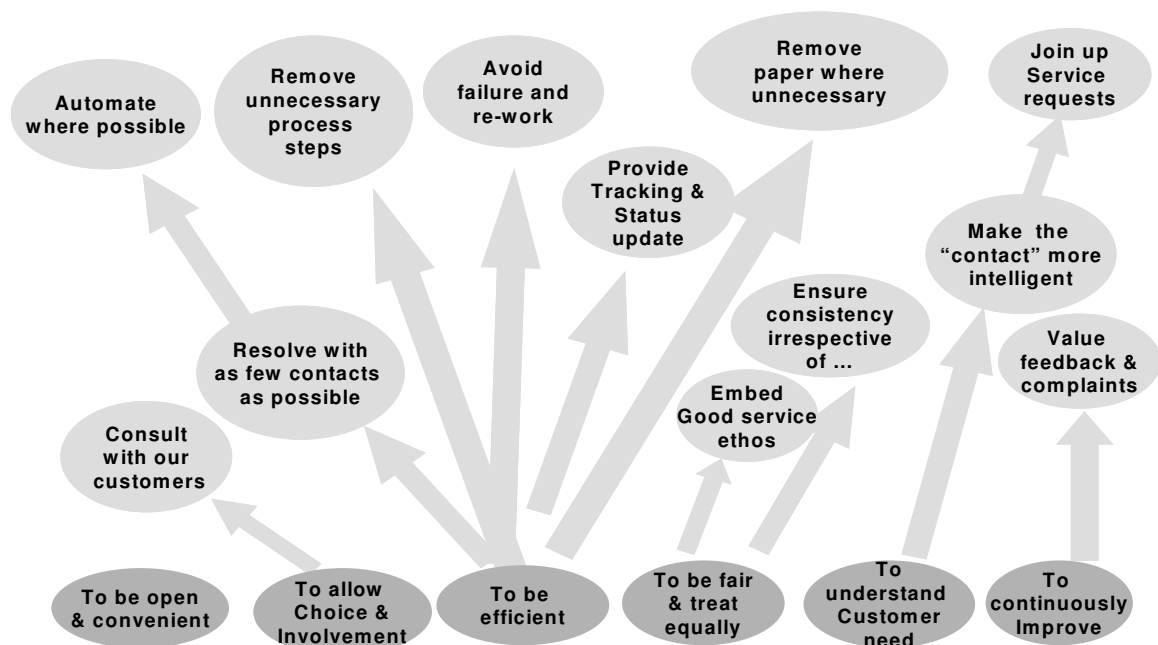
Intelligent use of channels to improve services

- Decide which channels are most effective for the service – no blanket assumptions. Sometimes face-to-face is the most efficient. Sometimes we need to take the service to our customer.

The needs of hard to reach and disadvantaged groups in the community are considered

- Make services available through partner organisations, third sector and community groups to increase accessibility
- Run proactive campaigns to promote services and target excluded groups
- Use of libraries and schools

5.2.2 Design principles: High quality and efficient services



*DRAFT***Annex A***We will consult customers in the design of services*

- When new service processes are being designed and build ongoing customer satisfaction consultation into processes so that we can actively seek input from customers about what works for them and whether we are delivering on our promises.

We will value feedback and complaints

- As a way to learn how we can continuously improve our services.
- A revised customer feedback policy has been developed (see Annex 1) and will be incorporated into all new process designs

We will design services to be efficient by:

- Automating processes where possible
- Resolving customers requests in as few contacts as possible
- Removing unnecessary steps from processes
- Making sure we get it right first time - avoiding failure and rework
- Remove paper from processes where it is unnecessary
- Provide self-service tracking for customers and service updates so that customer don't have to call us to find out what is happening

We will ensure that services are delivered fairly and equally:

- By embedding a customer service ethos through staff training and publishing our customer service standards (See Annex 2)
- By collecting equalities monitoring data from our customers

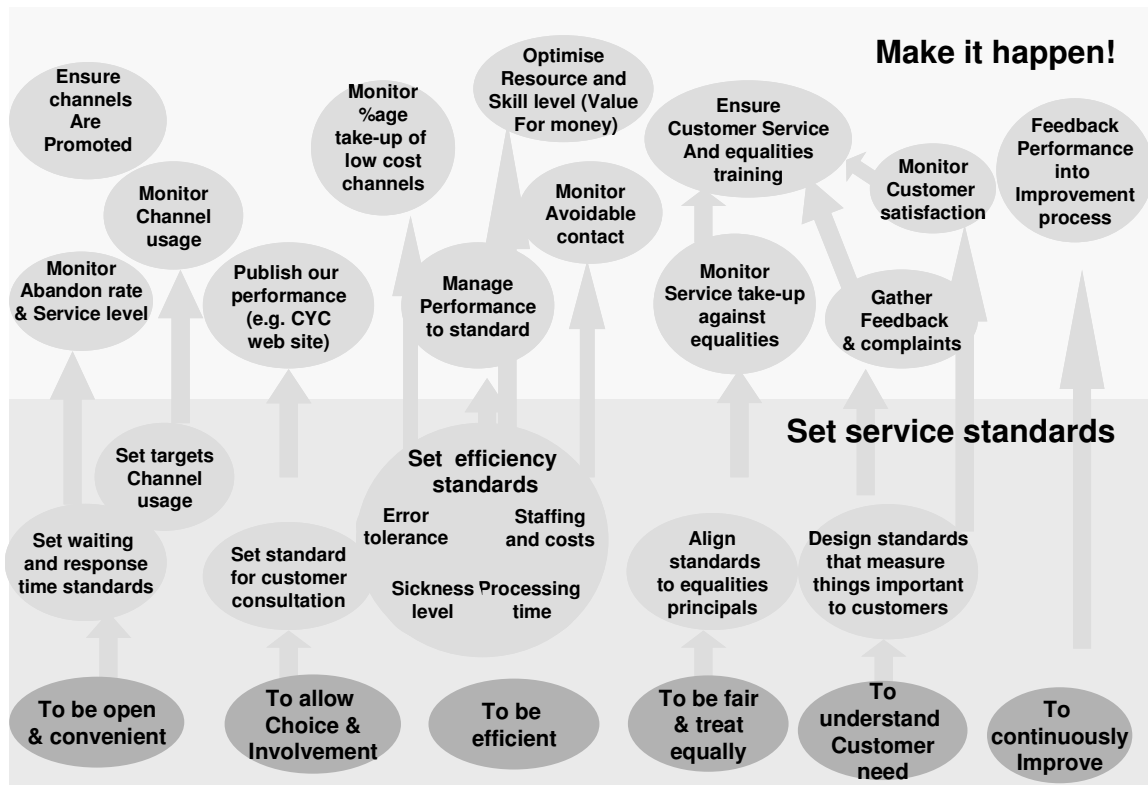
We will look for opportunities to join up our services

- In a way which corresponds to customers' needs

5.2.3 Design principles: Effectively Managed Services

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What customers want most from the Council is for us to deliver on our promises. To do this we need to effectively manage the performance of our services.

We will set service standards that measure what our customers value

- So that when we report our performance it means something to them
- Draft measures and targets have been developed (see Annex 3)

We will set standards for customer consultation across services

- That ensure customers have a consistent opportunity to be involved in service design and comment on service delivery

We will publish our performance so customers can see how we are doing

- On the website, in the council's publications and in the Customer Centre

We will set efficiency standards

- That enable us to manage processing times, errors, costs and staff absence, to maximise the efficiency of service delivery

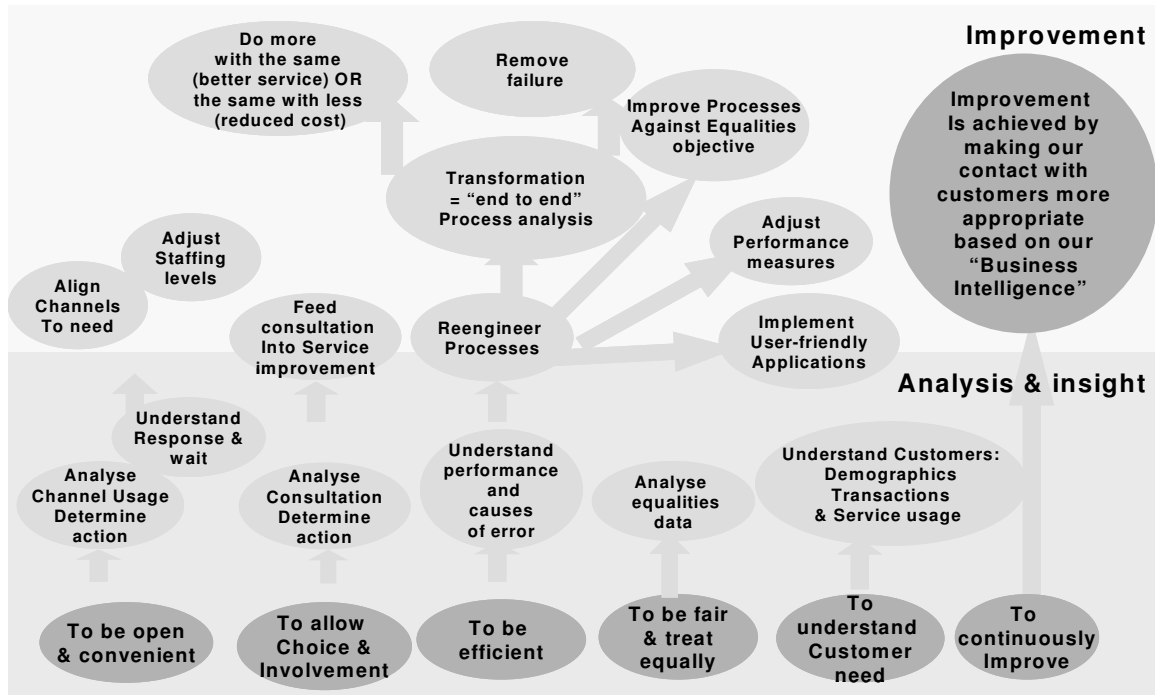
We will feed back our performance into the improvement process

- In order to continuously improve

We will implement NI14 as an improvement tool (see Annex 4)

- By identifying avoidable customer contact this indicator can help us target improvements in our performance where they are most needed.

5.2.4 Design principles: Services designed for you



No matter how well we are doing our customers will always want us to do better. Therefore a process for continuous improvement of services is a key building block for the delivery of our customer services vision. We believe in getting the best out of resources, in eliminating wasteful duplication or inefficient practices and processes and that technology should be used to support and enhance customer access and service delivery.

There are 2 stages in the improvement process: Analysis & Insight, and Improvement.

Analysis & Insight

We need to understand how and why our services are performing as they are and what the improvement opportunities are. We have a lot of data already but we do not have the capability to combine data to create a better understanding of our customers and our localities or the impacts of our service delivery. We need to build a business intelligence platform that will give us a single customer view and enable us to analyse channel usage, service performance, customer satisfaction, customer behaviour, customer profile and geographical data.

We also need to develop our approach to customer segmentation, which gives valuable insight into how to provide the best service for all our customers by focusing on their needs, motivations and choices. It will help services to move away from the idea that *'one size fits all'* for customers.

*DRAFT***Annex A*****Improvement***

The approach to improvement may be continuous or transformational depending on the degree of change required.

Both types of improvement will need to refer to the Customer Strategy design principles and take the following into account:

Re-engineering of processes

- To effectively transform processes you have to look at them end to end to identify and remove failure

Improvement in processes and accessibility to meet equalities objectives

- Processes must have appropriate choices of access and delivery methods to be effective for all sectors of the community

Use Business Intelligence

- What do our customers like?
- What is going wrong?
- What do we do well?
- What do our customers want?

