

Report of	Meeting	Date
Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services and Head of Information and Communication Technology (Introduced by the Executive Member for Customers, Policy and Performance)	Executive Cabinet	29/09/05

CUSTOMER FOCUSED ACCESS AND SERVICE DESIGN STRATEGY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To seek Executive Cabinet's approval of the proposed Customer Focused Access and Service Design Strategy.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2. The strategy relates directly to both the Customer and Capacity priorities.

RISK ISSUES

3. The report contains no risk issues for consideration by Members.

BACKGROUND

4. In March 2002, the Council approved its Accessible Public Services Strategy and as a result developed the One Stop Shop and, more recently, the Contact Centre. These developments were a focused response to the challenge of improving the accessibility and quality of the Council's services to its customers. In parallel to this, the Council has been investing significantly in technology to enable the delivery of more efficient services via a range of channels to maximise accessibility. Although it is recognised there is still work to do, the high customer satisfaction in the One Stop Shop and the recent excellent Best Value inspection is evidence of the real difference these strategic decisions are making to our customers.
5. Arguably, the most significant customer focused technology enabled by the investment is Customer Relationship Management or CRM. This technology will allow the Council to gain a fuller picture of customers and their requirements and use the information to target resources to improve take-up, service quality and, importantly, efficiency. The Council is now well placed to document its approach to redesigning its service delivery mechanisms to deliver true customer benefit.

WHY DO WE NEED A STRATEGY?

6. Customer intelligence is a common theme that exists in relation to both delivering better customer service and improving the efficiency of the organisation. The Council is now in a position to develop and use customer information to gain a fuller and more rounded understanding of our customers and their needs. This knowledge is vital as the Council rises to the challenge of increasing customer demand and their changing preferences of how and when they wish to deal with the Council, its partners and related agencies.
7. The Council has recognised the need for change. The recent restructuring proposals, that could result in the creation of a Customer Unit, seek to ensure the needs of the customer are placed at the centre of the organisation providing a platform from which the customer cause will be championed.
8. Research by external organisations e.g. MORI, as well as studies within the Council, consistently suggest that citizens:
 - Can find it difficult to make contact with the Council and to resolve their queries once they do make contact
 - Are frequently confused about which organisation does what, particularly in two-tier areas such as Chorley - Lancashire
 - Dislike being passed around different departments/services and having to give the same information several times
 - Would like more access outside of core working hours.
9. It is also recognized that a more structured approach to access can also improve the use of scarce resources. Improved access to services has the potential to deliver significant efficiencies. Examples are;
 - **Reducing unnecessary repeat contact.**

In some authorities where the nature of citizen demand has been analysed, a high proportion of contact has been found to consist of repeat calls prompted by initial difficulties in getting through or by a failure in the service delivery process. Early analysis of the calls received in our Contact Centre confirms this. Reducing the volume of such contact, which offers little value to either the citizen or the Council, should free resources for more worthwhile activity.
 - **Deploying staff resources more efficiently.**

One county council, for instance, found that around 40 per cent of the enquiries being handled by its education department specialists consisted of very basic requests for information. It may, therefore, be possible to make savings in scarce professional time by redesigning the way in which enquiries flow through the authority and are completed.
 - **Encouraging self-service.**

New electronic channels, such as the Internet, will offer some groups of citizens increased opportunities to resolve their queries with little or no direct contact with Council staff. This is particularly important in the light of legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act. Savings in staff time can be directed towards citizens who need or prefer more traditional forms of contact.

CONSULTATION

10. Given the subject matter, it was appropriate that an extensive consultation process was carried out prior to the submission of this report. The groups consulted included;

- Officers of the Council
- Members of the Council
- Members of the public (via the Councils web site)
- Parish Councils
- All Chorley Places of Worship
- Asian Women's Forum
- Ethnic consultative committee
- Disability Forum
- Youth Council
- Action for Blind People
- Age Concern
- LCC Learning Disabilities

At the time this report was written, responses to the consultation had been limited but generally positive. The Strategy document can be viewed on the Council's Intranet under the Local News area (this can be found in "My Space"... 'News & Views',..... 'Local News'). If you require a printed copy please contact the report author.

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

8. There are no immediate financial consequences associated with this report. However the delivery of the strategy and its outcomes may have financial consequences. As these emerge they will be picked up and reported to members through the normal business planning/budget cycle.

COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

9. There are no HR implications associated with this report.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

10. Executive Cabinet is requested to approve the Customer Focused Access and Service Design Strategy.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

11. To obtain Executive Cabinet's approval of the Customer Focused Access and Service Design Strategy allowing the programme of work necessary to deliver it to be planned and delivered.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12. None

MARTIN O'LOUGHLIN
HEAD OF CUSTOMER, DEMOCRATIC AND OFFICE SUPPORT SERVICES

TIM MURPHY
HEAD OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Background Papers			
Document	Date	File	Place of Inspection
Draft Customer Focused Access and Service Design Strategy	August 2005	Access Strategy draft V0.02	Contact Centre, Union St. and www.chorley.gov.uk

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Tim Murphy	5455	12.09.05	CUSTACCSTRATEXECAPPROVAL