
REPORT TO:	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM:	6
DATE OF MEETING:	18 September 2006	CATEGORY:	DELEGATED/ RECOMMENDED OPEN/EXEMPT
REPORT FROM:	Director of Corporate Services	PARAGRAPH NO:	
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Jayne Jones (595800)	DOC:	
SUBJECT:	Service Standards	REF: FM11	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE:	

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee are requested to comment and make recommendations to the Policy Committees on the framework and process outlined in this report.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 As part of their ongoing work programme, the committee have requested to be consulted on the process and framework for establishing the Council's Service Standards.

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 As part of the Higher Quality Services Theme of the Council's new Corporate Plan there is an action for 2006/7 to 'plan and establish Service Standards, in consultation with service users across all service areas'. Further, '**More efficient customer focussed services**' is one of the three main areas that the Council wishes to concentrate on first.
- 3.2 In addition, there is an Improvement Plan action to progress Charter Mark for Council services with a target to achieve accreditation for Environmental Services in 2006/7.
- 3.3 The overall aim of these initiatives is to improve access to information and Council Services for local people and through the process to improve efficiency and ultimately, customer satisfaction. This is a key element of a future CPA assessment.

4.0 Detail

Customer Service Code of Practice and Standards

- 4.1 A generic 'Customer Service Code Of Practice and Standards' was approved by Finance and Management Committee on 22nd June 2006. This is attached at **Appendix A**. The document sets standards for:

- The telephone
- Written communication
- Face to Face
- Customer Feedback

4.2 It was agreed that establishing such standards was a key action in delivering the Council's priority of *'more efficient customer focussed services'*.

4.3 Setting standards such as these improves access to information for local people and informs all stakeholders about the work of the Council. In addition, they enable performance to be managed and improved including customer perceptions.

Service Standards for All Services

4.4 In addition to the generic customer service standards approved as above, as part of the Higher Quality Services Theme of the Council's new Corporate Plan there is an action for 2006/7 to 'plan and establish Service Standards, in consultation with service users across all service areas'. Further, ***'More efficient customer focussed services'*** is one of the three main areas that the Council wishes to concentrate on first as part of its overall vision.

4.5 Also, to develop the customer experience further, there is an Improvement Plan action to progress Charter Mark for Council services with a target to achieve accreditation for Environmental Services during 2006/7.

4.6 The overall aim of these initiatives is to improve access to information and Council Services for local people by being:

- accountable and open
- to learn from feedback
- assist in the culture of continuous improvement

and, through this process to improve efficiency and ultimately, customer satisfaction. This is a key element of any future CPA assessment.

Framework

4.7 For consistency, it is recommended that a similar booklet is used for all services which forms part of a range of 5 booklets covering the following key services:

- Environmental
- Benefits and Taxes
- Housing
- Planning and Building Control
- Leisure and Community

4.8 The above list can be extended and changed over time to ensure it is up to date and covers all services, including internal service providers.

4.9 The standards are being established in accordance with the ambitions and priorities of the new corporate plan and within current resources.

4.10 The standards will be a mix of national standards such as BVPI'S and local standards that, wherever possible, are subject to benchmarking with other organisations to ensure they are realistic and challenging. All of them will be monitored on a quarterly basis and reported to the various Policy Committees as part of the usual Performance Management Reports.

4.11 The standard contents of the booklets will provide the following information:

- A copy of the generic customer service standards (Appendix A)
- A contents page
- Introduction (What can these services do for you?/key facts)
- Web site address including performance updates
- A brief description of the service, with relevant telephone no's etc
- Standards of Service clearly identified.

An example is attached at **Appendix A**, which is the first one to be completed and relates to Environmental Services.

4.12 In accordance with best practice, the booklets are recommended to be similar in design, within corporate colours, including logo, name of service, web site, relevant photos, other languages etc. Inside the booklet, the Council's vision will be reproduced together with details of our compliments/comments/complaints procedure. An example is attached at **Appendix C** (a colour version will be distributed at the meeting).

4.13 The booklets will be available in reception, libraries, our web site and to any person or organisation that requests a copy.

Consultation

4.14 Consultation on the framework to date includes the following:

- Relevant staff
- Charter Mark advisor
- This committee

In addition to the above the following is recommended:

- Consultation to ensure plain English (examples will be given at the meeting)
- consultation/approval from the relevant policy committees
- Ongoing consultation following the launch of the leaflets by inviting feedback from users of the services and readers of the booklet.

4.15 Meetings have taken place with the Charter Mark lead assessor who has considered the general format and details of the Environmental Services brochure and who has been very complimentary about the process and content. All suggestions from him have been taken on board. This is a major element in satisfying the Chartermark standard in Public Service Excellence.

4.16 A significant amount of consultation has been undertaken with all stakeholders in bringing together the new corporate plan. Certainly local people, service users, partners, voluntary organisations and parishes have been included in the future

design and delivery of Council Services, in particular those areas that are considered to be a priority for the Council to deliver. The standards have been completed with these in mind and within current resources. At this stage it is therefore not recommended that we consult externally and formally on every standard within every service, but that the future consultation of these standards becomes an integral part of the Council's consultation strategy.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 None.

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 The standards outlined provide consistency of service delivery in key areas and will improve performance, accountability and openness. This will have a positive effect on any VFM/CPA assessment.

7.0 Community Implications

7.1 The community will benefit from clear descriptions of services and related standards and will know what to expect and comment upon.

8.0 Conclusions

8.1 We have made a significant investment in Customer 1st and now need to ensure we deliver a consistent level of service to all users of our services. Service Standards will help us deliver the Council's vision and priorities.

9.0 Background Papers

9.1 Finance & Management Report 22nd June 2006.

9.2 Consultation Strategy.