Efficiency choices

- To provide better services – do more with less
- To reduce cost – do the same for less

Technology choices

- To implement user-friendly technology to support the process
- Make the most of our existing investment in technology – how can we make better use of existing systems?
- Will mobilising the process improve it?
- Automation - establish business rules and enable the technology to apply them

5.3 Customer Service Values

The design principles above will drive the change in our customer services consistently in the direction of our vision. We also need to ensure that we apply a set of customer service values to the 4 building blocks of the vision so that we are consistent in our approach. These values are: -

- **Openness and convenience**

We must make our services accessible and provide them in locations, at times and in ways, which ensure social inclusion and are convenient to our customers

We must clearly promote all of our services to ensure that those who are entitled or in need are made aware of services they may benefit from and are enabled to access them.

- **Choice and involvement**

We want customers to have a choice of how, when and where they contact us. We are here to serve them.

We want to consult customers on their experience of our services and engage them in the design of services.

- **Efficiency**

Efficiency is important to us and to our customers. By striving for greater cost-effectiveness in the design and delivery of our services we can deliver better, or more services to our customers for the same cost. And by always pursuing better value for money we can maintain a rate of Council Tax which is as low as possible for all our citizens.

- **Fairness and equality of outcomes**

We recognise that our customers are not all the same. York has a diverse population and our customers have different and changing needs, circumstances and expectations and it is our responsibility to design and deliver services that are capable of responding to all of our customers as individuals. We want to ensure that the same service outcomes are available to all so that there is fairness and consistency inherent in our service delivery. All customers will be treated with respect, dignity and understanding, regardless of disability, race, faith, age, gender or sexual orientation.

- **Understanding customer need**

We need to provide relevant services by tailoring them to meet specific customer needs

- **Continuous improvement**

We will design and deliver high quality, reliable, flexible and responsive services which continuously strive to improve

6 What will Customer Service be like in the future? – A Blueprint

To bring the vision of customer services in York to life, the following section tries to set out how City of York Council might look when this strategy is delivered. It gives a view from a customer perspective and from an employee perspective and it tries to set a general direction of travel for the evolving design of the organisation. This, of course, will be shaped in more detail as we begin to design and implement our services in our new headquarters. This will provide a blueprint for the organisation to strive towards as it transforms and improves customer service delivery.



6.1 What the council will look and feel like to customers

The following statements represent a vision of the customer experience we want to deliver in future.

Accessibility

- I can get through to the council quickly by phone or go to one place for all services.
- I can get into the new Customer Centre in my wheelchair
- I have a choice of “paperless contact” – all documents can be emailed to me or are on the web.
- I can do most of my business with the council on the website.
- The Council is open at times that are convenient to me
- The council sends me a text to remind me what time my appointment is.
- I know what services the council offers and how to get in contact
- Information is presented to me in a format I can understand

Delivery

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- Staff are always polite and try to help. They make things as simple as possible for me.
- Staff in the Customer Centre can deal with most things, or they can call in an “expert” there and then.
- Services and staff are consistent however I get in touch. I visited the Customer Centre and they knew that I had phoned and they had an electronic copy of a letter I sent in
- I can speak to one person and they can sort everything out for me quickly.
- I received a ‘Welcome to York’ pack which joined up the services I need

Performance

- I don’t have to wait long to be seen or get an answer on the phone
- I know when my service request will be completed and can track progress on the web site
- I can see how well the Council is doing on the website
- I have never had to chase things up or complain
- The information I get is always up to date

Improvement

- The web site and phone access has improved in the last 3 years
- The new Customer Centre is modern , comfortable and easy to use
- I was consulted on what I wanted to see in the new Centre
- I know that my feedback has been used to redesign services.



6.2 What the council will look and feel like from the inside

6.2.1.1 Accessibility

- More customers are using the website and the phone – this is quicker for the customer and costs us less
- More integrated web transactions saves staff time entering data into systems

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- Selected services promoted through SMS – less customers miss their appointments
- Outbound customer contact by email (where chosen) instead of letter – savings on paper and postage - greener, faster and less cost
- New Customer Centre meets physical accessibility criteria
- Staff can spend more time with vulnerable customers because most routine queries are done quickly on the phone or by customers using self-service

Delivery

- Multi-skilled, motivated, trained and empowered staff getting it right first time or fixing it first time – reduced cost, better service and promotes a better perception and reputation
- Re-engineered process for many services leading to low failure demand and error – reduced cost
- Automation where possible – reduced cost and convenience for the customer
- Flexible, mobile workforce –
- Accommodation designed to deliver excellent customer service

Performance

- Performance standards are aligned to what matters to customers in York
- We set clear targets for processing time in high volume services
- We understand the cost of transactions per channel
- We have a better understanding of Service and Staff performance
- We know the diversity profile and service take-up of our customers

Improvement

- We recognise complaints and feedback as a positive means to identify where we can make improvements
- We use customer insight to redesign services and have a Business Intelligence platform that provides a vehicle for continuous improvement
- We have mechanisms in place to ensure ongoing programme of transformational change and service improvement

6.3 Organisational design

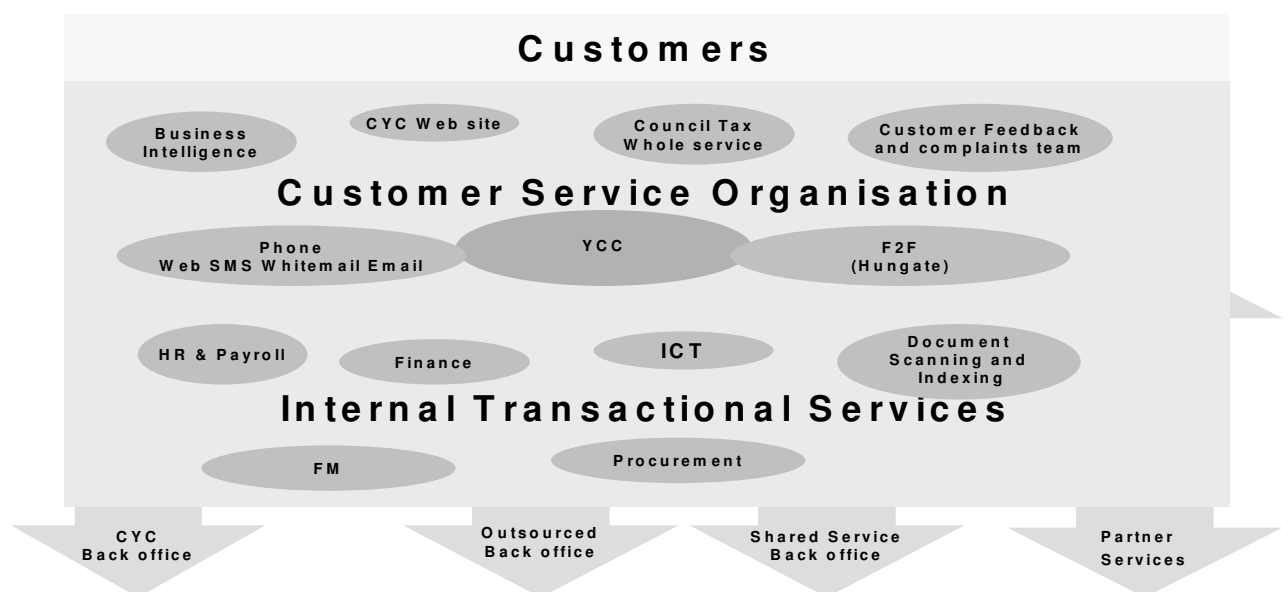
In order to deliver high performing, customer focussed services our business processes will change. This will also require our organisational structures to change. It is impossible to design these in advance but here we set out a direction of travel. We will move to an organisational structure that enables excellence in customer services where the following may apply: -

- There will be a single Customer Services Team with responsibility (over time) for:
 - Customer Service standards and monitoring adherence to the Customer Services Strategy

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- Running the York Customer Centre, which will manage customer contact across all channels, face to face, telephone, and web and email
- Customer complaints & feedback
- The development of Business Intelligence regarding our customers, their demographics and usage of our services.
- The Council Web site
- Delivery of whole services where appropriate (e.g. Revenues and Benefits Service)
- Specialist services will interface closely with the York Customer centre to ensure seamless delivery of end to end services
- All services will be structured around customer need
- The Council presents itself as one council. Silos of independent service delivery will no longer exist.
- The joins between front and back office will be completely invisible to the customer
- There will be strong lateral links between related services that enable us to deliver joined up services to customers
- The performance management of services will extend over both front and back office and may often relate to the work of more than one directorate
- Support services are structured in a way that enables seamless joined up working
- We will retain responsibility for our contact with customers irrespective of who delivers the service to them
- We will be able to share customer contact channels with partner organisations when this is appropriate

The following model shows how this mixed economy of delivery might work and how service boundaries between front and back office and between different delivery agencies might work.



7 How we will deliver change

7.1 Organisational and staff development

To realise our Customer Service Vision we need to further develop our organisation so that it is capable of delivering excellent and efficient services which are responsive to the needs and views of all residents. We need to achieve an ingrained culture of excellent customer service and access across the entire organisation.

The Council's most valuable resource in delivering excellent customer service is our staff. We depend on our committed and motivated workforce to put customer service first. To enable our staff to do this they must be involved at every level in the development and delivery of improved services and properly equipped to do the job.

We need to raise our expectations of managers to drive this forward in a way which delegates decision-making to the lowest possible level and empowers staff to pursue excellence. The introduction of leadership and management standards (LAMS) has begun our progress in this direction.

Staff will need to have access to high quality training, coaching and mentoring, systems, data and information if they are to be to deliver consistently the excellent standards of customer service to which we aspire.

This means that staff:

- Will be treated with respect, dignity and understanding
- Will be well-trained, well-managed and well-led
- Will be involved in the design of customer services
- Will be empowered to deliver high quality, responsive and efficient services to our customers

7.2 Service design and delivery

We have three methods or 'vehicles' that we can use to help us move towards our customer service values and implement our customer service design principles to deliver improved customer service:

1. Transitional Initiatives that we can ask all services to undertake now in order to align with the strategy.
2. Transformational initiatives – these are mainly undertaken by the Easy programme.

3. The approach to ongoing service planning and monitoring, assessment and improvement undertaken by the services.

7.2.1 How we will deliver change: Transitional Initiatives

We cannot implement our entire Vision across the whole Council at the same time. We need to identify a programme of transitional initiatives which will be implemented in all services over the next 5 years to align the Council's Customer Service with our Vision.

These initiatives are ones that can be implemented within our existing organisational structure and in our existing accommodation. They need to address:

- the embedding of a customer service culture
- the adoption of new customer service standards and measures
- a new approach to customer feedback

The purpose of the transitional initiatives is to move the whole organisation to a state of business-readiness for the transition to our new HQ building where we will be delivering Customer Service physically in one location to one set of standards.

Some transitional activities are already identified, agreed and planned. These are set out in section 8.

Following approval of the Customer Service Strategy a full programme of transitional initiatives will need to be identified and planned alongside the main transformational activities in the Delivery Plan to align customer service delivery standards across the whole council. This would include a programme of staff training.

The Customer Champion will lead the development and implementation of this plan.

7.2.2 How we will deliver change: Transformational initiatives

Transformational initiatives are those that review customer service areas and conduct a fundamental review of:

- Organisation structures, roles and skill sets
- Process and procedure
- Supporting technology, applications and the data that underpins the applications

In York this level of transformation has been successfully delivered by Phase 1 of the easy@york programme and Phase 2 of the programme will be

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responsible for the majority of the transformational initiatives in the Delivery Plan.

