

Best Value Review of Customer Care

Report of the Review Team

October 2002

## **Executive Summary**

This report sets out the key findings of the cross cutting Best Value Review of Customer care undertaken from February to October 2002. The review has resulted in a fundamental change in the Council's approach to customer care and a major reorganisation of services is taking place to ensure customer services staff focus their efforts on the public. The report also addresses the need to change the culture of the organisation to embrace quality standards for customer care and recommends a customer care code and strategy are launched in 2003.

The first two sections of the report provide the context and background for the review including initial weaknesses identified by staff and the review team.

Section three sought to compare customer care in East Cambridgeshire District Council with similar local authorities and the private sector. It concluded that the Council is similar to most other authorities in its family group but could learn from best practice from them and the private sector experience of the John Lewis Partnership, Hereward Housing Association and Barclays Bank.

Section four summarises the consultation undertaken with a wide range of customers. This work established that generally customer care is of a high standard in the organisation but that the introduction of quality standards would ensure this is the case in the future.

In section five the review team set out the options open to the Council to challenge why and how it carries out customer care. This section identifies a number of options and concludes that the Council is well placed to take advantage of local developments such as the Cambridgeshire County Council call centre, Cambridgeshire Direct, as well as an initiative to set up a multi-authority one-stop-shop in Newmarket.

Finally, section six outlines the main improvement options that result from the review. These are set out in more detail in the Best value Improvement Plan at the conclusion of the document (appendix i).

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

This review has been carried out as part of the District Council's five year Best Value Review Programme which seeks to secure 'continuous improvement' in services delivered by the Council.

This review is the second cross cutting corporate review following the Best Value Review of Grants in 2001.

### 1.2 Review Team

There are ten members of the review team.

Councillor James Coppola

Councillor Fiona McKay-Rae

Councillor Liz Garner

Cecilia Tredget - Deputy Chief Executive

Alex Colyer - Executive Director Finance

Nigel McCurdy - Principal Development Control Officer

Kathy Tuffs - Principal Human Resources Officer

Simon Fraser - Corporate Strategy Officer

Eleanor White - Customer Services/WP Supervisor

David Elliott - Assistant Director, Cambridgeshire County Council

Louise Duffield – UNISON

### 1.3 Timetable

The following timetable ensured that the outcomes of the review can be fed into the relevant service plans and draft budget for 2003/04.

30 <sup>th</sup> January 2002	Initial meeting of review team	
26 <sup>th</sup> February 2002	2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting of review team	Stage One Report
27 <sup>th</sup> March 2002	Policy and Resources Committee	
8 <sup>th</sup> July 2002	3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting of review team	
22 <sup>nd</sup> August 2002	4 <sup>th</sup> meeting of review team	Stage Two Report
5 <sup>th</sup> September 2002	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
9 <sup>th</sup> October 2002	5 <sup>th</sup> meeting of review team	
30 <sup>th</sup> October 2002	Policy and Resources Committee	Stage Three (final) report
27 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2002	Personnel Committee	Personnel Implications

## 1.4 Terms of Reference

The initial terms of reference were agreed at Policy and Resources in February 2002 and include all Council activities that involve interaction with the public as well as the services provided to internal customers by the Customer Services Team.

### *Activities included in the Review*

- (i) Reception
  - General enquiries
  - Council tax and benefit enquiries
  - Social Services reception
  - Room bookings
- (ii) Planning Reception
  - Public copies of plans
  - Photocopying of plans, dyeline prints and mapping.
- (iii) Telephone
  - Switchboard
  - External enquiries
  - Individual extensions
- (iv) Post Room
  - Internal and external mail
  - Hand deliveries
  - DX
- (v) Refreshments
  - Provided for all meetings with minimum number of six
- (vi) Word Processing
  - For most departments
- (vii) Cashiers
  - Cash transactions at cash desk
  - Associated tasks
- (viii) Out of Hours Service
  - Responding to out of hours calls from the public 5pm to 8.45am and weekends.
- (ix) Complaints
  - Investigate complaints to Chief Executive
  - Monitor all serious complaints
- (x) Other Public Contact
  - Interviews with public
  - Site visits, inspections etc.

The terms of reference did not include customer service at the TIC or by contractors ie Leisure Connection, Capita and Cleanaway.

## 1.5 Aims of the review

The aims are to carry out a fundamental review of customer care by applying the 4 Cs of best value : compare, consult, challenge and compete.

**Compare:** to compare the Council's customer care services to those of similar local authorities identified in the CIPFA family group and by neighbouring authorities as well as with best practice in the private sector.

**Consult:** to seek the views of a wide range and representative group of customers, including the public, staff and Members of the Council by utilising a range of different survey methods.

**Challenge:** to question why the Council delivers the services in the way it does and whether it could be done differently or by another body.

**Compete:** to explore options for how customer care services could be improved by delivering it in new or different ways.

## 1.6 Initial problems identified by the review team

The key problems identified by the review team and staff were:-

- Access - including planning reception, the needs of hard-to-reach groups (ie disabled) and the rural nature of the district. This also includes the hours of opening and e-government targets.
- Quality standards - lack of clear targets for quality service delivery across the Authority including telephone, as well as personal callers.
- Communication - the need to improve internal and external communication.

Other issues include:-

- "Cambridgeshire Direct", contact centre and the potential opportunities it may provide to meet customer expectations and e-government targets.
- A one-stop shop service combining planning with the current reception.
- Separating the front-of-house and back room support activities.

## 2.0 Description of Service

### 2.1 Links to corporate objectives

The Council has 16 corporate objectives and due to the cross cutting nature of the review it links to 8 of them:-

- 2.2 To create a safer environment where people can live and work free from crime and the fear of crime.
  - 3.2 To foster a unified, participating and informed community.
  - 4.1 To invest and motivate our staff to maximise their knowledge, skills, commitment and morale.
  - 4.2 To promote accessible, speedy and open decision making conducted to the highest standards of probity.
  - 4.3 To promote equal access to service delivery through the activities of licensing, regulation and enforcement under a variety of legislation intended to safeguard the rights of the individual and to protect public health and the environment.
  - 4.4 To promote equal opportunity in the employment of staff and the delivery of services.
  - 5.2 To improve access to information and services, through the effective use of IT within local communities.
  - 5.3 To ensure the Council and its staff take full advantage of IT to provide better and more efficient services.
- ### 2.2 Cost of Service

The direct costs of providing the main reception and cashiers service are shown in the table below:

Expenditure	2001/02
Customer Services	231,273
Cashiers	50,520
Out-of-hours service	7,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>288,973</b>
Income	2001/02
Social Services	2,200
Capita	37,186
<b>Total</b>	<b>39,386</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>249,407</b>

It has not been possible to provide the indirect costs of providing customer care, as it is integral to almost every service the Council provides.

## 2.3 Performance Indicators

No specific Best Value Performance Indicators exist for this area, apart from the general satisfaction performance indicators collected every three years outlined below.

