

Environment Select Committee

Review of Customer First



November 2008

Environment Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

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SELECT COMMITTEE – MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Mrs Rigg Chair)
Councillor Smith (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Cains
Councillor Leckonby
Councillor Stoker
Councillor Woodhead
Councillor Larkin
Councillor Rix
Councillor Womphrey

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee thank the following contributors to this review:

- Debbie Hurwood, Head of Customer Services and Taxation
- Kath Hornsey, Customer Services Manager
- Joanna Robinson, Customer First Manager
- Simon Lee, Senior Policy and Projects Manager
- Kate Dumain, Strategic Advisor - Research & Consultation
- Jenny Elstob, Viewpoint Co-ordinator
- Ken Pullen, Infrastructure Support Team Leader, Xentrall Shared Services

Contact Officer

Roy MacGregor, Scrutiny Officer
Tel: 01642 528159
E-mail: roy.macgregor@stockton.gov.uk

Foreword

This is the first scrutiny review to be carried out by this committee under the new PICK system for prioritising topics, which explains why the Environment Select committee has scrutinised a topic not related to the environment portfolio.

The committee recognised that the Customer First Programme has been an important tool for the Council to ensure that there is a focus on customer service in every section. In the course of the scrutiny two strands developed. The need for a corporate decision on the way forward post “Customer First Stage 2” was the driver for the review but a number of smaller issues surfaced which were of more obvious direct interest to the general public and therefore to many ward councillors. The recommendations on both strands are detailed in the report.

The committee members are indebted to all who gave evidence and to Debbie Hurwood (Head of Customer Service and Taxation) and Daniel Ladd (Scrutiny Officer) for their support throughout the review. We would also like to thank Roy MacGregor (Scrutiny Officer) who finalised the report.



Original Brief

<p>Scrutiny Chair/Project Director: Councillor Mrs Maureen Rigg</p>	<p>Contact details: 01642 785689 Email: maureen.rigg@stockton.gov.uk</p>												
<p>Scrutiny Officer/Project Manager: Daniel Ladd/ Roy MacGregor</p>	<p>Contact details: 01642 528159 roy.macgregor@stockton.gov.uk</p>												
<p>Departmental Link Officer: Debbie Hurwood Head of Customer Services and Taxation</p>	<p>Contact details: 01642 527014</p>												
<p>1. Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address? Council Plan 2007-10: Improve access to services. Improve operational efficiency. Ensure employees have knowledge, skills and tools to improve performance.</p>													
<p>2. What are the main issues? i) Assessment of residents' experiences of service delivery; ii) Review of published service standards; iii) Assessment of whether the Customer First scheme needs to be further developed – especially in relation to the Customer Services Excellence Standard Corporate Charter Mark. iv) Spreading a customer focus throughout the organisation.</p>													
<p>3. The Thematic Select Committee's overall aim/ objectives in doing this work is: To assist in the development and delivery of Council services.</p>													
<p>4. The possible outputs/outcomes are: Improved customer service; improved customer satisfaction.</p>													
<p>5. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic? Provides valuable input for the development of a key service area.</p>													
<p>6. Who will the panel be trying to influence as part of their work? Cabinet, SBC officers, users of services provided and facilitated by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.</p>													
<p>7. Duration of enquiry? Six Months</p>													
<p>8. What category does the review fall into?</p> <table border="0" data-bbox="193 1765 1471 1993"> <tr> <td>Policy Review</td> <td>✓</td> <td>Policy Development</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>External Partnership</td> <td></td> <td>Performance Management</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Holding Executive to Account</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		Policy Review	✓	Policy Development	✓	External Partnership		Performance Management	✓	Holding Executive to Account			
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External Partnership		Performance Management	✓										
Holding Executive to Account													