The easy programme designs more efficient business processes and procedures, opens up new access channels, designs and develops the supporting technology, designs and creates new organisational structures and supports the business through the successful implementation and embedding of these into the transformed business.

In Phase 2 easy is working alongside the New Headquarters project to achieve the transformation of 'Face to Face' access for customers. This will be realised by the inclusion of a single Customer Centre for all council services in the design of the new HQ building.

Currently the delivery plan for the easy@york programme extends to 2010/11 to coincide with the Council's move to its new HQ and for developing the delivery of Face to Face customer service for all Council services in the new Customer Centre. A further phase of the easy@york programme and potentially other transformational programmes will be required to deliver the full Vision.

The new HQ programme has responsibility for designing and delivering the new premises for the Customer Centre. Other transformational initiatives that support the delivery of the Vision are:

- The EDMS project which will allow all mail to be stored and managed electronically thus enabling greater automation and integration of processes
- The flexible working programme which will mobilise processes and create a new organisational culture enabling the flexible use of our workforce to meet our customers' needs.

7.2.3 How we will deliver change: Ongoing Service Improvement

The Council reviews the services it delivers every year in an annual planning cycle that is associated with the process for setting the following year's budget.

In this process each service area sets out a plan for what it will deliver particularly in term of the improvements that will be achieved.

It is proposed that in order to embed the Customer Value in the corporate culture, the Vision, Values and Design principles set out in this strategy are considered in this annual planning cycle and that services have a set of standards to refer to when deciding what customer service improvements they need to make.

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The proposed set of standards to form the basis of this service improvement checklist is the Cabinet Office customer Excellence Standards which are attached in Annex 5.

We want to join with our partners to act as One City in order to deliver the excellent services that our communities needs. We believe that partnerships are fundamental to delivering excellent services; that by working together we can make better use of resources and expertise; and that we will provide better access to services by working together to join up services at a local level and to remove service, geographical and professional barriers.

This means that we will:

- Work with partners towards achieving seamless customer service delivery that will signpost all York public services regardless of the service that has been accessed by the customer
- Build strong partnerships with business, community and voluntary organisations as well as other statutory agencies to achieve the best outcomes for our customers

8 The Delivery Plan: what we will deliver, when

At this stage it is not possible to set out a fully worked up delivery plan. Further work is needed to pull together the key strands of activity to deliver this strategy. However, there are significant blocks of work already identified and resourced and work is ongoing to develop the additional elements, with a view to achieving this plan largely within existing resources.

The Delivery plan will be split into the three strands set out in section 7 of this strategy and a high level view of the actions and timelines is set out below.

Transitional Activities

What	When
NI14: Record the cause of contact for selected services with a view to determining "Is this contact avoidable?" •Decide which services •Agree a reporting mechanism •Use NI14 to demonstrate service improvement in areas that have been reengineered (through Easy), and to indicate areas that need review	From Oct 2008
Implement the 2008 'Customer feedback and complaints policy'	From Jan 2009
Review customer data - what & where – Link to work of Equalities team &	To be planned

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performance team	
Adopt new Customer First standards and behaviours	From Jan 2009 following approval of Customer Strategy?
Adopt new Customer First measures and targets	From Jan 2009 following approval of Customer Strategy?

Transformational Activities

Customer Service transformation is the primary function of the **Easy@york programme**. Phase 2 will deliver end-to-end redesign and integrated customer service delivery for: -

Adult and Children's Social Services Advice Information and referral function
Neighbourhood Services – revisit phase 1 work to increase scope and depth of services currently delivered including Highways

Parking

Housing Management and repairs

Licensing

E-recruitment and internal HR transactions

Face to face contact point for all other services.

Mobile working to send jobs directly to the person doing the job

Easy@york phase 2 has a clear focus upon integrating our face to face contact from multiple reception points into one purpose built Customer Centre which will enable us to achieve the vision set out in this strategy. This means that the easy programme must work closely with the **New Headquarters project** to deliver high quality customer services in an effective setting.

Work is ongoing to design the new Customer Contact Centre, to deliver as many services as possible at this first point of contact and, for those services that are not yet redesigned, to ensure that services who have a large volume of customer contact are located close by. Projects are also ongoing to deliver the full potential of technology and ensure effective communication between front and back office services, seamless handover of customer requests and transparent tracking of transactions. Work is ongoing on these projects to identify the full extent of the resource requirement.

These are namely: -

An Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) - This new system is currently being implemented and will enable paper documents to be stored electronically and retrieved/moved around the organisation far more efficiently than paper. Workflow technology will enable us to push documents and transactions to each team/individual so that work is completed quickly and efficiently and progress can be reported at any time. A full roll out programme has yet to be worked up and resources may be needed to backscan historic or working documents.

Mobile working – A technology platform is being implemented that will enable secure mobile access to IT systems and data. This will provide an opportunity to deliver services to customers in their own homes and to deploy work to staff based in the field. Further work is needed to create an HR Policy framework and to pilot different mobile workstyles that might in future be used in the new Headquarters.

Service Improvement Activities

The desired outcome is to embed the Customer Strategy with its Vision, building blocks, design principles and values, into ongoing service delivery. In order to achieve this we need to build it into: -

- Directorate and service planning processes
- The council's corporate strategy - especially the organisational effectiveness and Inclusive City themes
- The council's corporate performance management framework.
- All 12 actions of the Single Improvement Plan
- The Equalities Delivery Plan

All of these are currently under review and the work to integrate the Customer Strategy into them will be undertaken in the next few months.

A full delivery plan will be worked up and delivered alongside the final version of the Customer Strategy in December 2008.

Engagement and Consultation Approach

We will work with the council's research team and the Easy Programme's marketing and communication function, and adopt approaches from the Corporate Engagement Strategy framework, which is currently being developed.

We will use the following methods to engage and consult with customers and residents; directorates and service areas; staff and unions: -

- Place Survey
- Talkabout Survey
- Phone survey
- Facilitated workshops/discussion forums
- Equalities Impact Assessments



Draft
Corporate Customer
Feedback
Policy and Procedures

CORPORATE CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY AND PROCEDURE**INDEX**

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Part 1 - Policy

1. General Principles

City of York Council is committed to excellent customer service and to securing customer satisfaction in the way it responds to complaints and feedback from any of its service users. The Council will ensure it delivers a better service to its customers by monitoring and measuring complaints, feedback, suggestions and comments. It will follow a standard procedure to achieve greater consistency in how it deals with complaints and feedback.

City of York Council will collect information on complaints and feedback so that it knows which areas of service customers are most satisfied /dissatisfied with. This enables a closer look at whether to change aspects of the service and/or offer training and support to staff dealing with complaints about particular issues.

City Of York Council will demonstrate that it listens to its customers' views and feeds them into service development. Gathering information on complaints and checking responses to them is one way we will do this.

City Of York Council wishes to be responsive to complaints made by members of the public; it views complaints as a valuable form of feedback. Therefore, a formal Corporate Customer Feedback Policy and Procedure will ensure that a complaint is fully investigated in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

Complainants should be advised about this. Fundamentally, all complaints will be dealt with in accordance with this policy.

City Of York Council will ensure that its feedback and complaints system:

- is easily accessible and understandable;
- is acknowledged and published as a model for developing good practice;
- ensures a thorough and fair investigation within set time-scales;
- provides an effective response and appropriate redress;
- is confidential;
- provides feedback to management so that areas of dissatisfaction can be improved;
- keeps complainants informed of progress;
- is fully understood by all staff.

2. Making a Complaint

In order to be as flexible as possible and subject to the Council's procedures for dealing with unreasonably persistent complaints, the Council is prepared to accept a complaint from a member of public or anyone acting on behalf of a customer with the proper authority and consent, in the following formats

- in person at any Council office.
- by telephone.
- by letter.
- by email
- through a City Of York councillor.
- through our website. www.york.gov.uk

A complaint is

Any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, from a member of the public about the level or nature of a council service or policy, or the way in which the council's staff carry out their duties

A complaint is not

A request for a service that is made for the first time. For example, if a customer complains that a streetlight is not working we will treat it as a service request that we aim to fulfil by repairing it within the service level agreement. If we then fail to repair it, and the customer is still unhappy, it should then be defined and treated as a complaint

This policy does not relate to those services where there is a statutory or other legislative requirement e.g.

- Adult Social Services
- Children's Social Care Services
- School Admissions
- Planning Objections
- Revenues and Benefits
- Freedom of Information requests

However this policy and procedures will also be used if we receive a complaint regarding one of our contractors or a partner organisation, which delivers services on our behalf.

3. Feedback e.g. Suggestions, Compliments and Comments

The Council recognises that it is important to ensure feedback is also recognised and used to inform service design/delivery and reviews. It is equally important to feed back feedback regarding the service to relevant service managers and to ensure this feedback is passed on to staff.

In order to assist this process, the Council has developed the same method as for dealing with complaints, to collect, record and pass on feedback on a regular basis to the management team, staff and councillors. This will help to ensure the good work of staff is recognised and praised accordingly.

Part 2 - The Procedures

4. Dealing with Complaints

It is important that members of the public are aware that the procedure only relates to genuine complaints. Equally it is not a system for appealing against a decision of the Council, providing these decisions are correctly arrived at.

The procedure is specifically designed to check that, in relation to a genuine complaint, everything that should have been done has been done and that the Council's procedures and policies have been upheld.

The identity of the person making a complaint should be made known only to those who need to consider the complaint, it should not be revealed to any other person or made public by the Council. Care should be taken to maintain confidentiality where particular circumstances demand (for example, information about third parties). It may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in some circumstances, for example where relevant legislation applies or allegations are made which involve the conduct of third parties.

Each directorate has a *Directorate Feedback Co-ordinator (DFC)* who is the channel for their directorate's feedback from customers and a key contact for them. They will receive comments, compliments, complaints and suggestions through a number of channels and need to be informed of any you get. The York Customer Centre (YCC) will be a major channel as staff there receive 'phone calls, emails and forms completed on the web for all types of feedback. They will determine which directorate it relates to and quickly transfer all the details with a unique reference number to the right customer feedback co-ordinator.

The DFC is the communications, monitoring and reporting hub for the directorate's customer feedback. They will:

- ensure the right person in the right service gets the feedback
- monitor anything that needs a response to time or quality standards
- have their name and contact details on all responses to complaints so the customer can come back to a single point of contact for further action should they need to
- produce the customer feedback analysis and reports for their DMT, Annual Report to Scrutiny and / or Audit and Governance Committees
- respond to complaints on behalf of chief officers when required
- be the contact point for letters or investigations passed to the directorate from our Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Link Officer – this is our Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services.

'Front-line' staff that provide the service can generally deal with many complaints quickly and satisfactorily. The member of staff who receives the complaint either by telephone, face to face, by letter or email or through the website should ensure that all steps are taken to resolve the complaint at the first point of contact

However if the complainant is not happy with the outcome at that point, it needs to be escalated into a Stage 1 complaint.

Stage 1

At this stage the line manager of the service will deal with a complaint and the complainant should be advised of the outcome within 10 working days and what they can do if they remain dissatisfied at the end of Stage 1

Stage 2

At the second stage, complaints are best set out in writing (letter, fax or email or on a feedback / complaint form. Assistance will be given upon request if the complainant is unable to complete the form). At this second stage the senior manager /head of the service to which the complaint relates will reconsider the complaint and will inform the complainant of the outcome within 20 working days. Again, complainants should be told what they could do if they remain dissatisfied at the end of stage 2.

Stage 3

At the third stage, the complaint is considered by the Director of the service or a member of staff independent of the service acting on the Director's behalf. At this stage the complainant can expect a full response within 20 working days or advised of any delay and when they can expect a full response. The complainant should also be made aware that if they are still dissatisfied with the outcome they might take their complaint to the LGO, who will carry out an independent investigation of the complaint.