<b>BVPI</b>		<b>2000/01 ACTUAL</b>	<b>Target 2003/04</b>
BV3	The percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by their authority	68%	70%
BV111	Percentage of planning applicants satisfied with the service received.	75%	80%
BV4	The percentage of those making complaints satisfied with the handling of those complaints	33%	38%
BV80	User satisfaction covering issues of accessibility, staffing issues (helpfulness etc) and communication/information (understandability etc) % of Benefits claimants satisfied with the service overall	85%	87%
BV89	Percentage of people satisfied with cleanliness standards	70%	90%
BV90 (a)	Percentage of people expressing satisfaction with recycling facilities	65%	95%
(b)	Percentage of people expressing satisfaction with household waste collection	87%	95%

## 3.0 Compare

### 3.1 Introduction

The terms of reference for this element of the review (included in appendix (ii)) include comparisons with similar authorities in the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants) family group and in the local area as well as process benchmarking with private sector organisations.

### 3.2 Comparisons with other Local Authorities

3.2.1 A questionnaire was sent to 24 authorities and an analysis was undertaken of 13 completed responses. The response rate was high for a survey of this kind and a summary of the results is provided below. A full copy of the results is also included in appendix (ii).

#### 3.2.2 Reception

Overall, the comparison data showed that East Cambridgeshire has the lowest number of callers (60 per day) the next is South Shropshire with 68. Further research showed that those with the most callers (Malvern Hills - 722, Huntingdonshire - 200, Cambridge City - 162) either still have management of their own housing stock which generates more callers and/or are based in a large town or city.

East Cambridgeshire (6 FTE) appear to have a larger staff complement (most authorities have between 2-5 Full Time Equivalent) but have wider duties. For example, no other respondents reported carrying out the housing benefit duties to verify claims as we do in this Council. This work is part of the verification framework introduced to reduce benefit fraud. Previously claimants could produce photocopies of evidence for a claim (ie rent books, bank statements, wage slips etc). People are now required to produce the primary evidence and reception staff help claimants complete forms and verify all documents before photocopying for submission with claims. The average number of callers per week is 60-100. Currently, claimants are interviewed at the front reception desk or in a private interview room. Generally, reception staff are paid towards the lower end of the scale compared to other authorities.

#### 3.2.3 Word Processing

Only 2 other Councils reported having a word processing centre.

#### 3.2.4 Telephones

Most Councils provide the same service as we do at East Cambridgeshire.

#### 3.2.5 Post

The responses showed that there is no uniform way of managing post. Interestingly, Cambridge City decided to separate the post service from the reception and switchboard service, following their best value review.

### 3.2.6 Cashiers

The survey showed that East Cambridgeshire carries out a similar cashier's service to other districts. Only one authority, West Lindsey, operates a cashier's service by a private sector partner, Capita.

### 3.2.7 Out of Hours

All but one respondent operates this kind of service but different methods were identified. In Shropshire, many of the districts operate together with their County Council, Forest of Dean use a private contractor and Huntingdonshire have linked their service to their CCTV control room.

### 3.2.8 Standards and Performance Indicators

Surprisingly only 3 out of the 13 authorities have a customer care code or standard but most appear to be developing one as part of their best value process. Performance Indicators also appear to be underdeveloped in this area.

### 3.2.9 Access

In terms of physical access East Cambridgeshire fares well against the other authorities. However, the exception to this is planning reception. In the Best Value Inspection of Development Control in March 2002 the Inspectors found:-

'Uninviting and difficult access to the planning reception area ..... disabled customers have to be seen at the main reception' and there are no disabled facilities or no facilities for payment at the planning reception.'

Cambridge City appear to have developed comprehensive services to improve access and might provide further useful information to improve services. Like most authorities East Cambridgeshire employ a telephone interpreting service for people where English is not their first language.

### 3.2.10 Future Plans

Only one district operates a Call Centre/Contact Centre but most report that they will be considering this over the next 3 years.

## 3.3 Comparison with the Private Sector

### 3.3.1 Waitrose (John Lewis Partnership)

The interview with the Manager of Waitrose, Ely proved very fruitful and identified two areas that could assist the Council in improving customer care. These 2 areas are:

- (i) communication and the role of Partners
- (ii) competency based performance management.

## Communication

The role of Partners within the John Lewis Partnership is unique. All full time staff are Partners and as such share in the profitability of the company. Similarly, they participate in the decision making and there is a strong framework for communication up and down the organisation. Partners on the "shop floor" have direct access to the Chairman of John Lewis Partnership's representative at a quarterly meeting for example.

## Competency Based Performance Management

Their other great strength is training and evaluation surrounding the performance management scheme for all staff. Every member of staff has to demonstrate key competencies focussed on customer care. Staff are monitored and regularly evaluated and this is fed back to branch headquarters. Individual training programmes involving CD Roms etc are used as a matter of course by all staff. This system has allowed John Lewis Partnership to achieve consistently high levels of customer care and customer satisfaction.

### 3.3.2 Hereward Housing Association (HHA)

Hereward Housing Association was established in 1993 following the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of the Council's housing stock. An interview took place with the Director of Housing which provided useful information on how they intend to re-model their customer services.

The drivers for change at HHA are the need to provide more comprehensive streamlined services to customers who are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their expectations. The change involves a new customer services team bringing key staff into a customer service centre equipped to deal with 80% of enquiries. This will ensure that tenants receive a joined up responsive service but importantly frees up the time of housing officers to deal with more complex and pro active work with their tenants.

The changes to the service will be implemented in advance of the introduction of new technology so that the experience of the new way of working will guide them in the introduction of a new IT system.

### 3.3.3 Barclays Bank

The interview with staff from Barclays Banks focused on four key areas:-

#### (i) Customer care quality assurance

Barclays employ different methods to ensure high quality in this area including service level agreements between departments, customer surveys, quality standards and well as logging and investigating patterns of customer complaints.

(ii) Innovative ideas

Barclays have a set of 'behaviours' all staff are required to demonstrate. The company invests heavily in training staff in the behaviours and their new brand, and use launch events initially to motivate and train staff and 'experience' the new brand. This has resulted in 70,000 staff attending events such as 'The Big Day' or 'SMART Move'.

(iii) Organisation

Currently, there are approximately 40% of customer service staff in call centres. The remaining staff are located locally.

(iv) Staff training and motivation

Barclays use world class management methods to train staff and use the behaviours described above to provide leadership in the workplace.

### 3.4 Conclusions

The comparison with other authorities provided some useful information and overall illustrated that in terms of the respondents, East Cambridgeshire does not differ enormously from other authorities of a similar size. The significant deviation is the verification framework and that the Council is unique in separating this function from the Housing Benefit department.

The process benchmarking carried out with Waitrose, Hereward Housing Association and Barclays provided some useful information in shaping the Council's future approach to customer care. John Lewis Partnership is uniquely customer and staff focussed and emphasises the strong link between well motivated rewarded staff and high customer satisfaction. Hereward Housing Association is becoming increasingly customer focussed in response to the changing demands of their tenants and is re-shaping their organisation to deliver joined-up services to meet these expectations and maintain their high levels of customer satisfaction. The innovative methods employed by Barclays Bank to motivate and sell their corporate objectives to staff could be replicated to a lesser extent in a launch day for a new customer care code. These are valuable lessons for the Council to learn and will be included in a comprehensive Customer Care Strategy for the Council.

