

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Council's desire to be customer focused

1.1.1 Torbay Council's current Strategic Plan, which is a public document, contains the following "fundamental beliefs and principles" that the organisation aspires to:

- **Customer Care**
We are committed to the courteous and fair treatment of our customers
- **Putting the public first**
Our services will be tailored to meet the changing needs of our customers
- **Equality of opportunity**
We will deliver services, which do not discriminate against any sector of the community, but at the same time we recognise the need to reflect cultural differences in services.
- **Open, responsive, accessible and accountable**
We will ensure that the Council is transparent in its decision-making, has accessible services, is responsive to the needs of customers and has clear lines of accountability
- **Challenging the current service**
We will continuously challenge the way our services are provided to ensure the most cost effective and efficient approach is adopted

1.1.2 In September 2003 the Council commenced a Best Value Review of Customer Focus, in part to test out how well the organisation meets these principles in practice. This executive summary, together with the accompanying service improvement plans and full report provides:

- An explanation as to why the Council needs to change to put these principles into practice.
- The current position and areas where the Council needs to improve.
- How the Council can move this agenda forward now and in the longer term.

1.1.3 Torbay Council already provides good customer service in a number of areas within the authority. This can be partly evidenced in the generally average to good 'scores' the Council receives for its services, as part of the overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Similarly, Library Services was awarded a Charter Mark for customer service in October 2002. See the full report for more detail.

1.1.4 However, the Best Value Review has identified that good customer service is at best patchy and is not driven by a corporate approach to customer care or how members of the public can access our services.

1.2 Why do we need to improve our customer focus?

1.2.1 The review has identified the following key reasons why the Council needs to adopt a more customer-focused approach to service delivery (please see full report for more detail):

(a) Delivering improved services to our customers

- the public's overall satisfaction with the Council has fallen significantly between 2000 and 2003 and at 45% is the lowest of the Devon authorities;
- historically many of our processes are designed around existing service structures, rather than the needs of our customers;
- we sometimes work in "silos", leading to duplication of effort and inefficient service to the public;
- members of the public can be pushed "from pillar to post", with no one taking "ownership" of their enquiries;
- we do not always respond quickly to customer's needs or keep them informed of how work is progressing;
- we sometimes make it difficult and complex for members of the public to contact us, operating out of numerous service points with differing opening times;
- we do not have a single recognised point of contact, where the majority of "routine" enquiries can be resolved "first time";
- we do not give a consistent response to enquiries, regardless of which access channel a member of the public contacts us on;
- we do not always understand the nature of our own "business" and customer demand; as a result, we do not accurately know how much it costs us to deliver these services and where there are potential savings e.g. staff time, accommodation costs, etc;
- we do not have a single means of "capturing" customer information, which leads to duplication of records and customers being asked the same questions again and again; and
- we do not offer "freedom of choice" in terms of how, when and where members of the public can contact us.

(b) using a modern approach in our dealings with customers

- we are being "left behind" by other service providers (both in the public sector – see new Jobcentre Plus and on the High Street – Saturday opening, 24-hour service, Internet self-service, etc.).

(c) adopting the national agenda

- the Government is telling us that we need to become more customer-focused and take advantage of the benefits of using IT, in terms of delivering service to the public electronically. There are approximately 50 e-Government “Priority Service Outcomes” that we have signed-up to as an authority (and achieved funding for) that must be in place by April 2006 (see Torbay Council’s Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) 3 Statement, November 2003);
- external inspections have identified failings in the way we deliver service to the public (see Corporate Governance Inspection and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) reports); and
- CPA from 2005 onwards will focus more heavily on how the Council responds to the needs of the community and how we make a difference, in terms of delivering “real outcomes” and improvements in service delivery. This will directly impact on how we are “scored” as a Council for CPA purposes (currently “weak”) and, linking back to the first point, how we are perceived as an organisation by the people of Torbay.

