

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**6 NOVEMBER 2008**

**REPORT OF ENVIRONMENT  
SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **CABINET DECISION**

**Access and Communities – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Coleman**

#### **REVIEW OF CUSTOMER FIRST**

1. Summary

This report informs Cabinet of the outcomes of the review of Customer First undertaken by the Environment Select Committee during the period April to October 2008.

2. Recommendations

The Committee recommends that:

1. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council adopts the Cabinet Office's new Customer Service Excellence Standard corporately, replacing and building on the Customer First Stage 2 programme post-March 2009, following corporate completion of Customer First Stage 2.
2. Section 5 of Customer First Stage 2 programme relating to Service Equality be reviewed and developed where necessary and included as an additional section above and beyond the Customer Service Excellence Standard or any other customer service programme implemented following Customer First Stage 2.
3. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Councillors to have the opportunity for increased involvement, for example by supporting Council staff involved in mystery shopping exercises or as customer service champions, under the Customer Service Excellence Standard or any other customer service programme implemented following Customer First Stage 2.
4. Specific overarching targets for improvement in customer service satisfaction ratings be developed as part of the introduction of the Customer Service Excellence Standard (which requires the introduction of such targets) or any other customer service programme implemented following Customer First Stage 2.
5. To assist customers presented with a voicemail message when contacting Council officers by telephone the existing service standards and guidance for the use of voicemail be enhanced and promoted, in particular:
  - All voicemail messages include the officer's name, team or service details and extension number.

- The alternative voicemail message facility is used if the officer being contacted is out of the office on business for the day or away on holiday.
- Voicemail messages give an indication when the caller can expect to receive a response, or otherwise provide the caller with an alternative telephone contact officer and number.
- Targets for responding to voicemail messages are established.

Furthermore, taking into account the above recommendation, the use of voicemail be included in future mystery shopping exercises.

6. To avoid unnecessary calls back to the Council's automated messaging service, callers presented with an answering machine when contacting a member of the public or a Councillor leave an appropriate message and contact details including name and telephone number.
7. A corporate staff suggestion scheme be implemented under the Customer Service Excellence scheme with awards presented for the best suggestions.
8. Existing information relating to the responsibilities of different organisations working within the borough for particular services be expanded and made available via the SBC staff intranet or other suitable way in order for customers contacting Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council with queries regarding services provided by organisations other than the Council to be re-directed accordingly.
9. A review of the provision of children's toys in Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council reception areas and other appropriate buildings/ areas of buildings be undertaken. In carrying out the review, consideration should be given towards:
  - Assessing the potential customer demand for the provision of children's toys by conducting public consultation in reception areas.
  - Recognising that children's toys cannot be provided in every reception area and are best suited to reception areas suitable for families rather than where customers do not have to queue for very long.
  - The financial implications to the Council.
10. The Customer Service Excellence Awards be continued under the Customer Service Excellence Standard or any other customer service programme implemented following Customer First Stage 2.
11. Officers hold further discussions with the Customer Service Excellence bodies to finalise the one-off costs associated with a corporate application for Customer Service Excellence and that a bid be made as part of the 2009/10 budget-setting process to fund these costs. The North East Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership could, potentially, provide additional funding.

### 3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

This review was undertaken to consider whether our published service standards should be reviewed and revised to ensure that they are realistic, challenging and focus on what is important to customers. It also examined the "what next?" after the current Customer First scheme ends in March 2009 and considered whether the scheme needed to be amended/ updated/ revitalised as a vehicle to further drive up customer focussed improvements.

The key objectives for the review were as follows:

- Assessment of residents experiences of service delivery.
- Review of published service standards.

- Assessment of whether the Customer First scheme needs to be further developed – especially in relation to the Customer Services Excellence Standard Corporate Charter Mark.
- Spreading a customer focus throughout the organisation.

The attached report outlines the results of the Committee's work.

#### 4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting is being held, whilst the matter is being considered; not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

**Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc.; whether or not they are a member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting, and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room during consideration of the relevant item.**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## **DETAIL**

1. The Environment Select Committee decided to examine Customer First with a view to making recommendations leading to improved customer service and improved customer satisfaction.
2. The Committee undertook an assessment of residents' experiences of service delivery, a review of published service standards, an assessment of whether the Customer First scheme needs to be further developed – especially in relation to the Cabinet Office Customer Services Excellence Standard, and arrangements for spreading a customer focus throughout the organisation.
3. The Committee received evidence on the new Customer Service Excellence Standard as a possibility for a programme to follow Customer First Stage 2. The Committee also looked at other aspects of the Council's customer service procedures including use of the 'ringback'

and 1471 functions associated with the Council's current telephone system and advertisements and messages relayed to customers whilst on hold.

4. Following consideration by Cabinet an action plan will be submitted to the Select Committee setting out how the approved recommendations will be implemented detailing officers responsible for action and timescales.

## **FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial**

Regarding recommendation 11, involving further discussions with the Customer Service Excellence bodies to finalise the one-off costs associated with a corporate application for Customer Service Excellence and a subsequent bid to fund these costs as part of the 2009/10 budget-setting process, the North East Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership could, potentially, provide additional funding.

### **Legal**

The review of the provision of children's toys in reception areas referred to in recommendation 6 will require consideration of relevant health and safety implications.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

This subject matter of report is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

## **COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

The review relates to the key service improvement objectives:

Improve access to services.

Improve operational efficiency.

Ensure employees have knowledge, skills and tools to improve performance.

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Regarding recommendation 2, section 5 of Customer First Stage 2 programme relating to Service Equality be reviewed and developed where necessary and included as an additional section above and beyond the Customer Service Excellence Standard or any other customer service programme implemented following Customer First Stage 2.

## **CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS**

Consultation took place with customers as part of exit surveys undertaken in reception areas, the Community Access point in the Ingleby Barwick Tesco store and from Viewpoint Panel members.

**Roy MacGregor**

**Scrutiny Officer**

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Background Papers

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors

Property