## 4.0 Consult

### 4.1 Introduction

A sub-group comprising the Performance Review Officer and the Customer Services Supervisor conducted a range of consultation exercises during June, designed to give a snapshot of the customer experience when contacting the Council, as follows:

- Citizens Panel survey
- Mystery Shopping by Telephone
- Telephone Survey
- Letter Survey
- Face to face survey at the Rookery, Newmarket
- Face to face survey in Reception
- Site visit survey
- Out-of-hours survey
- Access Group consultation
- Staff survey

The results of those surveys conducted in-house are not necessarily statistically representative, but they raise issues for further consideration by the review team, and are complemented by a survey of the Citizens Panel conducted independently by BMG. Once improvement options are mooted, it is proposed that customers have a further opportunity to contribute via a focus group.

### 4.2 Summary of consultation

Across the range of surveys, the telephone is by far the most popular means of contacting the Council, although a significant minority prefer to deal with matters face to face. Many of those living in the south of the district said they would use a Newmarket office were one opened.

Whether over the phone or in person, the vast majority of customers and staff felt that the attitude of officers was good, responding promptly to enquiries and genuinely trying to help. Overall, the telephone manner of staff is good, but the content lacks consistency. The Council would benefit from an agreed standard with clear guidelines. In all 4% of calls were not answered in a reasonable time at the switchboard, and of 15 test calls to Capita's Blackburn office, 4 (27%) were engaged. This matter has been raised with Capita who have increased their capacity at Blackburn to deal with this demand. This situation is being closely monitored, however, by the Council.

The Citizens Panel and Rookery surveys asked customers to recall their last contact over the past year and 64% said they were satisfied. However, the surveys that covered recent contact scored very highly. Staff considered letter response times to be on the weak side, and suggested more administrative support to address this. Building Control customers praised the team's helpfulness but some would like more flexibility on appointment times, in order to fit in with building work schedules.

Staff would like to see the front desk and back office split with training to enable customer services officers to deal with more enquiries at first contact, and to put calls through to the correct department. Benefits customers should be given private

interview facilities every time and there should be sufficient staff to avoid queues at the front desk. Staff felt that more information could be provided about services, including on the website, along with greater opportunity for electronic transactions and form filling. Some felt Planning should move closer to Reception or have its own presence with trained officers on the front desk, along with Building Control.

A more detailed breakdown of the consultation is contained as part of appendix iii.

#### 4.3 Conclusions

Overall, the consultation demonstrated that there is a high standard of customer care across the authority but that this could be strengthened by a customer care standard to ensure a consistent approach. A customer care strategy concentrating on the implementation of the standard would also need to focus on key areas such as telephony, response to written communication and the introduction of electronic delivery of services. Access to services was identified as a priority for some people and further consideration needs to be given to developing services in the south of the district. In line with the recommendations of the Best Value Inspection of Development Control it was felt that a priority should be an improved planning reception at The Grange.

## 5.0 Compete and Challenge

### 5.1 Introduction.

The review requires the Council to challenge why it provides the service as well as evaluating different options for service delivery. At present, the front line services offering customer services (reception and cashiers) are delivered in-house, however, a significant proportion of the Council's other services are delivered in partnership with contractors, eg waste collection and recycling, benefit and revenues and leisure services. In order to establish the different options and complete the challenge element of the review the review team considered the options outlined in the Council's Competition Strategy (Nov 2000).

### 5.2 Options

The Council's competition strategy suggests 6 potential options for service delivery:-

- 1) Cease providing the service (the challenge element)
- 2) Outsourcing
- 3) In-house delivery and internal options
- 4) Public/Private partnership
- 5) Joint provision (with another authority or public body)
- 6) Creation of new markets and potential suppliers

#### Option One: Cease Providing Service

##### Factors to consider

- ◆ For the purpose of the review the 'challenge' element of the 4 Cs has been included as it asks 'why provide this service at all?'
- ◆ The cashier's service has been subject to a cost benefit analysis in November 2001, during the Council's Base Budget Review of the 2002/2005 budget. This analysis considered ceasing to provide a cashiers service and required current customers to pay cheques etc via the post office. The results demonstrated that because of the work undertaken to process 'back room' receipts (cheques received by post and other data inputting), it would not be cost effective to stop providing this function. Since then further 'back room' functions have been moved to cashiers making them an integrated part of the finance service.
- ◆ Another option would be to cease providing a front of house reception and require the public to access services remotely by phone or internet, however, this would not meet customer expectation and would make it difficult to meet members of the public in a secure and accessible environment. The reception service also provides reception services for the County Council Social Services and Capita, therefore making it difficult to remove this function.
- ◆ It would not be possible to cease to provide telephone access; it was estimated in the first survey of the Citizens' Panel that 70% of contact is conducted by telephone. The Out-of-Hours service provides a referral service

to members of the public and partners when the office is closed. This referral service covers all services; however, the only statutory service where the Council is required to provide this service is the homelessness function. The Compare exercise illustrated that the majority of Councils operate a similar service, however, a variety of service delivery options are employed and alternatives are examined in this report.

Future Action:-

- ◆ Examine alternative delivery mechanisms for the out-of-hours service.

Option two: - Out-Sourcing

Factors to consider:-

- ◆ The contractor delivering the Revenues Service has provided cashiers services elsewhere and had its own reception service in the past before the integrated main reception was introduced in 2000. At the time of re-negotiation of the contract it was not felt that outsourcing this service was cost effective and that the Council wanted to retain the cash receipting element of the revenues function within its control. An option would be to include the cashier's function in any future contract. The current contract has 5 years left to run.
- ◆ There are a number of options for out-sourcing the main reception function that need to be examined closely. The first would be to use an existing contractor such as Capita to provide this service. The alternative would be to enter into a partnership with the County Council to join the Cambridgeshire Direct project. Cambridgeshire Direct was set up by the County Council to deliver integrated customer services through a comprehensive set of delivery mechanisms. In brief its hub is a contact centre (call centre) where skilled operators resolve 80% of telephone or email enquiries. The scheme is in its infancy and the County Council is currently procuring the external contractor to manage the centre. An integral part of the project is the introduction of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to manage the exchange of information between and within the organisation to provide a more effective and efficient service.  
Of the two options highlighted above the most comprehensive solution appears to be the County Council project Cambridgeshire Direct. A partnership with a contractor such as Capita would not necessarily link to the other County Council Services and Capita only currently deliver one Council Service and therefore has limited knowledge and access to other East Cambs services.
- ◆ The potential benefits of a partnership with Cambridgeshire Direct would include a one-stop service for customers, increased access due to longer hours (potentially 24/7) and increased modes of contact such as web based access from a variety of points.
- ◆ The decision to out-source the out-of-hours service would need to take place in the context of the above. If the Council decide to pursue the option of

Cambridgeshire Direct an out-of-hours service would be integral to this process.