At the end of all stages you need to complete the *Action Plan Following Feedback* form in order to learn from customer complaints.

5. Corporate Complaints Monitoring

The Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services will corporately monitor complaints through the Directorate Feedback Co-ordinators

It is important that complaints monitoring is effective. Consequently, a comprehensive monitoring system has been put in place.

- Upon receipt of the complaint at stage 2 or in the event the complainant has bypassed stage 1, the DFC will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days. This will then be sent to the relevant senior manager of the service, who is required to action the complaint. A date is given for the final response, which will be 20 working days from the date of receipt of the complaint. If, for some exceptional reason, the 20 working day deadline cannot be met, a holding response will be sent to the complainant stating a revised date when a response can be sent and giving an explanation as to the cause of the delay. The acknowledgement letter will indicate who is dealing with the complaint and the date by which a response can be expected.

- Once a complaint has been resolved or closed, then a Customer Satisfaction/ Experience and Equalities and Diversities Monitoring Form will be sent to the complainant with a pre-paid envelope for their return. Information contained within the responses will be collated to feed back to DMTs, Annual Report to Scrutiny and / or Audit and Governance Committees; the Equalities Leadership Group and other relevant groups, where lessons learnt from complaints will be considered/shared.
- A Customer Satisfaction Local Performance Indicator as part of our renewed Customer First Measures and Targets will be adopted for the forthcoming and subsequent years.
- In addition to the leaflet entitled "*Let us know*" guidance notes will also be produced for the information of staff, to ensure a consistent corporate approach across the Authority. In addition, the details of the Council's procedures will be contained on the Council's website.
- The Council will respond to complaints in a positive manner and where it is clear that it has been at fault and caused injustice, appropriate compensation will be authorised by the Chief Executive consistent with the principles adopted by the LGO, even if the complaint has not been referred to the Ombudsman.
- Where a complaint has been referred to the LGO, the Council will always use its best endeavours to meet the deadline set for responses and will maintain a positive, professional working relationship with the LGO Office.

6. Dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Procedure

This procedure should be initiated only after a discussion with relevant officers has confirmed that all other avenues have been explored and procedures exhausted. The Head of Service for which the complaint has been received, will initiate a discussion or meeting with the Director, directorate feedback co-ordinator and Head of Legal Services to consider the matter. There is a need to carry out an assessment process balancing the rights of the individual, the statutory requirements regarding the service and the Council's responsibilities towards its staff.

Options for dealing with unreasonably persistent complainants

Where complainants have been identified as unreasonably persistent, in accordance with the criteria above, the Head of Service will implement such action and will notify complainants, in writing, of the reasons why they have been classified as such and the action to be taken. This notification may be copied for the information of others involved, eg Advocate, Councillor or Member of Parliament. A record must be kept for future reference of the reasons why a complainant has been classified as unreasonably persistent.

The meeting called by the Head of Service will also consist of:

- Trying to resolve matters before invoking this policy. This might be accomplished by drawing up a signed agreement with the complainant, which sets out a code of behaviour for the parties involved if the Council is to continue processing the complaint. If these terms are contravened, consideration would then be given to implementing other action.
- Declining contact with the complainant either in person, by telephone, by fax, by letter or any combination of these, provided that one form of contact is maintained.
- Notifying the complainant in writing that the Council has responded fully to the points raised and has tried to resolve the complaint, but there is nothing more to add and continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose. The complainants should also be notified that the correspondence is at an end and that further letters received will not be acknowledged nor answered on the matter.
- Informing the complainant that in extreme circumstances the matter will be referred to the Council's solicitors and/or the Police.
- Temporarily suspending all contact with the complainant or investigation of a complaint whilst seeking legal advice.
- Seeking advice at any time from the Health and Safety Officer and/or the Head of Legal Services.

These measures should be limited in order from the least serious to the most.

Withdrawing unreasonably persistent complainant status

From time to time each directorate feedback co-ordinator will review the list of unreasonably persistent complainants and, where possible and reasonable, withdraw this status, subject to discussion with the relevant Head of Service.

7. Ombudsman Complaint Procedure

The Local Government Ombudsmen (LGO) is an independent, impartial and free service, which investigates complaints about councils and certain other bodies. They investigate complaints about most council matters including housing, planning, education and social services and about how the council has done something. But they cannot question what a council has done simply because someone does not agree with it.

This is the procedure that the Ombudsman adheres to:

- On receipt of a complaint to the Ombudsman, a letter will be sent to the Authority advising us of the complaint with a 28-day response target.
- If no response is provided to the Ombudsman within this target, they will contact the our Link Officer (who is our Head of Legal) who will then contact the relevant Head of Service for a progress report on the complaint.

- If there is still no response at this stage it will be filed for a further 14 days.
- If the Ombudsman has still not received a response after 14 days, a letter will be written to the Chief Executive. This will advise the Chief Executive that the Head of Service and Case Officer for the complaint will be required to report with all files relevant to the case for an interview at the Ombudsman's offices in York.

From 1st April 2008, there are new contact details for contacting the LGO to make a complaint or for advice on making a complaint. The Advice Team is available Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 5.00pm

Tel: 0845 602 1983 or 024 7682 1960 (calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes)

Fax: 024 7682 0001

Text: "Call Back" to 0762 480 4323

Send to: The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

8. Making a complaint about the conduct of a councillor

From 8 May 2008 the responsibility for considering complaints that a councillor may have breached the Code of Conduct moved to the standards committees of local authorities.

The Code of Conduct sets out the rules governing the behaviour of councillors in local authorities across the country and is included in Part 5 of the Council's Constitution.

What this means

After 8 May 2008, complaints about the conduct of a City of York Councillor or a councillor from one of our parish councils, must be submitted in writing to:

Chair of the Assessment Sub-Committee,
The Standards Committee, C/O the Monitoring Officer
City of York Council,
Guildhall,
York YO1 9QN.

Fax: 01904 551047

Email: Quentin.baker@york.gov.uk

How to get a complaints form

You can download or print off a Making a complaint about the conduct of a councillor form by following the links below:

[Printable form \(new window PDF 54KB\)](#) for completion by hand that can be submitted by fax or post on completion.

[Electronic form \(new window Word 117KB\)](#) that can be submitted by email, fax or post on completion.

Follow this link for [help with opening and downloading Word and PDF files.](#)

Complaint forms are also available at the Council's main reception desk.

What happens next?

The assessment sub-committee can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a councillor. It will not deal with complaints about things that are not covered by the Code of Conduct. Any complaints must be clear as to why the complainant thinks that a councillor has not followed the Code of Conduct.

We aim to make an initial assessment of the complaint within 20 working days of receipt. If the decision is to take no further action, complainants will have the right to ask for that initial decision to be reviewed.

For further information, or to discuss these changes, please contact the Council's Monitoring Officer, Quentin Baker, on 01904 551004 or email to Quentin.baker@york.gov.uk

9. Performance Measures

The Council will monitor the effectiveness of this policy and procedures by collating all relevant information and statistics and will use these when it undertakes reviews of this policy and service delivery.

The Council will hold information on its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system where available – in service areas where CRM is not available, a system will be introduced which is consistent with CRM and across the council.

This will comprise:

- the number of complaints received,
- how quickly they were dealt with and
- whether they were resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.
- equalities and diversities monitoring data

It will use the information to:

- Identify areas of dissatisfaction with services;
- Highlight areas for service improvement;
- Monitor the success of service improvements based on the number of complaints subsequently received;

- Produce a quarterly and annual statistical report.
- Support the Council's Equalities Strategy, Engagement Strategy and Customer Services Strategy

This information will be reported to the Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees, Annual Report, etc.

The following performance information will also be collected:

- Number of complaints received
- Number of Ombudsman maladministration cases (Annually).

Targets	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Complaints dealt with within target time	85%	90%	95%
Complainants found the complaint process easy to understand	85%	90%	95%
Written correspondence (letter, fax or e-mail) responded to within 20 days	85%	90%	95%
Number of Ombudsman maladministration claims	0	0	0

10. Quality Monitoring

When a response is required from the relevant Head of Service to an Ombudsman complaint, through our Link Officer, which is the Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services, the following quality monitoring will take place.

- A copy of the reply will be sent to the LGO Link Officer and DFC prior to sending to the complainant.
- The LGO Link Officer and/or the DFC will quality check the complaint to ensure that all points raised by the Ombudsman have been covered and then send the response out to the complainant.
- In the instance that not all points are covered they will be returned to the relevant Head of Service advising that more information is needed.

One of the ways to judge whether our feedback system works is to conduct customer satisfaction studies. To do this we will send out *Customer Satisfaction surveys* when responding to a customer with the outcome of their complaint and/or to closed complaints

chosen at random from their service area. This will also include an Equalities and Diversities Monitoring questionnaire. (For more information on this please see City Of York Council's Equalities Strategy).

11. Guidance Notes

Good investigative practice

The majority of complaints are likely to be capable of being dealt with speedily and simply. Where, however, a more substantial inquiry is required, the following guidance may be helpful for investigating officers.

Check if there are any previous complaints from this person. Contact the complainant to arrange a meeting (or time for a telephone conversation) and:

- clarify the complaint;
- set out in writing for the complainant your understanding of the complaint;
- clarify the outcome sought;
- check whether the complainant needs support of any kind, or has poor sight or hearing, or a language difficulty, and check what help the complainant needs so as to be able to understand the discussion properly;
- check that the complainant has a copy of the Council's complaints leaflet.

Dealing with unreasonably persistent complaints

Unreasonably persistent complainants can cause undue stress for staff and place a strain on the Council's time and resources. All staff should try to respond with patience and sympathy to the needs of all complainants but there are times when there is nothing further which can be reasonably done to assist them or to rectify a real or perceived problem.

In determining arrangements for handling such complaints, staff are presented with two key considerations:

- Ensure that the complaints procedure has been **correctly implemented so far as possible and that no material element of a complaint is overlooked or inadequately addressed** and to appreciate that even unreasonably persistent complainants may have aspects which contain some substance. The need to ensure an equitable approach is crucial.
- Identify the stage at which a complaint has become unreasonably persistent. Implementation of this policy would only occur in **exceptional circumstances**.

It is emphasised that this procedure should only be used as a last resort and after all reasonable measures have been taken to try to resolve complaints following the general procedure, or another avenue, such as the Local Government Ombudsman.

Judgement and discretion must be used in applying the criteria to identify potential habitual or vexatious complainants and in deciding action to be taken in specific cases. The procedure should only be implemented following careful consideration by, and with the authorisation of, the relevant Head of Service and after liaising with the DFC.