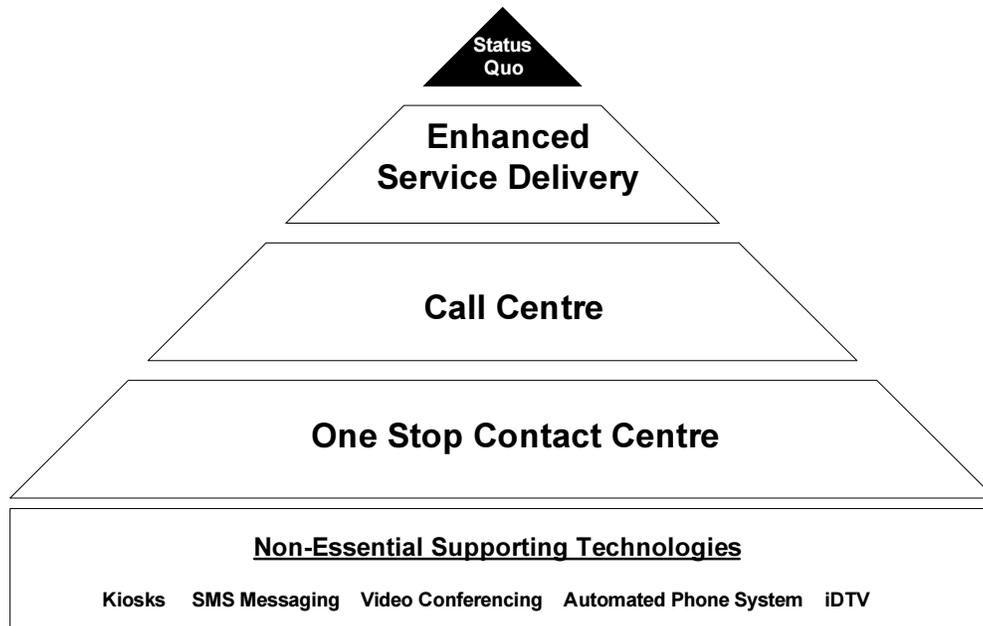
2. Where are we now?

2.1.1 The review has looked at the way services are delivered through the 4 main access channels (telephone; face to face; electronic; and manual correspondence – please see individual position statements for more detail). To compile the position statements and full report the four C’s of Best Value (Consult, Compete, Compare, Challenge) have been addressed – see individual position statements.

3. OPTIONS FOR PROGRESSION

3.1 How do we move the Council forward?

Four major options (developmental stages) have been identified within the Service Improvement Plan. The development pyramid below portrays a staged approach to achieving a full, one-stop approach to front line service delivery.



3.1.1 OPTION 1 - STATUS QUO

The Best Value guidance and legislation encourages Councils to think closely about delivering services in different ways to meet the needs of customers and to provide cost effective services. In undertaking a Best Value review the emphasis is on improvement and so maintaining the status quo is not an option. For Torbay section 1.2. identifies some of the issues why the Council needs to improve and these are explained in more detail in the full report. The review group, therefore, considers that maintaining the status quo is not a viable option.

3.1.2 OPTION 2 - ENHANCED SERVICE DELIVERY

Enhancing the Council’s current processes, using the existing resources to deliver them, is the logical first step in implementing change across the Council. Common building blocks can be utilised to support all methods of accessing Council services.

Better equipping existing customer service points will allow the authority to “fill the gaps” in current service delivery information to better inform the long term Service Improvement Plan.

Through Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRMS) and a comprehensive A to Z of Services, the Council can better enable existing staff, through existing channels of access, to resolve a

higher percentage of calls on first point of contact and improve the customer's experience of dealing with Torbay Council.

Enhancing service delivery through the implementation of the key technological building blocks and processes identified within this report will give significant benefits to both the customer and the organisation. A brief description of these building blocks is given below:

(a) Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

A Customer Relationship Management System is recognised as a fundamental building block to improving customer service. Customer Relationship Management is as much a culture as an IT system. Adopting a CRM approach will allow the Council to exploit a single point of reference for all interactions between a customer and the Council as a whole.

Benefits to the customer include:

- Single point of contact for multiple enquiries
- Greater 'first point of contact' resolution to enquiries
- Consistency of response
- Full history of requests/enquiries available
- Personalised enquiry handling

(b) Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)

Business Process Re-engineering underpins each and every stage of developing customer focus. Current processes must be understood, step by step, from both the customers' perspective and the internal process. All our processes eventually need to be re-focussed around our customers rather than ourselves as service providers.

Benefits to the customer include:

- Efficient, customer focussed, services
- Open, convenient and accessible services
- Cost effective services
- Less 'bureaucracy'

(c) Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS)

Reliance on manual files can be time consuming, restrictive and expensive. The scanning of incoming correspondence, and the centralised storage of internally generated correspondence, would allow documents to be accessible across the organisation. Electronic Document Management

is a powerful tool in enabling the resolution of enquiries at the front line, where correspondence is relied upon.