- ◆ One option for the out-of-hours service would be to outsource the statutory function of homelessness and cease to provide the remaining services.
- ◆ The Best Value Review of Housing services undertaken in 2001 considered outsourcing the homelessness requirement to provide emergency access to temporary accommodation. This is an option and costs at the time were approximately £2k per annum; the out-of-hours service covers a broader set of services cost £7k 2001/02.

Future Action:-

- ◆ Undertake a feasibility study into joining the County Council Partnership Cambridgeshire Direct.

Option Three: In-house delivery and internal options

Factors to consider:

- ◆ The introduction of improved IT into the finance section will enable cashiers to expand the service to the public and further increase their ability to undertake 'back office functions.'
- ◆ The introduction of standards for customer care (see compare and consult) will enable reception staff to develop the expertise to deal with more detailed enquiries at the front desk. A survey undertaken to establish the amount of work that could be transferred to the front desk illustrated a willingness for this development in service delivery.

Future Action

- ◆ Develop customer care standards and a strategy to implement and monitor standards across the authority.

Option Four: Public/Private Partnership

Factors to consider:-

- ◆ To a limited extent these do exist with existing partnerships with Capita, Cleanaway and Leisure Connection.
- ◆ As outlined above a partnership with an existing partner to deliver a broader range of services is one option. This would have to be weighed up against the potential of the county-wide partnership Cambridgeshire Direct.

Further Action:-

- ◆ As option three

Option five: Joint provision (with another authority or public body)

Factors to consider:-

- ◆ Cambridgeshire Direct would potentially be a partnership with the County Council and other districts and could provide an integrated service to all customers. A further option to consider would be to join with other districts and the Council for specific services ie out-of-hours, street furniture, rather than include all council functions.
- ◆ A further option involving joint provision with another authority would be delivering services with another neighbouring council. Newmarket Town Council is setting up a one-stop-shop in Newmarket with partners which could be accessed by residents of East Cambridgeshire. One option would be to ensure that access to all web based services is provided at the Newmarket office and existing housing and benefit surgeries are considered from this location. It may also be possible for financial transactions to be handled by a cash office operated by Newmarket Town Council on behalf of the Council if this is found to be cost effective.

Further Action:

- ◆ The feasibility study into Cambridgeshire Direct to consider a range of options for entering into the partnership ie single services
- ◆ Further consideration to be given to the one-stop-shop at Newmarket in partnership with Forest Heath District Council and Newmarket Town Council.

Option Six: Creation of new markets and potential suppliers

- ◆ The sector for providing better, more integrated customer services is well developed in the private sector and this is increasingly transferring to the public sector.
- ◆ One option to break into new markets would be through packaging all internal services (Reception, Revenues, IT, Legal, HR etc) together. This option is not seen as feasible as such a large proportion of existing services are outsourced it would be extremely difficult to provide the critical mass to provide services that cannot be outsourced easily.

Further Action:

- ◆ Take advantage of the well developed market place to secure service improvements.

### 5.3 Conclusions

The Council is well placed to take advantage of local developments such as Cambridgeshire Direct and needs to exploit this potential over the next 18 months. Any feasibility into entering into this partnership needs to consider local circumstances such as the size of the authority, the Newmarket One-Stop-Shop initiative as well as the out-of-hours service.

The Challenge and Compete elements of the review demonstrate that the separation of services provided to internal and external customers will not only improve customer services but also develop the necessary skills for joining Cambridgeshire Direct should this decision take place in the future.

## 6.0 Conclusions and Improvement Plan

### 6.1 Key issues for improvement

Importantly, all the problems identified by staff and the review team in the Stage One report (see 1.6) were also significant issues arising from the review of service.

These four key issues are:-

- Access to services by customers
- Standards of quality across the authority
- Focus on customers at front reception
- Communication between departments

Improvement options for these four issues were presented and agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2002. These options have now been developed into a Best Value Improvement Plan. (see appendix i)

### 6.2 Access to services by customers.

- A feasibility study is underway in Year 0 (02/03) to restructure ground floor accommodation at The Grange to enable Planning reception to move by December 2003.
- The review team did not feel that at this stage it would recommend that the Council join the County Council partnership to provide a county-wide contact centre, but do recommend that a feasibility study is carried out by management team into Cambridgeshire Direct.
- Through the Implementing Electronic Government Strategy, the Council intends to extend and improve its services to customers. This process has already commenced in Year 0 with phase 3 of the Council's website.

### 6.3 Standards of quality across the Council

- Front line staff have been involved in a workshop to draw up a customer care standard for the Council, concentrating on telephony, face to face contact and written correspondence.
- Feedback from the workshop along with best practice from the private sector and other authorities will be fed into a comprehensive customer care strategy to be launched alongside the code in April 2003.
- An ongoing programme of monitoring will accompany the performance indicators included in the customer care code.

### 6.4 Focus on customers at front reception

- Following the meeting of the Best Value Review of customer care on the 8<sup>th</sup> July and the meeting of the Best Value Review team of the 20<sup>th</sup> August, it was agreed to move the services associated with internal customers ie post

room, meeting room bookings, word processing to facilities management from April 2003.

- Ongoing discussions with Capita could result in the work associated with the verification framework transferring to Capita. This should result in a better service to customers who will deal with Capita for all benefit enquiries. It will, however, reduce the workload of reception staff and one customer services post will be deleted if this transfer of work is agreed. The implications for customer service staff are part of the consultation and will be presented to a future meeting of the Personnel Committee.

#### 6.5 Communication between departments

- This objective is linked to the need to set customer care standards and the customer care strategy will address the need to improve communication across the authority.
- A pro-forma to brief customer services staff is due to be launched in Year 0 to ensure front line staff are kept aware of departmental and corporate events.

**Customer Care  
Best Value Improvement Plan**

**Appendix (iii)**

**YEAR 0 2002/03**

Objectives	Resources	Lead	Action	PI	Target Date	Links to Service Plan
1. Carry out an audit of physical access to services to main reception by 31.03.03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Access Officer</li> </ul>	JP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Access Officer to carry out audit and report to Management Team after Equal Opportunities Group with action plan.</li> </ul>	Date report to Management Team	31.03.02	Facilities Management Imp Obj 4
2. Draw up Customer Care Standard and Strategy by 30.3.03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Performance Review Officer</li> <li>◆ Customer Services Supervisor</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Carry out workshop with key staff</li> <li>◆ Draw up draft customer code</li> <li>◆ Consult staff and customers</li> <li>◆ Draw up Customer Care Strategy</li> </ul>	Workshop complete  Customer Code in place  Customer Care Strategy in place	30.09.03  31.12.02  28.02.03  30.03.03	Corporate Services Obj 4.3
3. Separate external and internal customer service functions by 31 March 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Facilities Manager</li> <li>◆ £5k</li> </ul>	AS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Restructure Facilities Management Team</li> <li>◆ Transfer verification framework to Capita</li> </ul>	Restructuring completed  Increase in customer satisfaction levels	31.03.03  31.03.03	Corporate Services Obj 1