Definition of unreasonably persistent complainants

Complainants (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be unreasonably persistent complainants where previous or current contact with them shows that they meet **two or more** of the following criteria:

Where complainants:

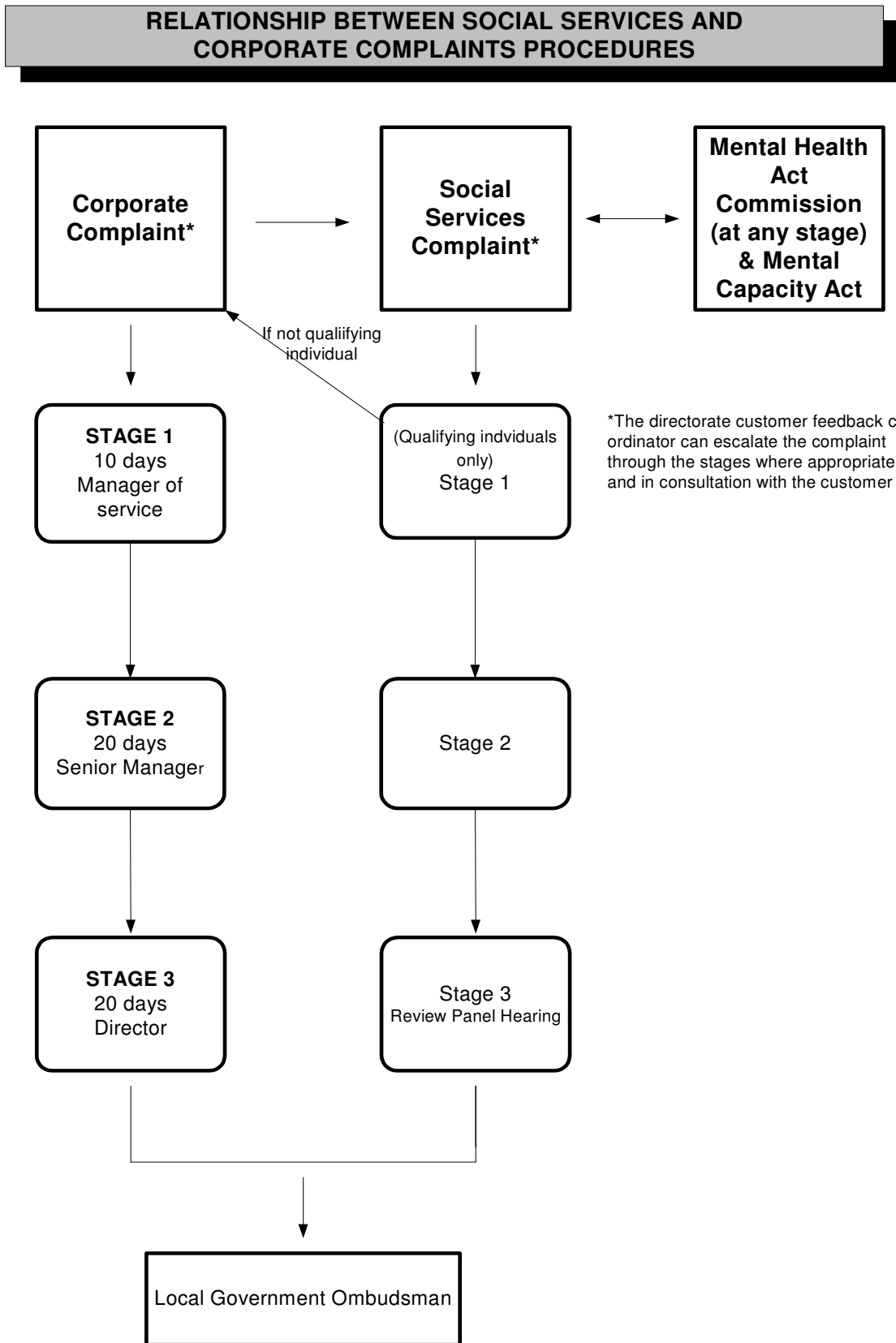
- **Persist in pursuing a complaint** where the complaints procedures have been fully and properly implemented and exhausted.
- **Change the emphasis** of a complaint or **continually raise additional issues or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions** upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. (Care must be taken not to discard new issues, which are significantly different from the original complaint. These might need to be addressed as separate complaints).
- **Are unwilling to accept documented evidence** as being factual in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions or **do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify** when a long period of time has elapsed.
- **Do not clearly identify the precise issues** which they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts to help them specify their concerns, **and/or where the concerns identified are not within the remit** of the Council to investigate.
- **Focus on a trivial matter** to the extent that this is out of proportion to its significance and continue to focus on this point. (It is recognised that determining what is a 'trivial' matter can be subjective and careful judgement must be used in applying this criteria).
- **Have threatened or used actual physical violence** towards staff at any time – this may in itself cause personal contact with the complainant and/or their representatives to be discontinued and the complaint will, thereafter, only be pursued through written communication. All such incidents should be documented.
- Have **harassed** or been personally **abusive or verbally aggressive** on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with their complaint. (Staff must recognise that complainants may sometimes act out of character at times of stress, anxiety, or distress and should make reasonable allowances for this. They should document all incidents of harassment. You may need to consult other Council policies and where there have been threats, violence and/or harassment.) E.g.
 - Staff Warning Register
 - Whistle blowing
 - Staff Conduct
 - Disciplinary and Grievance
- Have, in the course of addressing a complaint, had an **excessive number of contacts** with the Council placing unreasonable demands on staff. (A contact is defined as those methods of communication set out in section 2. Discretion must be used in determining the precise number of "excessive contacts" applicable under

this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each individual case).

- Are known to have **recorded** meetings or face-to-face/telephone **conversations without** the prior knowledge and consent of other parties involved.
- **Display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable** (e.g. insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or normal recognised practice).

Appendix 1

Example of the relationship between our corporate policy and a statutory/legal requirement



Appendix 2

CITY OF YORK COUNCIL Monitoring the Customer Feedback Procedure
--

1. **How did you find out how to make a comment or complaint?**

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Member of council staff | <input type="checkbox"/> | Professional not employed by the council eg doctor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Leaflet | <input type="checkbox"/> | Council's website | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Friend / relative | <input type="checkbox"/> | Advocate | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="text"/> | | |

2. **How easy was it to make the comment or complaint?**

Very easy Fairly easy Neither / nor Fairly difficult Very difficult

3. **Was your complaint answered by the date you were given?**

Yes **Go to Q5** No **Continue**

4. **If your complaint was not answered in time, were you happy with the way staff kept you up to date with what was happening?**

Yes No

5. **Were you given a contact name and telephone number in case you had any further queries?**

Yes No

6. **Were staff helpful?**

Yes No

7. **If you needed support to help you make your comment or complaint, did we arrange this for you?**

Yes No **Not applicable**

If you have any further comments please send on a separate sheet

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

On the back of this questionnaire there is an Equalities Monitoring form which helps us to check that everyone is getting the same standard of service.

EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY FORM

Filling in this form is **anonymous and optional**. City of York Council and its partners need to know that services we provide reach all the people in our area. The information you provide will be used to help us and our partners make sure that we provide appropriate services for everyone, irrespective of individual differences like age, gender, disability, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation. Our partners include the NHS, the community and voluntary sector and the emergency services. It is our policy and also a Government requirement to ask these questions so that we can improve life in the city for all.

Gender : <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender			
Age Group			
<input type="checkbox"/> under 16	<input type="checkbox"/> 16-19	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-24	<input type="checkbox"/> 25-29
<input type="checkbox"/> 30-44	<input type="checkbox"/> 45-59	<input type="checkbox"/> 60-64	<input type="checkbox"/> 65-74
<input type="checkbox"/> 75-84	<input type="checkbox"/> 85-89	<input type="checkbox"/> 90& over	
Ethnic Origin (please indicate by a tick in the appropriate box)			
White		Mixed	Black or Black British
<input type="checkbox"/> British	<input type="checkbox"/> Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> White and Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean
<input type="checkbox"/> Any other White background	<input type="checkbox"/> White and Black African	<input type="checkbox"/> White and Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> African
	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other mixed background	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other Black background	
Asian or Asian British		Other Ethnic groups	
<input type="checkbox"/> Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other ethnic group
<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other Asian background	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not wish to disclose my ethnic group	
Are you a disabled person?			
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not wish to disclose whether or not I have a disability			
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
Sexual orientation			
<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not wish to disclose my sexual orientation		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lesbian		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gay		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bisexual		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Heterosexual		
Religious Belief If you are comfortable giving us this information it will help us check everyone is getting the same standard of service:			
<input type="checkbox"/> I do not wish to disclose my religion/belief			
<input type="checkbox"/> Atheism	<input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism	<input type="checkbox"/> Christianity	<input type="checkbox"/> Hinduism
<input type="checkbox"/> Islam	<input type="checkbox"/> Judaism	<input type="checkbox"/> Sikhism	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Action Plan following feedback**Reference Number:****Name of responding manager:****What stage was the complaint at (if appropriate):****Brief description of feedback/ complaint:**

Was the complaint: (This relates to whether you agreed, partly agreed, or disagreed with what the customer said had happened or not happened. The complaint will only be not pursued if the customer decided they no longer had a complaint before any work you completed). Please indicate by highlighting in bold if emailing or circling if posting.

Upheld

Partly Upheld

Not Upheld

Not Pursued

What lessons have been learnt through this feedback:**What action will be taken as a result of this feedback:****By when:****By Who:****Date action completed:**

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Customer Care Standards - draft

We will be friendly and helpful.

We will listen to you and deal with your enquiry efficiently, quickly and correctly.

We will communicate with you in plain English, using terms that are clear and easy to understand.

If you need to discuss a sensitive or confidential issue, we can arrange a private room for you.

All Council leaflets and information can be made available in or presented in a format that you can understand eg other languages, large print, audiotape, or Braille, as appropriate.

We can arrange an interpreter for you if you use British Sign Language

We can arrange an interpreter for you if English is not your first language through the Language Line service

We welcome and encourage your feedback and will try and resolve any complaints on the spot.

We will wear a name badge so you know to whom you are speaking. If we have to pass your enquiry to a colleague, we will tell you who is now dealing with your enquiry.

In addition, in order to keep you informed about our decisions and performance against set standards, we will:

- Publish ***% of minutes of public meetings within *** days.
- Publish information about our performance against set targets on our web site every quarter.
- Publish our performance in delivering the Local Area Agreement.

Equal Opportunities

Our standard is:

- We deliver a service that recognises that our customers have different and diverse needs. We will adopt a flexible approach to these needs and tailor our services to ensure equality of service.
- We will ensure that the services we provide and those, which we purchase from other organisations, do not discriminate unfairly against any section of the community.

We will achieve this by: -

- Operating in line with current equalities policies and procedures and facilitating relevant training and briefings.
- Arranging for an interpreter as quickly as possible.
- Arranging for a signer as quickly as possible.
- Making customers aware that staff of either gender are available to speak to them and that home visits are available for customers.
- Ensuring good physical accessibility for disabled customers.
- Actively encourage customers to comment on our services and to make suggestions for improvement.
- Providing a non-smoking environment.

Customer First measures and targets

1. Introduction

1.1 Customer First measures and targets are important for our customers, potential customers, residents, employees and management of the council. They help to define what a customer can expect and to remind management and employees of the challenge and obligations that they face.

1.2 Customer service needs to be owned and driven at a corporate level to ensure that the customer's experience is consistently good across all services and access channels. Customer service is more than a website and a contact centre. It is about how the organisation operates and more importantly, how it views, understands and responds to its customers, so that it can better anticipate and plan the delivery of services around them.

1.3 At present we do not measure customer satisfaction effectively across the council and only measure and report on a fraction of the main elements of the key drivers of satisfaction. This results in no added value to our customers and residents and missed opportunities to improve our business efficiency and effectiveness.

1.4 However setting measures and targets is of no use if performance against them cannot be measured as well as the cost of data collection needs to be balanced against the ideal service definition.

1.5 We also need to communicate performance against our published standards to our customers and employees on a timely basis.