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Environment Select 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.
- 1.2 The Council's Customer First programme started in 2003. Stage 2 of the programme was launched in June 2007 and, setting a higher standard than Stage 1, it aims to develop the Council's existing customer-focused culture into one that places exceptional customer service at the heart of all we do as an organisation. The Programme applies to all services (not just those that are the first point of contact with customers) and includes services provided to both internal and external customers.
- 1.3 The programme comprises an extensive range of criteria, against which all Council services are assessed, and a set of customer service standards for reception areas and telephone, letter and e-mail communications.
- 1.4 The Committee was informed that a review and decision on what should follow Customer First Stage 2 had been identified, with an officer group led by the Head of Customer Services and Taxation reviewing the options and scheduling exploratory meetings with the four Charter Mark assessment bodies. The scrutiny review of Customer First was identified as an effective way to ensure that Members had been able to have input into the shaping of the Customer First Programme (or whatever might replace it), with particular reference to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's published service standards ensuring that they are realistic, challenging and focus on what is important to customers.
- 1.5 The criteria contained in Customer First Stage 2 are based on information and best practice from other service areas considered to be performing well, the essential elements of other quality awards such as the Charter Mark, ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation), and EFQM (the European Foundation for Quality Management), and national research into what are considered the 'key drivers' of excellent customer service.
- 1.6 Services completing Customer First Stage 2 are therefore required to compare their own services' performance against the criteria contained in the programme. This includes both essential criteria which all services must achieve if they want to complete the programme and criteria which have been identified as essential only for 'frontline' services and demonstrating compliance is not essential for 'support' services.
- 1.7 The programme recognises that some services may already be delivering a standard of customer service commensurate to the Stage 2 criteria and the assessment process for these services may just be verification and formal recognition of this, whilst other services may benefit from improved customer service as a result of undertaking the programme and implementing service improvements.

- 1.8 During the review, the Committee was provided with initial data from a report undertaken to assess the impact of Customer First Stage 1. This report is from December 2006, prior to the introduction of Stage 2. It was included as part of the evidence in order to provide an indication of progress up to that point and context for the review of Customer First Stage 2.
- 1.9 The Stage 1 report also included data from mystery shopping undertaken in August and September 2006, which looked at reception points, telephone conversations and email responses. The Committee also received further data on mystery shopping from an exercise undertaken in 2007 by the Customer First Team, which examined the quality of provision at receptions, telephone and e-mail responses, and requests for information for all services.
- 1.10 Data collated by Ipsos MORI regarding contact with the Council and overall satisfaction levels with contact was also considered by the Committee. This includes data comparing Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's performance over time (between 1998 and 2006) and with other local authorities who have asked the same questions in their Ipsos MORI polls. Ipsos MORI data is collected bi-ennially (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006) in Stockton, although not all questions included in this report were asked in all of these years and therefore comparisons are not always possible.
- 1.11 Information was provided to the Committee concerning complaints and commendations for 2007/08. This information provides the main areas of complaint and commendation for different service areas and is an integral part of the Council's performance reporting arrangements.
- 1.12 The Committee felt the provision of children's toys was important in some reception areas which were likely to be used by people with young children; however health and safety assessments had resulted in toys being removed from reception areas. However, the Committee were informed of an example where cube toys were available in a hospital reception area for children to use.
- 1.13 The Committee received evidence on the new Customer Service Excellence Standard as a possibility for a programme to follow Customer First Stage 2. The Customer Service Excellence Standard initially arose from a report written by Bernard Herdan in 2005 entitled 'The Customer Voice in Transforming Public Services'. The 'Herdan Report' as it became known was commissioned by the government to review the effectiveness of the Charter Mark scheme, to make recommendations for its future, to strengthen its role in improving public services and to examine the measurement and use of customer satisfaction scores and customer insight in the design and delivery of public services.
- 1.14 The Committee accepted that standing still following corporate customer completion of Customer First Stage 2 was not a viable possibility for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. A further Customer First Stage 3 programme was considered, but it was considered that the external assessment which the Customer Service Excellence Standard offered was a more significant selling point and greater bonus for the Council. The estimated costs of set-up and revenue budgets were also considered, and the Committee felt that these appeared to offer good value for corporate completion of the programme. The Committee also recognised some services were unlikely to be satisfied solely with an internal system of appraisal and had therefore been through some form of external appraisal such as Charter Mark.

- 1.15 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.
- 1.16 Looking to the future, it is clear that the new Comprehensive Area Assessment, which replaces the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime from April 2009, will have a strong citizen focus, particularly through the new partnership approach towards the provision of services for local people.