**Customer Care  
Best Value Improvement Plan**

**YEAR 0 2002/03**

Objectives	Resources	Lead	Action	PI	Target Date	Links to Service Plan
4. Introduce briefing system for customer services for major projects/events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Performance Review Officer</li> <li>◆ Customer Services Supervisor</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Draw up pro-forma</li> <li>◆ Circulate to all staff and members</li> </ul>	Pro-forma launched  Increase in customer satisfaction	30.11.02  31.01.03	Corporate Services Obj 4
5. Introduce new complaints procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Performance Review Officer</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Draw up leaflet</li> <li>◆ Attend team briefings</li> <li>◆ Launch new procedure</li> </ul>	New procedure in place  Increase in customer satisfaction	30.10.02  01.12.02	Corporate Services Obj 4
6. Public able to access planning reception services through one-shop-main reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Facilities Manager</li> <li>◆ Capital Resources: £10k for feasibility</li> </ul>	AS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Undertake a feasibility study to The Grange to increase office accommodation and move Planning reception adjacent to main reception</li> </ul>	Resources secured to fund outcome of feasibility	Feb 2003	Corporate Services Obj 4  Facilities Management Imp Obj 4
7. To provide electronic access to services and information to customers in main reception by June 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ £8k capital</li> </ul>	AK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Draw up project plan</li> <li>◆ Liaise with Cambs County</li> </ul>	No of public using PC	June 2003	Corporate Services Obj 4

**Customer Care  
Best Value Improvement Plan**

**YEAR 1 2003/04**

Objectives	Resources	Lead	Action	PI	Target Date	Links to Service Plan
1. To develop a public access module for public to access planning applications remotely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ SOCITM</li> <li>◆ £20k Rev</li> <li>◆ £15k Cap</li> </ul>	AK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Draw up project plan</li> <li>◆ Implement Plan</li> </ul>	Public able to view applications on line	March 2004	Development Control
2. Conduct a feasibility study of establishing a unified and single point of contact through a contact centre with CRM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Management Team</li> </ul>	AK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Draw up project plan following away-day</li> <li>◆ Decide on the establishment of call centre services at ECDC</li> </ul>	Project Plan in place  Committee decision made	September 2003  March 2004	Corporate Services Obj 4
3. Establish a local service point for customers in the south of the District in partnership with other agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Performance Review Officer</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Attend liaison meetings with FHDC and NTC</li> </ul>	Number of meetings attended	Throughout 2003/2004	Corporate Services Obj 4
4. To improve physical access to services to main reception in line with action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Capital Programme</li> </ul>	AS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Improve lighting in reception outside cashiers by</li> <li>◆ Carry out further improvements identified in action plan</li> </ul>	Date action plan implemented	December 2003	Development Control
5. Introduce customer care quality standard for all in-house services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Performance Review Officer</li> <li>◆ Customer Services Supervisor</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Launch Standards</li> </ul>	Date standards launched	April 2003	Corporate Services Obj 4
6. Introduce new quality standard to new contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Executive Director, Community Services</li> </ul>	RH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Paradise Pool</li> </ul>	Date standards in contract	March 2004	As above

**Customer Care  
Best Value Improvement Plan**

**YEAR 1 2003/04**

Objectives	Resources	Lead	Action	PI	Target Date	Links to Service Plan
7. Undertake a review of staffing levels within Customer Services Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Customer Services Supervisor</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Conduct 6 month review of work/load.</li> <li>◆ Conduct 1 year review of effectiveness of change</li> </ul>	Reviews completed	October 2003 March 2004	Corporate Services Obj 4
8. Implement customer care strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Principal HR Officer</li> <li>◆ Performance Review Officer</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Implement programme of training on customer care for all front line staff</li> <li>◆ Introduce monitoring and evaluation.</li> <li>◆ Introduce customer care training to induction programme</li> </ul>	No of staff trained  Monitoring system in place  No of new starters trained	March 2004  April 2003  April 2003	Corporate Services Obj 4
9. Public able to access planning reception services through one-stop-shop main reception by May 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Capital Resources:</li> <li>◆ £200k bid for in 2003/2004 budget</li> </ul>	AS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Implement changes and establish planning reception as part of main reception</li> </ul>	Building work complete	December 2003	Development Control
10. Integrate new Benefits Performance Standard into quality standard and customer care strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Revenues Officer</li> <li>◆ Capita</li> </ul>	AC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Carry out audit of performance standard</li> <li>◆ Feed outcomes into customer care standard and strategy</li> </ul>	Audit complete  Standards included	On going 2003	Financial Services
11. Review provision of out of hours service vis-à-vis decision on contact centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Deputy Chief Executive</li> </ul>	CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Carry out feasibility of amalgamating out of hours provision with call centre</li> </ul>	Committee Decision	March 2005	

**Customer Care  
Best Value Improvement Plan**

**Year 2 2004/05**

1.	Establish a local service point for customers in the south of the district in partnership with other agencies	♦ Performance Review Officer	CMT	♦ Implement Action Plan	Committee Decision	March 2005	Corporate Services Obj 4
2.	Implement customer care strategy		CMT	♦ Train front line staff ♦ Review staff briefings		On going 2004	Corporate Services Obj 4
3.	Introduce new quality standard into external contracts		AC SCC	♦ Capita/Revenues ♦ Cleanaway/Waste	Contracts include new quality standard	March 2005	Corporate Services Obj 4
4.	Carry out feasibility into competency based appraisal system	♦ Principal HR Officer	AK	♦ Evaluate benefit of introducing elements of a competency based system	Report to Management Team	March 2005	Corporate Services Obj 4
5.	Review complaints procedure	♦ Performance Review Officer	SF	♦ Carry out customer satisfaction survey	Report to Management Team	December 2004	Corporate Services Obj 4

**Customer Care  
Best Value Improvement Plan**

**Year 3 2005/06**

Launch local access point for service in Newmarket	♦ As year 2	CMT	♦ As above	One Stop Shop open	Sept 2005	Corporate Services Obj 4
Implement second year of customer care strategy	♦ As year 2	CMT	♦ As above	Results of mystery shopping exercise	March 2006	Corporate Services Obj 4

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**BEST VALUE CUSTOMER CARE – COMPARE**

To: Best Value Customer Care Review Team

Date: 8 July 2002

From: Deputy Chief Executive

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1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To consider the results of the compare "element" of the best value review and develop improvement options for customer care in the Council.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Further investigate separating the internal customer services (post, meeting rooms, refreshments etc) from the external customer service functions of reception and switchboard.

2.2 Develop a customer care code in consultation with staff with SMART objectives.

2.3 Further investigate a corporate competency based system of performance management linked into customer care training.