Anonymous Quote

"You don't hear things that are bad about your company unless you ask. It is easy to hear glad tidings but you have to scratch to get the bad news"

2. Defining Customer First measures and targets

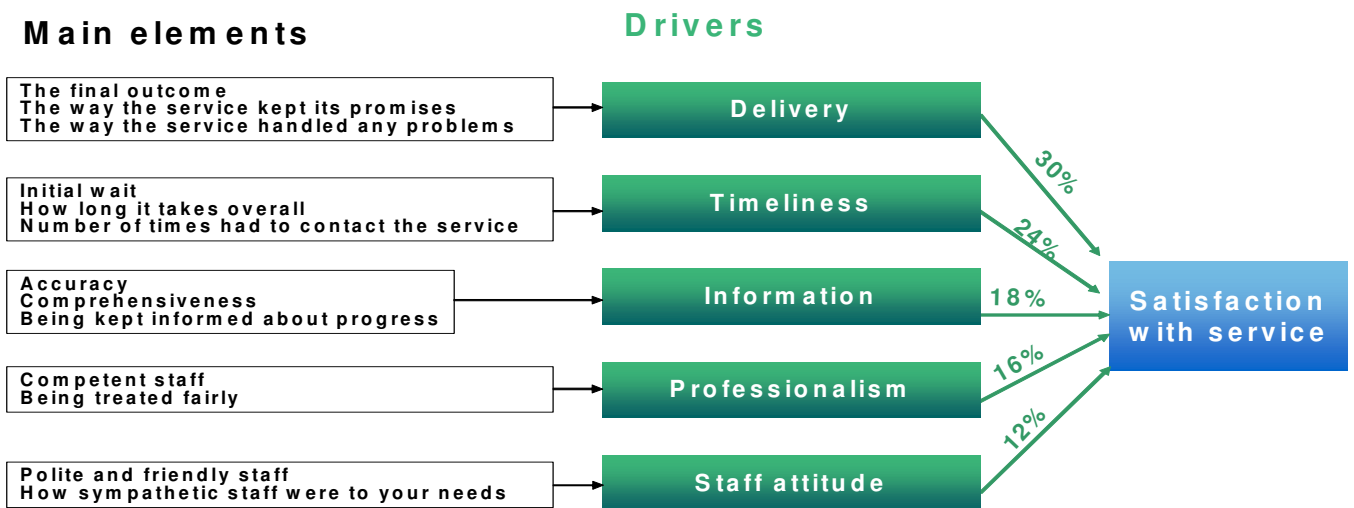
2.1 Each measure needs to be defined precisely before they can be considered as a true service measure. To do this it is important to understand what elements are most important in determining customer satisfaction and detailed research has been conducted to identify the key drivers of satisfaction across public services.

2.2 Detailed research conducted by Mori, Institute of Customer Services, BSI Code of Practice for Customer Service amongst others have all identified a powerful set of five factors that drive satisfaction across public services. In order of impact, they are:

1. **Delivery** - the service delivers the *outcome* it promised and manages to deal with any *problems* that may arise.
2. **Timeliness** – the service responds *immediately* to the initial customer contact and deals with the issue at the heart of it *quickly* and without *passing* it on between staff.
3. **Professionalism** – staff are *competent* and treat customers *fairly*.
4. **Information** - the information given out to customers is *accurate* and *comprehensive* and they are kept informed about *progress*.
5. **Staff attitude** - staff are *friendly, polite* and *sympathetic* to customers' needs

2.3 Additional drivers are – **physical environment** and **access**

Key drivers of satisfaction



This model explains 67% of the variation in satisfaction

Source: MORI

2.4 Further research was conducted through our Talkabout panel in February 2008 in order to understand what is important to local residents.

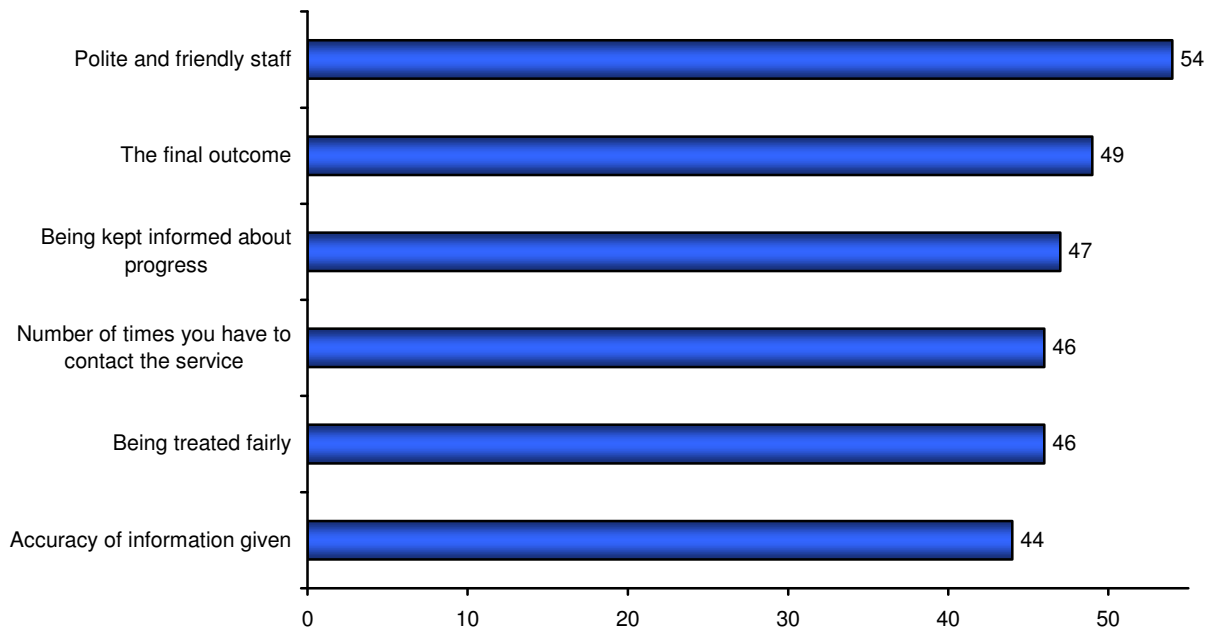
2.5 A total of 1492 completed questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 66%. A sample of this size is accurate to + / - 3% at a 95% confidence level. The main aim was to assess: -

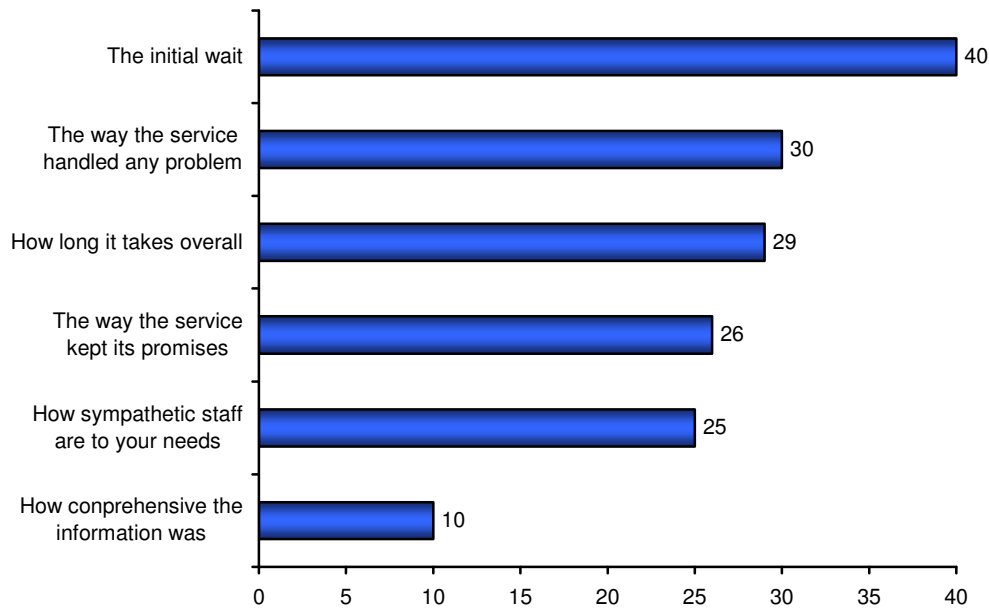
- which factors are important to residents when contacting the council
- opinions of how the council should measure or publicise the handling of different aspects of complaints
- the maximum time residents would expect to wait for service in a council reception
- the maximum rings residents would expect to hear when phoning the council
- the maximum time residents would expect to wait for an outcome of a complaint they had raised with the council

2.6 The results showed: -

- The factor of most importance when contacting the council with a complaint, comment or suggestion is how polite and friendly staff are (54%). Of least importance to panellists was how comprehensive the information was, with one in ten (10%) saying this.
- 92% of respondents agreed that the council should measure how many times a person had to contact the council before the problem was resolved, which was the highest satisfaction level of all the statements related to complaints.
- There was least agreement with the statement that the council should publicise how it performs against its performance targets (68%). Although this statement received the least satisfaction, less than one in ten (8%) respondents actually disagreed.
- When asked how long panellists would expect to wait in a council reception nearly two-fifths (39%) of respondents would expect to wait a maximum of five minutes. A further 37% would expect to wait no longer than ten minutes. 5% of respondents are not prepared to wait.
- Around three-fifths (62%) of panellists would expect to hear five to ten rings before their call was answered, when phoning the council. Only 1% would expect to hear over twenty rings before their call was answered.
- Panellists were asked how long they would expect to wait for the decision or outcome of a complaint they raised with the council. Just under a third (30%) would expect to wait ten days. 28% said they would expect to wait under ten days, with 26% they would wait fifteen days.

2.7 Factors of most importance when contacting the council





3. External Drivers

3.1 A key delivery mechanism of Transformational Government and a central recommendation of the Varney Report (recommendation 24) was to establish the Contact Council which has responsibility for customer contact across government.

3.2 In the mid- to long- term the Contact Council will focus on setting and implementing the strategy for delivering modern customer contact for public services. In the short term the Contact Council is concentrating on implementing the Varney recommendations and establishing best practice performance indicators in contact centres.

3.3 This set of performance indicators (known as the Performance Management Framework or PMF) was compiled with input from departments, agencies, local authorities and the police and published in May 2007.

3.4 A further recommendation – number 27 – is *“to establish best practice performance indicators and benchmarks in public sector”, this document sets out a set of performance indicators for use in all publicly funded contact centres”*.

4. Objectives

4.1 The key objectives of establishing revised Customer First measure and targets across the council are to: -

- Make performance measurement more consistent and comparable across the council;
- Identify areas of excellence and opportunities to share good practice and areas to target additional focus;

- Improve senior level visibility of customer service performance and to improve decision making;
- Focus performance improvement in the areas most in need;
- Establish peer awareness of performance and performance trends;
- Provide a common language for experience sharing and learning amongst council managers;
- Improve understanding of cost to serve and drive better value for money
- Align Customer First to the Contact Council PMF requirements and to help achieve accreditation to a customer service excellence award
- To measure customer satisfaction effectively across the council.

5. Existing Customer First measures and targets

- 95% of letters dealt with within 10 days
- 100% of customers seen within 10 minutes
- 100% of those customers who need further help seen within 10 minutes
- 95% of calls answered within 20 seconds
- 95% of stage 2 complaints dealt with within 10 days
- 95% of stage 3 complaints dealt with within 10 days

6. Proposed Customer First measures and targets

6.1 In order to propose robust, challenging but achievable targets in this area further analysis and modelling work needs to take place to identify

- a. What is desirable set of targets
- b. What we would need to do to achieve these targets
- c. What customers think of the targets
- d. Whether these targets should be generic or service specific

6. 2 The proposed measures below are taken from our work on phase 1 of easy@york and best practice in other authorities

Customer Contacts

- Total number of contacts across all channels across the council
- Total number of contacts via each channel
 - Face to face
 - Phone
 - Email
 - Web
 - Letter
- Total % of contacts assessed as avoidable

Telephone Contact

- Number of calls received – total and by process

- Number of calls resolved at first point of contact
- Number of calls assessed as avoidable
- % of calls resolved at first point of contact
- % of calls assessed as avoidable
- Number of calls abandoned
- % of calls abandoned
- Average speed of answer
- Service Level %
- Satisfaction rating of the service
- Number of calls transferred to Council wide (signpost)

Face to Face Contact

- Number of customers – total and by process
- Number of customer requests resolved at first point of contact
- Number of customer requests assessed as avoidable
- % of requests resolved at first point of contact
- % of requests assessed as avoidable
- Number of customers visiting
- Average waiting times
- Average transaction times
- Number of customers making multiple requests
- Satisfaction rating of the service.