Following the review, 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.**

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The Council's Customer First Programme started in 2003. Stage 2 of the programme was launched in June 2007 and, setting a higher standard than Stage 1, it aims to develop the Council's existing customer-focused culture into one that places exceptional customer service at the heart of all we do. The Programme applies to all services (not just those that are the first point of contact with customers) and includes services provided to both internal and external customers.
- 2.2 The programme comprises an extensive range of criteria, against which all Council services are assessed, and a set of customer service standards for reception areas and telephone, letter and e-mail communications.
- 2.3 A target date has been set for all services to complete the Stage 2 Programme by 31st March 2009, however it is recognised that the road to customer service excellence is continuous and there is always room for further improvement. The Environment Select Committee was therefore requested to consider how Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council continues after March 2009, not only maintaining the excellent standards achieved already, but also building on them and delivering greater customer satisfaction. The Committee was informed that there are several options for the future, including amending/ updating/ revitalising the Customer First Stage 2 programme or adopting the new Cabinet Office Customer Service Excellence Standard (the new Charter Mark), a programme identified as particularly worthy of consideration.
- 2.4 As at April 2008 (the start of the review), seven service areas had achieved Customer First Stage 2, with a further 24 teams at various stages of planning/ implementation as they work towards completion of the programme by the March 2009 deadline.
- 2.5 In addition to this, there are currently 13 services across the Council that hold Charter Marks for outstanding customer service. The move to the Customer Service Excellence Standard contains new concepts, which will require additional evidence. Existing Charter Mark holders will not be allowed to automatically move to the new standard. The 13 existing Charter Mark holders will have to go through a transition process if they want to retain the award.
- 2.6 Both the old Charter Mark Scheme and the new Customer Service Excellence Standard provide for corporate assessments. Completion of Customer First Stage 2 by all services, coupled with existing corporate frameworks covering complaints, diversity and performance management means that most of the groundwork has been completed for the potential award of the Customer Service Excellence Standard corporately. Nationally, nine local authorities are engaged in the Corporate Charter Mark programme.
- 2.7 The Committee was informed that a review and decision on what should follow Customer First Stage 2 had been identified, with an officer group led by the Head of Taxation and Administration reviewing the options and scheduling exploratory meetings with the four Charter Mark assessment bodies. The scrutiny review of Customer First was identified as an effective way to ensure that Members had been able to have input into the shaping of the Customer

First Programme (or whatever might replace it), with particular reference to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's published service standards ensuring that they are realistic, challenging and focus on what is important to customers.

3.0 Background

BACKGROUND TO CUSTOMER SERVICE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Customer First Programme

3.1 The Committee was provided with an overview of the Customer First programme as they were requested to make an assessment as to whether Stage 2 of the programme needed to be further developed. Customer First began in 2003 with stage 1 of the programme, which aimed ensure that services were delivering good customer service, and was completed by over 30 services. Stage 2 of Customer First was launched in 2007 and aimed to move services on from delivering good customer service to excellent customer service, with the ultimate aim of developing a customer-focussed culture throughout the Council. There is currently a target for all services to complete Customer First Stage 2 by March 2009. At the start of the review seven services had completed Customer First Stage 2:

1. Taxation;
2. Benefits;
3. Housing;
4. Care for Your Area (CFYA);
5. Finance;
6. Administration; and
7. Community Safety.

And a further 14 were identified either as awaiting assessment or progressing well. These included:

1. HR Transactional;
2. Technical Services;
3. Democratic Services;
4. Performance, Business and Bereavement Services;
5. PPC;
6. ICT;
7. Planning and Building Control;
8. Community Transport;
9. Regeneration;
10. Trading Standards;
11. Cultural Services;
12. Customer Services – CESC;
13. Pupil and Student Support; and
14. Legal Services.

3.2 The Customer First Stage 2 programme is a self-assessment tool designed to challenge services to demonstrate that they are delivering excellent customer service against a set criteria including:

- service delivery;
- service responsiveness;
- organisational culture and attitude;
- accessible services; and
- service equality.

- 3.3 The criteria contained in Customer First Stage 2 are based on information and best practice from other service areas considered to be performing well, the essential elements of other quality awards such as the Charter Mark, ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation), and EFQM (the European Foundation for Quality Management), and national research into what are considered the 'key drivers' of excellent customer service.
- 3.4 Services completing Customer First Stage 2 are therefore required to compare their own services' performance against the criteria contained in the programme. This includes both essential criteria which all services must achieve if they want to complete the programme and criteria which has been identified as essential only for 'frontline' services and demonstrating compliance is not essential for 'support' services.
- 3.5 The programme recognises that some services may already be delivering a standard of customer service commensurate to the Stage 2 criteria and the assessment process for these services may just be verification and formal recognition of this, whilst other services may benefit from improved customer service as a result of undertaking the programme and implementing service improvements.
- 3.6 The Customer First assessment process is as follows:
- Self-Assessment – which should be undertaken by a working group formed from within the service and include representatives from all different levels of the service;
 - Action Plan produced, of which all staff should be made aware;
 - Pre-Assessment – undertaken by the Customer First Manager;
 - Full Assessment – undertaken by trained volunteers from across the Council; and
 - Feedback Report.