Benefits to the customer include:

- Front-line staff have instant access to information
- Reduced handling times

(d) Workflow

Workflow systems allow detailed management information to be produced to monitor and review the handling and resolution of enquiries. A workflow system can be employed to route requests and jobs around the organisation automatically. Workflow systems are generally integrated with Customer Relationship Management Systems and Document Management Systems to allow requests, along with supporting documentation such as application forms or proof of identification, to be routed to the appropriate team for resolution. This will mean that a member of the public would be able to contact the Council at any time to find out the progress on their enquiry and the officer will have this information to hand.

(e) A to Z of Services

A comprehensive A to Z of Council services gives staff and customers direct access to generic information regarding Council services, e.g. service standards, processes, costs/fees, opening hours etc. An A to Z will enable staff to resolve the majority (generally accepted as 80%) of enquiries at first point of contact, and will also allow customers to 'self serve' through the Council's web site.

Benefits to the customer of an A to Z include:

- Consistent service information
- Intuitive, self service, access to Council information

3.1.3 OPTION 3 - CALL CENTRE

As demonstrated by East Riding Council's approach to call centres, call centre staff do not need to be located in one building (although this is often the case). Separate teams can operate as single call centre through the functionality of a Call Management System. This provides a seamless service to the customer, and allows the Council to locate staff in dispersed locations. A call centre approach would allow the Council to:

- rationalise the number of published numbers

- provide wider coverage (extended opening hours) across multiple service areas
- move towards a one-stop approach to service delivery
- move towards its goal of achieving an 80% resolution to enquiries at first point of contact (for telephone interactions)
- Implement CRM across the organisation.

The technological building blocks, culture change and Business Process Re-engineering identified within this report support both the distributed and central call centre approaches.

A call centre approach would enhance telephone interactions only (although the building blocks could be employed to enhance other channels).

3.1.4 OPTION 4 - ONE-STOP CONTACT CENTRE

A contact centre builds on the call centre approach by enabling staff to deal with all enquiries, irrespective of access channel. Contact centre staff interact with the public via the phone and face to face, and also deal with enquiries received electronically and through manual correspondence.

A contact centre approach cannot be achieved without first implementing the culture change identified in phase 1 of the Service Improvement Plan (enhancing service delivery). Implementing a contact centre would allow the Council to realise its goal of resolving 80% of enquiries at first point of contact, across all channels of access.

3.2 Do we adopt a Council wide approach or run a pilot project?

3.2.1 Section 1 above demonstrates the need for the Council to take positive, proactive action. To help the Council move forward it could adopt a fundamental, “big bang” approach to improving customer access across the organisation. This might include the introduction of a corporate approach to CRM, development of a generic customer contact centre, rationalisation of contact points, etc. The adoption of such an approach Council wide would have far reaching effects but would also incur significant risks. We believe that at present this is not achievable by the Council on its own for a number of reasons:

- current budget pressures mean capital and revenue funding is not available to resource such a radical approach within the short term;
- we will not be able to change the culture of the organisation and break down “silos” over night;
- we have a limited understanding of our existing customer demand across our access channels; and

- if the project were to fail a “big bang” approach would have a greater impact on the public and how we are perceived as an organisation.

3.2.2 In light of the above, we believe it would be better to undertake a pilot project within one area of the Council, where we can test some of the fundamental building blocks required to improve customer focus. It is suggested that Exchequer and Benefits (E&B) would be the most suitable location to undertake this pilot, based on a number of reasons:

- Conducting a pilot in Exchequer and Benefits (E&B) will be broadly ‘cost neutral’, as funding is already in place for some projects, via our eGovernment budget and successful bids to other sources e.g. Department for Works and Pensions (DWP). We can test systems and demonstrate/develop a robust business case, prior to any significant future capital/revenue investment in a larger, Council-wide project e.g. contact centres;
- A pilot will allow us to test out new concepts e.g. Business Process Re-engineering (BPR);
- E&B is already substantially electronically enabled e.g. payments can be made via direct debit and we are looking to take payments using credit and debit cards. E&B are implementing an Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) funded via a bid to the DWP. This will enable us to test the benefits of scanning and accessing paper documents electronically; including freeing up accommodation space currently used for filing. This system has Workflow functionality, which will give us some ability to track and monitor work in progress. E&B have already got their own bespoke ‘AtoZ’ and we can build on their experience of using an AtoZ to resolve enquiries, in developing a corporate AtoZ;
- E&B includes some of the key eGovernment Priority Service Outcomes that we need to meet.;
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that E&B is one of our biggest ‘demand’ areas. We can use the pilot to start to demonstrate real improvements to a significant portion of our customer base;
- The pilot within E&B can be used as an example of good practice to ‘sell’ the concept to the rest of the organisation (staff and Members) and partners;
- E&B already have good performance management systems in place; which we can build upon utilising CRM;
- E&B have already undertaken BPR across some services and have some skills in place to undertake further process mapping to inform the CRM approach;
- E&B have line-management for Connections, the ‘embryonic’ one-stop-shop of the Council. They also have ‘quasi’ call centres in the form of the Benefits and Council Tax helplines. ‘Back office’ teams support these interfaces. E&B are therefore a microcosm of the

organisation as a whole and the inter-relationships between 'front' and 'back' office. We can use the pilot to explore how we can support both face-to-face and telephone contacts and front to back office communication, through CRM and Workflow;

- We can experiment with using 'generic', multi-skilled customer advice officers, by interchanging staff between the telephone helplines and face-to-face enquiry counters;
- We can test at a very low-level developing working relationships with services outside the pilot, with a view to extending the scope of the model as additional service areas are brought onboard;
- E&B is a good area to start extensive testing of the information coming out of the new call logger system, e.g. length of calls, number of calls, number of missed calls, call routing, etc;
- We will be able to locally test our draft Corporate Services Standards and Customer Charter, supported by more detailed management reporting available from the CRM and Workflow systems; and
- Many councils have taken a similar approach, using E&B teams to pilots their approach to improving their customer access points, before rolling this out across their authorities.

3.2.3 On completion of the pilot a review of the success of the project will need to be conducted, to inform the business case for subsequent rollout to the rest of the organisation.

3.2.4 A draft Customer Charter has been produced and an external consultant has undertaken some limited initial consultation with Stakeholders to gauge their views on the draft charter. The standards in this draft Charter need to be tested before consideration is given to wider application in the Council. The overall Customer Charter could then be developed into charters covering each Council service.

3.2.4 Bearing in mind the above it is therefore recommended **that**:

R1 The Executive agree to implement a pilot and that a further review takes place at the end of the pilot phase to evaluate its success and the potential for roll-out across the organisation. If approval is given to then extend the pilot across the Council it will be necessary to reassess the resource implications and identify appropriate procurement options for future service delivery.

R2 Exchequer and Benefits be accepted as a suitable pilot.

R3 The Customer Focus Challenge Panel be reconvened to monitor and assess the results of the pilot.

R4 That the draft charter be piloted in Housing Services and one area of leisure services to gain additional consultation feedback and also identify issues around monitoring and feasibility on a corporate and service level. It is recommended that this pilot take place in autumn 2004 with a view to launching the corporate charter in March/April 2005.

3.3. Parallel Tasks

3.3.1 In addition to the adoption of the pilot project, the following recommendations (and the supporting tasks) should be adopted in parallel with the pilot study to fully inform the future phases of the Council's Service Improvement Plan. These recommendations are shown in appendix 1 with an explanation where appropriate. In addition to these recommendations any actions that are planned by services to improve customer delivery should proceed provided they are in line with findings of the review.

4. FUTURE PHASES

4.1 The operation of the pilot will enable the Council to consider how it wants to take this subject forward. This would include considering whether the Council wants to move towards option 3 (establishing a Call Centre) or option 4 (a One stop contact Centre), explained in section 3, and how quickly it wants to move towards these options.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON PARALLEL TASKS

Communicating a clear vision

- R5** It is proposed that, as part of our commitment to being customer focused and to help our customers know what they can expect from us, this Council adopts a Customer Focus Vision, based on the principles identified above.
- R6** The Council adopt a 'Customer Focus Vision' based on the 4 basic principles of:
- Understanding and meeting customers' needs
 - Providing easy access to services
 - Being inclusive, and
 - Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided.
- R7** To fulfil its Customer Focus Vision the Council adopt, resource and implement the Customer Focus Service Improvement Plan.
- R8** Subject to the agreement and development of the corporate customer charter, a rolling programme of development of service charters needs to be established. These service charters need to take account of the service standards contained within the corporate document, but also include local service standards and customer service promises to reflect the business of every division within the Council. In developing these service standards meaningful and robust consultation needs to take place with service users to ensure that the local standards/charters reflect customer needs.