Web Site and Self Service Facilities

- Number of transactions - total and by process
- Number of transactions resolved at first point of contact
- Number of transactions assessed as avoidable
- % of transactions resolved at first point of contact
- % of transactions assessed as avoidable
- number of transactions for multiple requests
- Satisfaction rating of the service

Cost Comparator / Cost Benefit Analysis

- Service costs
- Staffing costs
- IT investment
- Premises / Asset costs
- Measures of Success

Customer satisfaction/experience

- Percentage of contacts made to the Council customer contact centre that are dealt with at the first point of contact
- Reduction in average waiting time for calls to be answered
- Reduction in Abandoned call rate
- Increasing number of service transactions on the Council's website
- Number of visitors to the Council's website
- Percentage of Council Services providing Electronic Service Delivery
- Number of services delivered by fully interactive electronic government

- Annual percentage satisfaction in the customer survey with contacting the Council and using the council's website
- Reduction in the number of people needing to contact the council by visiting an office or telephoning (where the cause is attributed to the Easy Programme/ Customer Strategy e.g. separate processes have been joined up therefore reducing the need for a form or additional contact or providing web or telephone process reduces office visits)

Efficiency benefits

- Annual audit of savings in process time and economies of scale by modernising customer services – see above
- Reduction in office capacity required due to changes in working practices e.g. increased use of mobile working, home working

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Performance Framework - National Indicator 14
– minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer

1. The 2006 white paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* set out the blueprint for the new Performance Framework which aims to reduce the performance burden on local government and shift the emphasis away from detailed process type performance indicators towards more customer outcome based measurement.
2. In April 2008 a new single set of national indicators was introduced which replaced the existing statutory indicators e.g. best value and removed the requirement for local authorities to produce BVPPs (best value performance plans). Although not a replacement for performance plans, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) with its locally agreed targets (as agreed by the Local Strategic Partnership LSP) from the list of national indicators will become a main focal point for data quality audits and external assessment.
3. NI 14 is one of the 198 indicators against which we will be assessed within the new performance management framework agreed between Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association. It also relates to the requirement in the central government Service Transformation Agreement to minimise the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer.
4. Following publication of the Guidance for this indicator in July 2008, there is a requirement to have recording and reporting mechanisms in place by October 2008 with the first report due April 2009. The definition for this indicator includes a list of key service areas, which we will be required to report on. However the Audit Commission, Cabinet Office, and IDeA through their work with the pilot local authorities, understand that we may not be able to record and report for all service areas from October 2008 but we will be required to evidence how we have chosen service areas to record/report in and also that we have a plan to include all areas within the CSR07 period.
5. NI 14 aims to reduce avoidable contact between the community and the council - examples of which include calls from citizens to chase progress on service requests or to report a missed service etc. It means we will need to: -
 - a. understand how our customers currently contact us across the different channels;
 - b. recognise when customers are able to access information and services at the first point of contact;
 - c. identify when customers are forced to make several contacts to get what they need.

6. The benefits that can be achieved by implementing NI 14 broadly reflects the Audit Commission's new use of resources assessment for 2008/09, which considers how well organisations, are managing and using their resources to deliver value for money and better and sustainable outcomes for local people.

Financial Value

- Measuring and understanding the causes of avoidable contact provides an evidence base for improvement initiatives which can unlock a range of relatively straightforward service improvements
- By reducing avoidable contact, there is potential to release resources/capacity from both the front line and back office
- These benefits may be cashable or we can choose to take the benefits in the form of increased capacity in the workforce

Organisational value

- Measuring avoidable contact provides a major learning opportunity for us in providing insight
- Training and developing staff to record/report NI 14 can result in staff being more engaged and empowered
- Can help demonstrate to other parts of the council the contribution made by the York Customer Centre and encourage a whole council approach to improvement

Customer Value

- Can help identify improvements in processes and systems that will have the greatest impact on the way in which customers experience services
- Will save customers time and effort in contacting the council
- Improve the customers experience of end to end service delivery and recorded customer satisfaction
- Improvements in communications, access channels and service design that benefits those customers who find it most difficult to deal with complex bureaucracies

Political Value

- Enhance the reputation and trustworthiness of the council with the local community
- Improve communications to ensure we better reach people who are eligible for services and benefits

7. Timeline for implementation of NI 14 recording and reporting

When	What
July 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy Programme Board approval for implementation/action plan• Update Performance Officer Group
August 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CMT approval for implementation plan, inclusion into corporate dashboard, reporting schedule• Complete EIA and follow up actions arising where required
September 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise council wide awareness• Publicise• Training for managers/staff in Year 1 service areas
October 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councils expected to have mechanisms in place for data collection to begin
November 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• review recording and reporting mechanisms and amend where needed
1 st April 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• complete report for Oct 08 to March 09;• include in Corporate Performance Management annual report• report to Cabinet Office/IDeA/esd toolkit data interchange hub/Audit Commission

8. Timeline for rollout across service areas

	NI 14 definition key service area	Part of Easy Programme
Year 1 (October 2008 to March 2009)	Highways (conditions of roads, street lighting)	Yes
	Housing (benefit claims, council tax benefit)	Yes
	Street Scene – waste collection and street cleaning, including recycling, street furniture and fly tipping)	Yes
	Environmental Health Services (pest control)	Yes
Year 2 April 2009 to March 2010	Childrens Services (school admissions, free school meals, youth services)	Advice & Information / Referral only
	Housing (repairs allocations and lettings process for social housing)	Yes
	General council tax enquiries	Yes
	Planning Services	Yes but further work required
	Adult Social Services	Advice & Information / Referral only
	Parking Permits and Parking Control Notices	Yes
Year 3 April 2010 to March 2011	Childrens Services (school admissions, free school meals, youth services)	No
	Trading Standards	No
	Electoral register	No

Customer Service Excellence – ongoing service improvements

The council proposes to be judged on how well it is progressing by assessing progress against the Governments Customer Service Excellence standard. A summary of these is shown below: -

Criterion 1 – Customer Insight

1. Customer Identification

- We have an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of our current and potential customer groups based on recent and reliable information
- We have developed customer insight about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences
- We make particular efforts to identify hard to reach and disadvantaged groups and individuals and have developed our services in response to their specific needs.

2. Engagement and Consultation

- We have a strategy for engaging and involving customers using a range of methods appropriate to the needs of identified customer groups.
- We have made the consultation of customers integral to continually improving our service and we advise customers of the results and action taken.
- We regularly review our strategies and opportunities for consulting and engaging with customers to ensure that the methods used are effective and provide reliable and representative results.

3. Customer Satisfaction

- We use reliable and accurate methods to measure customer satisfaction on a regular basis
- We analyse and publicise satisfaction levels for the full range of customers for all main areas of our service and we have improved services as a result.
- We include in our measurement of satisfaction specific questions relating to key areas including those on deliver, timeliness, information, access and the quality of customer service, as well as specific questions, which are informed by customer insight.
- We set challenging and stretching targets for customer satisfaction and our levels are improving.
- We have made positive changes to services as a result of analysing customer experience, including improved customer journeys.

Criterion 2 - The culture of the organisation

1. Leadership, Policy and Culture

- There is corporate commitment to putting the customer at the heart of service delivery and leaders in our organisation actively support this and advocate for customers.
- We use customer insight to inform policy and strategy and to prioritise service improvement activity.
- We have policies and procedures that support the right of all customers to expect excellent levels of service.
- We ensure that all customers and customer groups are treated fairly and this is confirmed by feedback and the measurement of customer experience.
- We protect customers' privacy both in face-to-face discussions and in the transfer and storage of customer information.
- We empower and encourage all employees to actively promote and participate in the customer-focused culture of our organisation.

2. Staff professionalism and attitude

- We can demonstrate our commitment to developing and delivering customer focused services through our recruitment, training and development policies for staff.
- Our staff are polite and friendly to customers and have an understanding of customer needs.
- We prioritise customer focus at all levels of our organisation and evaluate individual and team commitment through the performance management system.
- We can demonstrate how customer facing staffs insight and experience are incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning.
- We value the contribution our staff make to delivering customer focused services, and leaders, managers and staff demonstrate these behaviours.

Criterion 3 – Information and Access

1. Range of information

- We make information available about the full range of services we provided available to our customers and potential customers, including how and when people can contact us, how our services are run and who is in charge.
- Where there is a charge for services, we tell our customer how much they will have to pay.

2. Quality of information

- We provide our customers with the information they need in ways that meet their needs and preferences, using a variety of appropriate channels.
- We take reasonable steps to make sure our customers have received and understood the information we provide.
- We have improved the range content and quality of verbal, published and web based information we provide to ensure it is relevant and meets the needs of customers.
- We can demonstrate that information we provide to our customers is accurate and complete, and that, when this is not the case we advise customers when they will receive the information they requested.

3. Access

- We make our services easily accessible to all customers through the provision of a range of alternative channels.
- We evaluate how customers interact with the organisation through access channels and we use this information to identify possible service improvements and offer better choices.
- We ensure that where customers can visit our premises in person, facilities are as clean and comfortable as possible.

4. Co-operative working with other providers, partners and communities

- We have made arrangements with other providers and partners to offer and supply coordinated services and these arrangements have demonstrable benefits for our customers.
- We have developed coordinated working arrangements with our partners that ensure customers have clear lines of accountability for quality of service.
- We interact within wider communities and we can demonstrate the ways in which we support those communities.

Criterion 4 – Delivery

1. Delivery Standards

- We have challenging standards for our main services, which take account of our responsibility for delivering national and statutory standards and targets.
- We monitor and meet our standards and key departmental and performance targets, and we tell our customers about our performance.
- We consult and involve customers, citizens, partners and staff on the setting, reviewing and raising of our local standards.

2. Achieved delivery and outcomes

- We agree with our customers at the outset what they can expect from the service we provide.
- We can demonstrate that we deliver the service we promised to individual customers and that outcomes are positive for the majority of our customers.
- We can demonstrate that we benchmark our performance against that of similar or complementary organisations and have used that information to improve our service.
- We have developed and learned from best practice identified within and outside our organisation, and we publish our examples externally where appropriate.

3. Deal effectively with problems

- We identify any dips in performance against our standards and explain these to customers together with action we are taking to put things right and prevent further recurrence.
- We have an easy to use complaints procedure, which includes a commitment to deal with problems fully and solve them wherever possible within a reasonable time limit.
- We give staff training and guidance to handle complaints and to investigate them objectively and we can demonstrate that we empower staff to put things right.
- We learn from any mistakes we make by identifying patterns in formal and informal complaints and comments from customers and use this information to improve services and publicise where action taken.
- We regularly review and improve our complaints procedure taking account of the views of customers, complainants and staff.
- We ensure that the outcome of the complaints process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them

Criterion 5 – Timeliness and quality of service

1. Standards for timeliness and quality

- We set appropriate and measurable standards for the timeliness of response for all forms of customer contact including phone calls, letters, e-communications and personal callers.
- We set comprehensive standards for all aspects of the quality of customer service to be expected in all dealings with our organisation.

2. Timely outcomes

- We advise customers and potential customers about our promises on timeliness and quality of customer service.