2.4 Use the team briefing system to communicate with staff more effectively throughout the organisation.

2.5 Visit Cambridge City Council to look at service improvements to reception for people with disabilities.

2.6 Further pursue the contact centre with the County Council.

2.7 Consider alternative arrangements to deliver the out-of-hours service.

2.8 Further investigate options for the delivery of the verification framework by customer service staff.

3.0 COSTS

3.1 All the above have cost implications that will need to be developed as part of the improvement option appraisal.

4.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS

4.1 The last meeting of the best value review team agreed the terms of reference for the compare "element" of the review (appendix A). The terms of reference include a questionnaire survey of similar authorities (CIPFA family group and neighbouring) as well as process benchmarking which is still underway.

## 4.2 Benchmarking with other Local Authorities

4.2.1 The benchmarking questionnaire (see appendix B) was sent to 24 authorities (appendix C). A summary of the results from the 13 completed returned questionnaires is at appendix D. The response rate was surprisingly high, makes interesting reading and a brief analysis is provided below. One form was faxed back incomplete (Richmondshire).

### 4.2.2 Reception Facilities

All of the respondents had a main reception apart from Malvern Hills which has 4 different reception points. Wychavon, Forest Heath and West Lindsay also have other offices with receptions.

The number of visitors varies enormously with North Kesteven reporting an average of 722 visitors down to East Cambs with 60 which is the smallest number of visitors with a main reception only. The average is 170 but if we exclude North Kesteven the average drops to 115. The most similar authority to East Cambridgeshire appears to be South Shropshire with 68 visitors.

Similarly, the number of staff carrying out reception duties varies as well and appears to link to other duties particularly telephony. In the follow up e-mail question, no authority reported reception staff operating the verification framework on behalf of housing benefits. On average, staff numbers appear to be between 2 and 5 FTE (East Cambs 5.5FTE) with the usual salary cost of Scale 3 or 4 (East Cambs Scale 1/2).

### 4.2.3 Typing Facilities

The majority of authorities that responded no longer had a word processing centre/typing pool. The other two that did have similar sized centres (3 or 4 typists per centre) but no indication of salaries.

### 4.2.4 Switchboard Facilities

Most authorities appear to run the switchboard alongside the reception function as we do at East Cambs. The number of extensions varies which is an indication of the size of each authority. Almost all authorities report they have direct dial and the performance indicators supplied will provide useful data for benchmarking future improvements in our own authority.

### 4.2.5 Post

The responses to the questions on post opening and sorting, show that there is no uniform way in which this is dealt with. Some authorities appear to use a mixture of Admin staff and Reprographics staff (Forest of Dean, South Norfolk) with numbers varying from 2 to 8-10 depending on volume of post. This indicates a degree of flexibility in most authorities.

#### 4.2.6 Cashiers

Not surprisingly, the majority of cashiers are in the same location or in an adjacent location to the main reception with 2 FTE being the norm for authorities similar to East Cambs (South Shropshire 1.4, Malvern Hills 2 FTE, South Cambs 2 FTE, South Norfolk). Interestingly, the service is provided by Capita as part of the Revenue Contract at West Lindsey. The normal arrangement appears to be a senior and junior member of staff. The more junior member of staff on scale 3/4 as opposed to 2/3 at East Cambs.

#### 4.2.7 Standards

Only three authorities had a customer care code or standard although many appear to be developing one as part of best value. Wychavon and Cambridge City both sent copies of their standards and copies of leaflets are attached at appendix E. These examples will be extremely useful as we develop our own standards as part of this review. Apart from the two examples, few of the respondents had SMART performance measures for monitoring performance.

#### 4.2.8 One-Stop-Shops and Contact Centres

Only a few authorities operate one-stop-shops and these appear to be the larger authorities (North Kesteven and Wychavon). Interestingly, Forest of Dean appear to offer a comprehensive service for a similar sized authority to our own. Only Wychavon operates a Contact Centre.

#### 4.2.9 Out of Hours Service

The answers to the supplementary e-mail question on out-of-hours services provided information on a number of different approaches. All but one who answered operate an out-of-hours service. Bridgnorth District operate one in partnership with the rest of Shropshire County, Forest of Dean use a private sector organisation "Linkline" and Huntingdonshire have linked theirs to their CCTV control room. At East Cambs we operate a referral system with a rota of three officers taking it in turns to run the service once in every three weeks.

#### 4.2.10 Services Planned for the Next Three Years

It is no surprise that all of the Cambridgeshire respondents report that they are considering a call centre and this is mirrored across the country. Only Bridgnorth District replied no to all three questions.

#### 4.2.11 Disabled Facilities

Only Malvern Hills and West Lindsay answered no to this question with most reporting a loop system for hard of hearing as well as level access, automatic opening doors etc. Cambridge City provide the most extensive facilities and would be a good benchmark for us to visit and emulate.

#### 4.2.12 Interpretation

Many authorities report that they do not have interpreting services. Those that do, generally provide a good standard of facilities for disabled people as well. East Cambs employ a telephone interpreting service called "language line".

#### 4.2.13 Best Value Reviews

Many of the authorities who responded have or are undertaking a Best Value Review (5 out of 14). The results of the Cambridge City review look particularly interesting. One of their improvement actions was to "separate the postal support service from the reception and switchboard service".

#### 4.2.14 Overall

The results of the benchmarking has provided valuable comparison particularly in relation to:

- ◆ Salaries
- ◆ Verification framework
- ◆ Separation of post and reception
- ◆ Word processing centres
- ◆ New technology

There may be value in taking some of this analysis further and a visit to Cambridge City might prove worthwhile in the future.

### 4.3 Process Benchmarking

4.3.1 The terms of reference for compare included visiting organisations that demonstrated good practice. To date, one of three interviews has taken place with the manager of Waitrose in Ely. Interviews are scheduled with Barclays and Hereward Housing Association.

#### 4.3.2 Waitrose (John Lewis Partnership)

This interview proved very fruitful and concentrated on two main areas that impact on customer care:

- ◆ communication and the role of partners
- ◆ competency based performance management.

#### 4.3.3 Communication and the role of Partners

Good communication appears to be the key to how the business is run. It starts with daily meetings between the manager and a representation from each section of the store. Every month there is a branch meeting where the manager will hold a series of meetings in the week to reach as many staff as possible. Each section also has a monthly meeting.

As well as this the John Lewis Partnership operates a structure where all staff are partners and share in the profitability of the company. This role is extended by their participation in decision making at a central and local level.

John Lewis Partnership has a central council which operates at a National level with elected representatives from stores. At a local level, local representatives meet with a representative of the Chairman of John Lewis Partnership every quarter. This is their opportunity to talk directly to the Chairman. The manager is present but has no control over the agenda.

#### 4.3.4 Competency Based Performance Management

Every member of staff is given a standard set of competencies for their particular job. The branch manager carries out a weekly branch assessment that involves measuring partners behaviour on the shop floor. Section managers have to watch staff and check that they are performing to the agreed standard.

#### 4.3.5 Overall

The two things that appear to influence and motivate staff are the role of partners and the types of competencies set down by John Lewis Partnership.