Customer Service Standards

- 3.7 The Committee also reviewed the documented standards for customer service. The service standards are a further important part of the Customer First programme and the requirement to evidence how these are being met comprises part of the assessment criteria. The introduction of the service standards aims to provide a parity of customer service provision and experience across the Council. The service standards cover physical access to Council buildings, access by telephone, e-mail, and letter and include:
- standardised reception opening hours wherever possible – generally from 8.30am to 5.00pm (4.30pm on Fridays);
 - providing a friendly, helpful, respectful, courteous and professional service;
 - if a member of staff cannot help they will try to find out who can;
 - answering phone calls within 5 Rings (80% within 20 seconds and 20% within 45 seconds);
 - if voice mail is left a prompt call back will be arranged (within 24 hours);

- email will be acknowledged on the same day with the aim to have a full response within 10 working days;
- aim to send a full response to contact by letter within 10 working days;
- aim to attend to customers within 10 minutes of arrival in reception areas;
- staff will have readable name badges and be welcoming;
- reception areas will be accessible, clean, tidy and inviting with open hours displayed;
- provide information in large print, in Braille on audio tape other formats on request;
- arrange interpretation, translation and signing when requested;
- respect rights to privacy and confidentiality, and seek views and feedback;
- investigation of complaints and a response within 10 working days; and
- all services are also required to publish a service charter, displayed in reception areas for public facing services and published on the internet or included in a Service Level Agreement for support services.

3.8 Adherence to the service standards for all services is compulsory and these are assessed through the mystery shopping exercises. In addition to this service level assessments of customer satisfaction assessments and of commendations, comments and complaints as well as staff nominations for customer service excellence are all used as evidence to determine whether a service is upholding the standards. Staff appraisals should also identify any individual areas for improvement for officers and ensure that the competency framework is adhered to.

4.0 Evidence/ Findings

Meeting – 9th June 2008 – Existing data on Customer Service / Satisfaction

4.1 The Committee received evidence from the following sources:

Customer First Stage 1 Report (December 2006)

4.2 Initial data from a report undertaken to assess the impact of Customer First Stage 1. This report is from December 2006, prior to the introduction of Stage 2. It was included as part of the evidence in order to provide an indication of progress up to that point and context for the review of Customer First Stage 2.

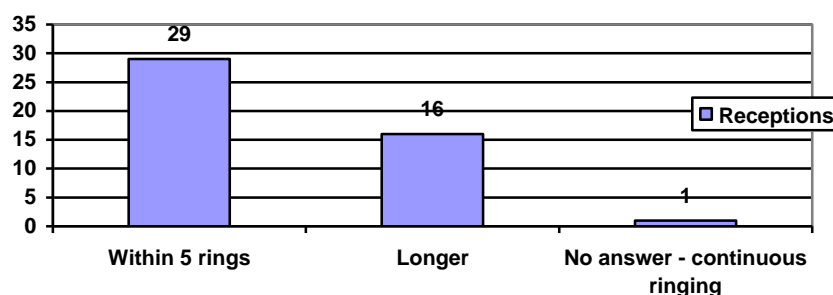
4.3 The report included Mystery Shopping data undertaken in August and September 2006, which included visiting reception points, telephone conversations and email responses.

4.4 In relation to reception areas, assessment of 37 reception points showed a general high standard with improvement since the introduction of Customer First. The most common problems identified in reception areas were:

- Signage – either trying to find the reception from the street or once inside the building there is little in the way of directional signs;
- heavy external doors;
- leisure centres have very little corporate information on display;
- six receptions did not have at least one poster in another language;
- eight had no loop system; and
- customer care displayed by staff in 2 receptions was below an acceptable standard.

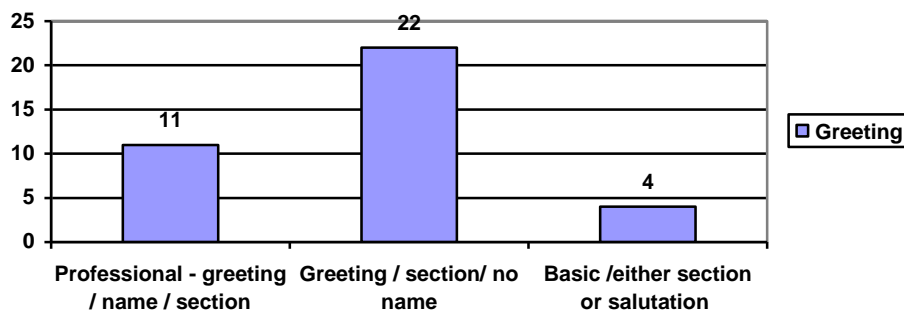
4.5 For telephone calls, 46 receptions throughout the Council were contacted and were asked “what are your normal opening hours”. The results are as follows:

How long (in rings) did it take to answer?