Customer Focus Project Team

The resources required for the first phase of the project, which includes the pilot, will be arranged from within existing resources, by seconding appropriate staff for 50% of their time. During the later stages of the project, full-time project team support is essential and will be justified as part of the business cases developed as an outcome of the pilot.

Post Review Analysis

The work carried out to establish the 4 baseline position statements (Telephone Contact, Face to Face Contact, Manual Correspondence, Electronic Contact) has

identified areas of further research required to inform the Council's longer term Service Improvement Plan. This work must be carried out, in the appropriate detail, in order to establish costings, scope, potential benefits and savings etc for all of the Technological 'building blocks' identified in the Service Improvement Plan.

Until this work has been carried out it will be impossible to produce an accurate specification for any system, and accurate costings, return on investment etc cannot be produced. The continued analysis work has been identified within the Service Improvement Plan and will require both a central drive from the proposed Customer Focus Project Team and commitment from directorates to providing the necessary information.

Business Process Re-engineering

The benefits to the Council of undertaking Process Re-engineering (BPR) are significant and include:

- ❑ Elimination of unnecessary actions / whole processes
- ❑ Reduce the cost of service delivery
- ❑ Facilitate the focus of resources on priority service areas
- ❑ Help ensure value for money, Best Value and continuous improvement across the council

The pilot project will demonstrate the best way to achieve this and identify the best way to roll it out in the future.

Funding

The pilot will be funded using existing resources. However, significant funding and resources will be required to implement subsequent phases of this project. At present £100,000 has been allocated from the Council's e-Government Fund (secured through the IEG grant) to assist in the implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Considerable (to be identified as part of the ongoing analysis work) additional investment will be required to implement CRM. As a result it would be logical to explore possible funding sources whilst the pilot is taking place in the event that the Council wants to extend the activity of the pilot across the Council or move to the next option (see 3.1 for more information).

Recommendation

- R9 The Council notes the management action planned to implement and undertake the pilot and undertake the preparatory work for future phases.**

Council's Customer Focus Strategy

The Council needs to adopt a long term strategy to Customer Focus to guide the development of its customer contact points. This strategy would be best developed after the evaluation of the pilot.

Recommendation

R10 The Executive Summary be developed into the Council's Customer Focus Strategy.

Opening Times

The Council has made a commitment to enabling a one-stop approach to service delivery. With a full range of services handling available at any access point it will have the opportunity to consider rationalising the number of access points available. Under a one-stop approach the Council need not maintain the high number of, currently primarily service specific, contact points distributed across Torbay. Opening hours across our telephone and face to face contact points will be rationalised to give consistency across all channels. In future we may look to extend opening hours through our rationalised contact points.

Recommendation

R11 That the Council support the move to rationalise the number of, and the opening hours for, general reception areas (i.e. excluding libraries and TIC's) and telephone access points. In undertaking this recommendation the Council's long term accommodation strategy must be considered.

Partnership Working

The Best Value Review (in the form of the Interim Position Statements) has identified that there is currently a lack of performance management information with regards to its complex customer access points. Similarly, the Council is in the midst of a radical restructuring (i.e. TDA, Children's Services, Adult Trust) and it is not yet clear how the organisation will look in two or three years time. The Council has not yet clearly articulated where it sees the future split between 'front' and 'back office' functions occurring and until this work has been done, it is difficult to gauge where lines of management accountability will be located for customer services. This would make it difficult for the Council to develop a robust partnership contract at this stage, which clearly defines 'the business' and equally maps out the vision for the future. It is therefore recommended that:

Recommendation

- R12 The Council should inform key strategic partners of these decisions, and enter into dialogue with them with a view to delivering more integrated services in the medium to long term.**
- R13 The Council should continue to work with the Devon e-Government Partnership to identify opportunities for future joined up service delivery.**

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Enhanced Service Delivery Pilot Project

ID	Recommendation	Links	Objectives	Key Tasks and Timescales (all dates in phase 1 are based on an 18 month plan, suitably resourced)	Resource Implications
Recommendation R1					
<p>The Executive agree to implement a pilot and that a further review takes place at the end of the pilot phase to evaluate its success and the potential for roll-out across the organisation. If approval is given to then extend the pilot across the Council it will be necessary to reassess the resource implications and identify appropriate procurement options for future service delivery.</p>					
Recommendation R2					
<p>Exchequer and Benefits (E&B) be accepted as a suitable pilot.</p>					
Key Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation, procurement and Implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system • Implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system across E&B • Implementation of Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) in Housing benefits • Implementation of Corporate A to Z of Council Services • Business Process Re-engineering undertaken within E&B • In depth testing and analysis of Call logger statistics for all E&B help line numbers. 				