The role of partners is unique and provides an additional channel of communication up the chain at John Lewis Partnership. In some ways it is not dissimilar to the role of the union, however, partners receive financial benefit from their position within the company. Big issues, such as changes to opening hours etc. cannot be decided without involving partners in the process. This special relationship appears to help motivate staff to make John Lewis Partnership successful and providing good customer care is seen as an essential part of this.

The wording of the competencies is extremely value-laden which is surprising for a private-sector business. The extracts below are from a list of 15 common competencies for a member of staff:

"... balances the amount of time assisting customers with the needs of the branch and other customers carefully."

"...responds to complaints politely and sensitively..."

"... communicates with all customers respectfully and politely at all times."

"... uses non-verbal communication which is always sincere and polite."

"... acknowledges customers waiting to be served and informs them of actions being taken."

These values are also replicated in the staff handbook and an extract from this is attached at appendix F.

It appears that John Lewis Partnership have a good understanding of what customers want but also value their staff and see this as the key to good customer care.

## 5.0 Conclusions

The results from the compare exercise have to be looked at alongside the other 3 C's. However, it is apparent that both the private sector and other authorities could help East Cambridgeshire develop and improve customer care. The recommendations included in Section 2 highlight the good practice evident from the compare exercise. This might be added to once the interviews are concluded with Barclays and Hereward Housing Association.

The next step will be to develop recommendations into potential improvement options that will then need to be consulted upon and subjected to a financial appraisal.

## **BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CUSTOMER CARE: COMPARE**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### 1.0 Timetable

1.1 The compare element of the Best Value Review needs to be undertaken and to report by 16 May 2002.

#### 2.0 Method

2.1 Benchmarking with other local authorities

A simple questionnaire will be sent to local authorities in the CIPFA family group and neighbouring authorities. The questionnaire will include:

- ◆ Number of receptions
- ◆ Number of staff
- ◆ Reporting Structure
- ◆ One-stop-shop
- ◆ Duties
- ◆ Plans for future ie. Call Centre
- ◆ Customer Care Code
- ◆ Performance Indicators
- ◆ Special provision for people with disabilities
- ◆ Translation/Interpreting facilities
- ◆ Job titles and grades
- ◆ Separate or combined cash and reception facilities

2.2 Process benchmarking

A qualitative exercise will be undertaken with similar organisations to establish best practice in Customer Care. These organisations to include:

- ◆ Barclays Bank, Ely
- ◆ Waitrose, Ely
- ◆ Hereward Housing Association
- ◆ Centre Parcs Headquarters
- ◆ In-house contractors with Charter Marks

#### 3.0 RESOURCES

3.1 The work will be undertaken by the Deputy Chief Executive and Customer Services Supervisor. The main constraint will be time and the willingness of the comparitors to participate in the exercise.

## **RESULTS OF CONSULT**

### **CITIZENS PANEL**

370 responses were received from a mailing to the Citizens Panel's 1000 members conducted by BMG in May, giving a response rate of 37%.

43% of respondents had contact with the Council in the past 12 months, 57% of whom used the telephone, 18% wrote a letter and 23% visited the offices in person. Given the option of any means of contact for future enquiries, 51% said they would choose the telephone, 12% would use email and 11% would prefer to visit the offices in person.

Of those who had contacted the Council, 61% were satisfied with the speed of response, 64% thought that the attitude of the Council's response was good and 60% felt that their enquiry was fully answered. Overall 64% were satisfied with the Council's response to their contact.

66% of respondents said they experience no difficulty contacting the Council, but a minority said they had trouble travelling to the Council offices, or did not know who to ask for (8% in each case). The most common suggestion for improving the Council's customer care was to provide more information about services (cited by 7% of respondents), but 73% offered no suggestions for improvement.

### **MYSTERY SHOPPING BY TELEPHONE**

A Market Research company Teleconomy made 240 calls to the Council during June, 25% direct dialled and 75% via the switchboard, presenting all departments with a range of enquiries. The Council operates no formal telephone standards and the main purpose of these test calls was to evaluate the experience of callers and establish an agreed standard of call handling to improve customer care.

10 calls (4%) were abandoned having not been answered after 15 rings, 9 of these were to the switchboard. 4 out of 15 calls (27%) to Capita's Blackburn number were engaged. Overall, calls were answered and terminated in a warm and welcoming manner but lacked a consistent structure and content. Switchboard staff showed a great awareness of Council information and a willingness to resolve some calls without transfer. At switchboard and extensions, staff were helpful and knowledgeable with a pleasant speech style and most calls were handled in a positive and professional manner.

Customer service would benefit by formalising the helpful staff approach within a telephone standard, incorporating the following recommendations from Teleconomy:

- ❑ A simple, informative greeting e.g. 'Good morning, East Cambridgeshire District Council'
- ❑ Reassure the caller by clarifying the query and giving the name of the department before transferring the call.
- ❑ When seeking supplementary information use soft questioning e.g. 'May I ask - What?', 'Can you tell me - Where?' rather than hard questioning: 'What's your name', 'Where are you calling from?'
- ❑ Warn the caller of any holds or silences and apologise following a long hold.
- ❑ Put the caller on hold while discussing the call with colleagues in the room.

- ❑ Having checked the caller is satisfied, thank them for calling and offer future assistance.
- ❑ Allow the caller to hang up first.

### **TELEPHONE SURVEY**

The Performance Review Officer completed 38 telephone call-back interviews out of 148 callers to the Council's switchboard, giving a response rate of 26%. The sample of 148 was drawn by logging all callers' numbers for a period of 1 hour each day, at different times over a five-day period in June. 28% of calls were for Planning, 22% for Capita and 13% for Building Control, with the balance transferred to other departments.

11% of callers said they had a long wait before getting a response. Once answered, 92% said they were put straight through to the right person. Only 2% were greeted with a voicemail at the extension. 89% said their enquiry was fully answered, while 100% said that matters were explained clearly over the telephone, and no one reported a poor attitude. Overall, every caller was satisfied with the way their call was handled, and 92% confirmed that the telephone was their preferred means of contacting the Council.

### **LETTER SURVEY**

Over a period of 1 week in June, a questionnaire was attached to each Council letter sent in response to a written customer enquiry. To produce a random sample, and to maintain simplicity, questionnaires were attached by typing services, although Planning and Community Services managed their own as generally they do not use Typing Services. This exercise has proved to be the most difficult to manage and response rates have been too low to produce useful information. This survey can be run again with tighter controls, although the Citizens Panel survey did not indicate any dissatisfaction with the Council's response to written enquiries.

### **FACE TO FACE SURVEY AT THE ROOKERY, NEWMARKET**

Councillors Leake and Garner interviewed East Cambridgeshire residents shopping at The Rookery, Newmarket on Market Day, Tuesday 25 June. 32 questionnaires were completed with 58% of respondents stating they had contacted the Council in the last 12 months. 82% used the telephone and 12% called to the offices in person. In some cases it was difficult to recall accurately the details of the contact. Nevertheless, 57% said their enquiry was answered fully, while 6% had a long wait before the phone was picked up and 7% described the attitude of the officer on the phone as poor. Overall, 65% were satisfied with the way the call was handled. For future contact, the telephone was the preferred method for 67% of respondents, while 30% said they would use a local office in Newmarket if the Council opened one.