- We identify individual customer needs at the first point of contact with us and ensure that an appropriate person who can address the reason for contact deals with the customer.
- We promptly share customer information with colleagues and partners within our organisation whenever appropriate and can demonstrate how this has reduced unnecessary contact for customers.
- Where service is not completed at the first point of contact we discuss with the customer the next steps and indicate the likely overall time to achieve outcomes.
- We respond to initial enquiries promptly, and if there is a delay we advise the customer and take action to rectify the problem.

3. Achieved timely delivery

- We monitor our performance against standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we take action if problems are identified.
- We are meeting our current standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we publicise our performance against these standards.
- Our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of customer service compares well with that of similar organisations.

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Executive Member for Corporate Services and Advisory Panel

21st October 2008

Report of the Director of Resources

National Non-Domestic Rates/Sundry Debtors/Council Tax And Overpaid Housing Benefit and Car Park Charges Accounts Submitted For Write-Off

Summary

1. This report provides Members with details of the value of irrecoverable accounts under £2,000 that have been written off under delegated authority in the current financial year. These accounts are for NNDR, Sundry Debts, Council Tax, Housing Benefit Overpayments and irrecoverable Car Park charges.
2. This submission does not include any accounts that are over £2,000 which require Member approval to write-off.
3. This is the first submission of write-offs for 2008/09 by the Head of Finance, in line with arrangements to report on a regular basis, in order to keep accounts more up to date. The Executive Member for Corporate Services approved the last report on 18th March 2008
4. Cases where the debt is under £2,000 have been written off under the delegated authority given to the Head of Finance, debts identified as irrecoverable this year are as follows (amounts rounded). The 'year to date' figures refer to amounts written off under delegated authority since April 2008.

Fund	Year to Date £	This submission (Cases under £2000)	This submission (Cases over £2000)	Total in 07/08 £	Value of Bills Raised in 2008/09 £
National Non-Domestic Rates	41,748	41,748	Nil	41,748	85.1m
Sundry Debtors	17,178	17,178	Nil	17,178	22.7m

Council Tax	249,158	249,158	Nil	249,158	78.5m
Overpaid Housing Benefit	49,782	49,782	Nil	49,782	0.32m
Car-Park Charges	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	0.21m
Overall Total	357,866	357,866	0.00	357,866	186.8m

Background

- 5 Since April 1990 the rates levied on all non-domestic properties have been set nationally and all monies collected are paid into the National Pool.
- 6 The amounts written-off for NNDR are offset against contributions to the Pool and, as such, all sums written off are met by Central Government rather than by local Council Tax payers.
- 7 Sundry Debtor charges are raised for goods and services that have been provided by the individual departments within the Authority. These charges include such services as commercial waste collection, shop rents, works carried out by Neighbourhood Services, housing repairs, homecare and warden call.
- 8 Housing Benefit overpayments occur when a customer receives more benefit than they are legally entitled to. The main reason why these occur is usually due to a failure by customers to report changes in their circumstances (whether fraudulent or otherwise). When it is not possible to recover the overpayment by reducing future payments of benefit, the customer is sent an invoice for payment.
- 9 Car Park charges are issued for car parking infringements. This has not been reported in the past as no write off's have been made to date.
- 10 During the process of collection of all debts, it is apparent to Managers within Financial Services that, for a number of reasons, particular debts will not be honoured by the debtor concerned. These debts become irrecoverable and must be considered for write-off to allow prudent management of the debt portfolio.
- 11 Members have given delegated authority to the Head of Finance to write-off debts up to a maximum value of £2,000 per debt. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the amount written off by the Head of Finance under delegated authority.

Consultation

12 Not relevant to this report.

Options

13 To advise Members of the amount of £357,866 that has been written off to September 2008 as shown in para. 4.

14 No amounts require the approval as there are no individual debts in this report that total over £2,000.

Analysis

15 The very nature of debt recovery inherently involves the identification of debts that will not be paid and a recognition that such debts become irrecoverable and must be written off. As illustrated above there are a number of reasons why debts become irrecoverable and are written off.

16 Financial regulations and prudent financial management dictate that provision for bad debts is made in the Council's accounts. The following provision has been made in the Council's accounts in 2008/09 (rounded to the nearest '000):

	£k
NNDR	1,440
Sundry Debtors	448
Council Tax	2,957
Poll Tax	2
Overpaid HB	1,798

Corporate Priorities

17 The Corporate Priority relevant to this report is to 'Improve efficiency and reduce waste to free-up more resources' It would be counter productive to use Officer's time to try and recover debts that we are aware are irrecoverable. It is more efficient to utilise Officer resources in pursuing debts that are recoverable.

Implications

Financial

18 The values for write off this financial year fall well within the bad debt provision (para. 30)

19 There are no HR, Equality, Legal, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology or Property implications

Risk Management

20 Not relevant to this report

Recommendations

21 To advise the Executive Member to note the amount of £357,866 (shown in para. 4) of accounts valued at less than £2,000 written off in the 2007/08 financial year under the Head of Finance's delegated authority.

Reason: For information and to enable the Executive Member to monitor action taken under delegated powers.

Contact Details

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Ian Floyd
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**Report
Approved**



Date 4th October 2008

Specialist Implications Officer(s) Head of Finance

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers

Files can be found at the Local Taxation Section and Customer Accounts Section City Finance Centre Library Square.



Executive Member for Corporate Services and Advisory Panel

21st October 2008

Report of the Director of Resources

UPDATE ON GERSHON EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

Summary

1. This report is for information only and gives an update on progress against the Gershon efficiency targets in the light of the final 2007/08 outturn.

Background

2. The Gershon efficiency agenda was a three-year national programme aimed at delivering a cumulative £6.45 billion of savings within local government by the end of 2007/08. These savings were, in theory, available for investment in front-line services although, in reality, they were needed to balance budgets and to try to minimise council tax increases. Each local authority was challenged to try to achieve 2.5% of savings per annum from a base-line figure set in 2004/05. The base-line excluded education expenditure which was subject to separate targets within the Department for Children, Schools and families (DCSF).
3. At least half of the annual efficiencies had to be cashable, i.e. there was a real monetary saving which could be re-directed elsewhere by the Council. The remainder could be non-cashable, i.e. savings did not arise because of lower costs but because of improved performance:- e.g. an improvement in the time taken to process new benefit claimants with no increase in costs. Savings had to be on-going for the whole three-year period of the programme. One-off savings were not allowable.
4. The Council's efficiency savings are reported to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) three times per year:-
 - a) a forward looking forecast for the coming year (April)
 - b) a mid-year update (November)
 - c) a backward looking out-turn report with actual savings made in-year (July)

Consultation

5. This section is not applicable.

Options

- This report is for information only and members are not asked to take a decision.

Analysis

Methodology

- The approach for identifying efficiencies started with a review of the savings accepted as part of the annual budget. Each of these cashable savings was assessed against the criteria given by government to identify efficiencies and those which resulted in either a cut or deterioration in service were excluded. These savings were then circulated to the relevant council departments to ensure that they could be classified as efficiency savings. Further reviews took place mid-year and at year-end to confirm that all, or some, of the savings reported were achieved.
- In addition to the cashable efficiencies identified above, improving performance indicators were used to identify non-cashable efficiencies, against which a monetary value could be calculated.
- The final savings reported in the Backward Look had to be linked to Quality Cross Checks (Performance Indicators) to ensure that Council performance had not deteriorated because of the savings made. If a performance indicator linked to a saving deteriorated over the 3 year programme the saving had to be removed.
- Each return to the DCLG had to be reviewed and approved by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Director of Resources before submission.

Final Outturn

- 2007/08 was the final year of the 3 year Gershon programme. The table below details the final position.

£000's	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Total
Cumulative Target	2,587	5,871	8,806	8,806
Cashable	3,749	6,795	9,636	9,636
Non-Cashable	1,035	1,306	1,306	1,306
Total Achieved	4,784	8,101	10,942	10,942
Over Achievement	2,197	2,230	2,136	2,136

Note: In recognition of the fact that local authorities were already embracing efficiencies to balance budgets the government allowed 2004/05 efficiencies to count towards the 2005/06 target.

The Council has successfully achieved its 3 year target of £8.8m, with additional efficiencies of £2.136m being found. The final return has been submitted to DCLG and will be subject to a broad brush audit as part of the Audit Commission's value for money review.

12. DCLG has stated that any cashable efficiencies, over and above our 3 year target can be carried forward to meet the challenge of the national efficiency programme for the period 2008-09 – 2010/11, when councils have been challenged to find 3% net cashable efficiency gains per annum. York is therefore entitled to carry forward £830k towards its 2008/09 efficiency target of £4.2m.

The Efficiency Review Programme

13. The Council is working towards a more formalised and structured way of managing the efficiency agenda. Council has approved the release of £1m from the General Reserve for an invest to save fund to pump prime efficiency projects. Also a procurement process is currently underway to appoint a private sector partner to work with the council and bring in additional capacity and skills to drive through efficiency savings. The procurement process is looking for potential suppliers who are prepared to take the risk of non delivery of the savings by paying back a proportion of their fees should the required level of savings not be made. The successful partner should starting working on this agenda in January 2009. It is hoped that a managed programme will mean efficiencies and related cashable savings will significantly contribute to the annual budget savings target and maintain a good CPA score.

The current efficiency climate

14. Senior Government officials and commentators are concerned that as the 'Gershon programme has come to an end there could be a lack of focus on achieving further efficiencies even though the target has become tougher. Recent comments from Sir Peter Gershon and the Audit Commission are included below.

'There is still scope for significant efficiencies in the public sector. If we look at the gains, then they were about issues such as better procurement. But the gains from now on will be made through the re-engineering of business processes. And this is much harder.'

An Audit Commission report this week, Back to front, supported his comments by warning that further savings would require 'a strategic and long-term, transformational, back-to-front approach, delivered in a tight economic climate.'

It added that to make the savings so far, 'changes at senior level were necessary for some councils, to unblock obstacles to efficiency gains.'

15. The council is taking positive steps to ensure that it continues to review its operations to ensure they are performing as efficiently as possible and will strive to meet the harder efficiency targets.

Corporate Priorities

16. The Efficiency Agenda plays an important role in achieving the corporate priority of improving our organisational effectiveness, specifically
- Improve our focus on the need of customers and residents in designing and providing services
 - Improve the way the Council and its partners work together to deliver better services for the people who live in York
 - Improve efficiency and reduce waste to free-up more resources.

The Director of Resources is the Council's efficiency champion and is leading on the approach required to ensure further efficiencies are delivered

Implications

- **Financial**
Failure to achieve the Gershon Efficiency Targets could have a detrimental effect on York's Comprehensive Performance Assessment for Use of Resources and on its budgetary position.
- **Human Resources (HR)**
There are no implications
- **Equalities**
There are no implications
- **Legal**
There are no implications
- **Crime and Disorder**
There are no implications
- **Information Technology (IT)**
There are no implications
- **Property**
There are no implications
- **Other**
There are no implications

Risk Management

17. Because this report is for information only, there are no risks attached to any decision to be made. There is a risk associated with the non-achievement of York's efficiency target, namely the potential for a detrimental score in the Council's CPA for Use of Resources. To avoid this it is essential that the

Council continues to pursue efficiencies and can clearly show how they are captured and measured.

Recommendations

18. Members are asked to recommend that the Executive Member:-

- 1) Notes the progress against the Gershon efficiency targets and the steps being taken to ensure that the council achieves the harder targets.

Reason: For information

Contact Details

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Simon Wiles
Director of Resources

Report Approved **Date** *Insert Date*

Report Approved

Specialist Implications Officer(s) None

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

None

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