ID	Recommendation	Links	Objectives	Key Tasks and Timescales (all dates in phase 1 are based on an 18 month plan, suitably resourced)	Resource Implications
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a centralised E&B helpline resource • Testing of 'generic' contact staff through sharing of face to face and telephone enquiry handling. <p><i>Oct 2004 – March 2005</i></p>				
Recommendation R3					
The Customer Focus Challenge Panel be reconvened to monitor and assess the results of the pilot.					
Key Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post pilot review <p><i>March – April 2005</i></p>				
Recommendation R4					
That the draft charter be piloted in Housing Services and one area of leisure services to gain additional consultation feedback and also identify issues around monitoring and feasibility on a corporate and service level. It is recommended that this pilot take place in autumn 2004 with a view to launching the corporate charter in March/April 2005.					
Key Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of draft Corporate Customer Charter and service standards and charter <i>Sept 2004</i> • Piloting of draft Customer Charter in Housing Services and one area of Leisure <i>Sept – Nov 2004</i> • Adoption of Corporate Customer Charter and Service Standards <i>Dec 2004 – April 2005</i> • Implement rolling programme of development of local Service Standards <i>April 2005 onwards</i> 				

Parallel Tasks

ID	Recommendation	Links	Objectives	Key Tasks and Timescales (all dates in phase 1 are based on an 18 month plan, suitably resourced)	Resource Implications
<p>Recommendation R5</p> <p>It is proposed that, as part of our commitment to being customer focused and to help our customer know what they can expect from us, this Council adopts a Customer Focus Vision based on the principles outlined in R5.</p>					
<p>Recommendation R6</p> <p>The Council adopt a ‘Customer Focus Vision’ based on the 4 basic principles of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and meeting customers’ needs • Providing easy access to services • Being inclusive, and • Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided. 					
<p>Recommendation R7</p> <p>To fulfil its Customer Focus Vision the Council adopt, resource and implement the Customer Focus Service Improvement Plan.</p>					

ID	Recommendation	Links	Objectives	Key Tasks and Timescales (all dates in phase 1 are based on an 18 month plan, suitably resourced)	Resource Implications
	<p>Recommendation R8</p> <p>Subject to the agreement and development of the corporate customer charter, a rolling programme of development of service charters needs to be established. These service charters need to take account of the service standards contained within the corporate document, but also include local service standards and customer service promises reflect the business of every division within the Council. In developing these service standards meaningful and robust consultation needs to take place with service users to ensure that the local standards/charters reflect customer needs.</p>				
	<p>Recommendation R9</p> <p>The Council notes the management action planned to implement and undertake the pilot and undertake the preparatory work for future phases.</p>				
	<p>Recommendation R10</p> <p>The Executive Summary be developed into the Council’s Customer Focus Strategy.</p>				
	<p>Recommendation R11</p> <p>That the Council support the move to rationalise the number of, and the opening hours for, general reception areas (i.e. excluding libraries and TIC’s) and telephone access points. In undertaking this recommendation the Council’s long term accommodation strategy must be considered.</p>				
<p>Key Actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a comprehensive matrix of customer demand across all contact points (face to face and telephone). Information to include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Demand across a defined period (considering seasonal variation) 				

ID	Recommendation	Links	Objectives	Key Tasks and Timescales (all dates in phase 1 are based on an 18 month plan, suitably resourced)	Resource Implications
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enquiry type ○ Peak demand / demand times ○ System dependency (back-office It or manual systems) ○ Opening times ○ Staffing levels (to include seasonal staffing where appropriate) <p><i>Nov 2004 – April 2005</i></p>		
	<p>Recommendation R12</p> <p>The Council should inform key strategic partners to these decisions, and enter into dialogue with them with a view to delivering more integrated services in the medium to long term.</p>				
	<p>Recommendation R13</p> <p>The Council should continue to work with the e-Government Partnership to identify opportunities for future joined up service delivery.</p>				