The following specific comments/suggestions were made:

- ❑ Prefer to ring the Ely office rather than Capita - more personal/better manner
- ❑ Clarify service responsibilities between Parish, District and County Councils
- ❑ Switchboard could improve departmental knowledge
- ❑ Don't like ringing Cambridge for the local Police - isolating
- ❑ Seems the person you want is on answerphone
- ❑ Person was a bit brusque
- ❑ Dog fouling enquiry wasn't satisfactorily resolved

## **FACE TO FACE SURVEY IN THE GRANGE RECEPTION**

Councillors Coppola and Tuite interviewed visitors to The Grange on Market Day, Thursday 27 June. 29 questionnaires were completed, the majority with visitors to the Cash Office (34%), Main Reception (28%), Capita (21%) and Planning (10%). 93% felt the environment of the office was comfortable, while 97% were pleased with the attitude of staff and no respondent had a long wait. 97% of visitors had their enquiry dealt with at the time of their visit and overall every respondent was satisfied. Given a choice of contacts for future enquiries, 93% said they would still prefer to visit the offices in person.

The following specific comments/suggestions were made:

- The officer was very understanding
- You can keep on top of your finances this way (by calling in to the office)
- Staff had time for me
- I come to Ely on a Thursday anyway (so convenient to call in)
- Really good
- Bit dark by cash office
- Letters too wordy/jargon/standard letters; need to be Plain English, especially for older people
- Cash office opened extra window especially for me
- Nice Reception but unnecessary expense
- Nice and cool
- Access to Planning not great (compare Kings Lynn and West Norfolk)
- Could view planning applications on website but in past some Councils have had compatibility problems
- Get rid of voicemail - need human voice every time
- Which desk to go to? Not sure what they're dealing with as there are no signs above the window
- Prefer to come in person - to collect the correct form
- Prefer face to face
- All lovely
- Happy with all services
- Would like street map of Ely in Reception

## **SURVEY OF CUSTOMERS WHO HAD RECEIVED ON-SITE VISITS**

The Performance Review Officer telephoned 30 customers following visits by Building Control (73%), Environmental Health (17%) and Planning (10%). 90% of customers had no difficulty making the appointment, and 97% said the date they were given was soon enough and the time of day was convenient. One respondent reported that the officer turned up late. Once on-site, 97% said that matters were explained to them in a clear way and everyone felt that the officer's manner was good. Overall, 96% of respondents were satisfied with the procedure for appointment making and the way in which the visit was conducted.

The following comments/suggestions related to Building Control inspections:

- Would like flexibility on appointment time e.g. when waiting to lay concrete
- Can be awkward when no specific time is given for the appointment
- Requiring the customer to give their reference number can be inconvenient
- Customer did not have reference number - staff a bit abrupt, but made booking any way

- ❑ Appointment time not always convenient if waiting to pour concrete
- ❑ Would help to work builders' hours: 7am - 3pm
- ❑ Laying down the regulations is too technical and inflexible
- ❑ Inspectors are flexible and helpful, in particular Nick and Mike e.g. calling by on way to work when concrete delivery due

## **OUT OF HOURS SURVEY**

To date, too few customers have been surveyed to provide worthwhile information on this service

## **ACCESS GROUP**

A response is awaited from the Ely Access Group regarding its members' experience of Council services. In addition, it is proposed that the Council's Disabled Access consultant be approached for advice on assessing this aspect of customer care.

## **STAFF SURVEY/SUGGESTIONS**

All members of staff were invited to comment on the Council's standard of customer care as it operates within their own department, and to make suggestions for improving the operation of the front desk, switchboard and cash office. To date, 27 responses have been received. Staff reported on their department's performance for speed, attitude and knowledge when responding to customer phone calls, letters and visits to the office.

In general, high scores were awarded, the lowest ones being for 'speed of responding to letters' where 72% said it was good; and 'extent to which customers visiting the office without an appointment have their enquiry answered', where 79% of staff rated this as good. The highest scores awarded for staff attitude on the phone (100% said good), and staff attitude to customers visiting the office (96% rated this good).

Staff were invited to make suggestions for improvements in the following areas:

### **Responding to letters**

- ❑ More admin assistance (x3)

### **Responding to phone calls**

- ❑ Update the internal phone list
- ❑ Organise internal phone list departmentally
- ❑ Standard message for voicemail including when response will be made
- ❑ FAQs for admin staff across all sections
- ❑ Telephone answering standard
- ❑ Basic Planning training for registration staff for answering phone queries
- ❑ Have requested a loop amendment 3 weeks ago and not fixed yet

### **Responding to customer visits to the office**

- ❑ Computer in Planning Reception to search the register in map form (x2)
- ❑ Move Planning closer to Main Reception (x2)

- ❑ When officer not available, contact officer should be able to book appt via diary or IT calendar

### **Responding to customers on site visits**

- ❑ Appointments cause most problems, but system is fair
- ❑ Leave corporate calling cards when unable to gain access

### **Improvements using the website/e-technology**

- ❑ On-line transactions
- ❑ Investigate use of CAB out of hours call system
- ❑ Building Control drawings come through on CAD
- ❑ Put license application forms on website (animal and entertainment), plus more info on services, also customer care policy. Advertise web address in press releases. Better navigation around website. Easier placement of large documents on website.
- ❑ More information on-line explaining what the Council does, what services are available to them and how they can take part in the democratic process - i.e. obtain agendas, committee reports on-line
- ❑ Making everyone aware it is available for a range of uses and services
- ❑ Employ more staff
- ❑ Making booklets such as 'planning - a guide for householders' available to view on-line. This would include the criteria used for permitted development
- ❑ Planning applications on website

### **Suggestions for front desk**

- ❑ question and answer sheet like Env Serv.
- ❑ Send mail to right department
- ❑ Privacy for benefits advice (x5)
- ❑ More staff - reduce delays (x2)
- ❑ Split front and back office (x2)
- ❑ Limit to motivated, customer focused staff
- ❑ Better departmental/service training so staff can answer enquiries (x2)
- ❑ Brief staff on departmental/staff job roles and back up officers if not available
- ❑ Provide a front desk for Planning/Building Control with trained staff (x2)
- ❑ In the past staff have been almost rude with customers
- ❑ Give clear explanation when transferring calls
- ❑ Pay staff better
- ❑ Greet customers, don't sit with back to them
- ❑ Make sure all Reception staff are familiar with departmental information passed to them

### **Suggestions for switchboard**

- ❑ Put calls through to right department (x3)
- ❑ Switchboard is slow, the equipment needs changing (x2)
- ❑ Need more time on switchboard to understand enquiries
- ❑ Faster response

### **Suggestions for Cash Office**

- ❑ Cash Office should be open same as rest of offices