4.6 Of the 46 calls, 9 went to voicemail and only 2 of these gave the name of an officer who would ring back when they were available. One reception did not answer the phone, nor did it have an answering machine service. Sixteen areas took longer than 5 rings (corporate standard) to either answer or go to voicemail, although all were answered within 10 rings.

How was the call answered – did they give a greeting including their name and the section they were in?



- 4.7 From the 37 officers who answered the phone all but one were deemed to sound professional (the one was deemed to sound 'uninterested'). All officers answering the telephone were considered knowledgeable and did not need to direct the call to someone else, but only one reception - gave a closing statement - "is there anything else...".
- 4.8 Nineteen Services, predominantly within Support Services, were contacted via e-mail and asked to provide information on "*which Officer is responsible for your Internet / intranet web updates*". The corporate standard for acknowledging e-mails from a customer is 24 hours. The results were seen to be very disappointing with only 5 of the 19 services responding within 24 hours and 14 services providing no response at all.

Mystery Shopping Data (2007)

- 4.9 The most recently available 'mystery shopping' data was collated by the Customer First Team. This looked at the quality of provision at receptions, for telephone responses, e-mail responses, and requests for information for all services, not just those services that have completed or are completing Customer First Stage 2, every six months.

Reception Areas

- 4.10 The research was undertaken throughout September 2007, when the Customer First team visited 27 Council reception areas. From the research, the following was found:
- 74% of Services wore readable name badges (20/27).
 - 78% of Services displayed the up to date Complaints. Comments and Commendations Leaflet (21/27).
 - 81% of Services displayed the Customer Service Standards (22/27).
 - 56% of Services displayed some Performance Information (15/27).
 - 67% of Services displayed service improvements/customer feedback e.g. "You said, we did" (18/27).

- 74% of Services displayed a Language/Interpretation/Translation poster. (20/27).
- 41% of Services displayed a poster advising that information could be made available in other formats and languages (11/27).
- 96% of Services were considered easy to find (26/27).
- 100% of Services displayed opening times.
- 96% of Services provided sufficient and comfortable seating (26/27).
- 74% of Services provided children's toys (20/27).
- 96% of Services were tidy and welcoming (26/27).
- 100% of Services had a good display of leaflets and posters.
- In response to the 3 questions each Service were asked, 12% provided excellent responses, 72% provided good responses and 16% did not provide good responses.
- 100% of the receptionists were polite and friendly.
- 85% of receptionists were knowledgeable in answering the questions (23/27).
- 11% of receptionists needed to seek advice from someone else to answer the questions.

Telephones

4.11 Forty five services were telephoned and asked to confirm their office opening times. This was a success in 43 services:

- 80% of Services contacted answered the call within 5 rings (36/45).
- 4% of Services contacted answered the call longer than 5 rings (2/45).
- 4% of Services continuously rang/no response (2/45).
- 2% of Services rang straight to Voicemail (1/45).
- 10% of Services went straight to an automated service (4/45).

For **automated response times**, the length of time waiting on hold before the telephone was answered included:

- Housing Benefits – 30 Seconds.
- Council Tax – 2 minutes.

- CFYA – 1 minute.
- Billingham Forum – 1 Minute.

For telephone greetings:

- 58% of Services provided a greeting with name and section (25/43).
- 33% of Services did not provide either a name or service (12 no name and 2 no service) (14/43).
- 9% of services only provided 1 of the required standards (4/43).

For 'voice quality and tone':

- 90% of services were deemed professional and polite (39/43).
- 5% of services were fairly professional and polite (2/43).
- 5% of services were not very professional and polite (2/43).

In relation to the **knowledge and helpfulness** of the person answering the telephone

- 83% of services gave a very helpful and knowledgeable response (36/43).
- 17% of services gave a fairly helpful and knowledgeable response (7/43).

Finally, mystery shopping assesses if a **closing statement** is given by the person answering the telephone.

- 21% of services provided a closing statement (9/43).
- 79% of services did not provide a closing statement (34/43).

Email Contact

4.12 Thirty six services were emailed and asked to provide the name of the Local Councillor for Stillington.

For response times:

- 94% of Services sent a reply within 1 working day (33/35).
- 6% of Services sent a reply more than 2 days later (2/35).
- Only 1 Service failed to respond.

In terms of the **'tone of the email'**

- 23% of services were rated excellent (8/35).
- 51% were good (18/35).
- 17% were fair (6/35).
- 9% were poor (3/35).

In terms of a judgement on the **quality of information** supplied

- 43% of Services were rated excellent (15/35).
- 26% of Services were good (9/35).
- 20% of Services were fair (7/35).
- 11% of Services were poor (4/35).

In terms of whether this query was **'resolved at first contact'**

- 77% of replies were fully resolved at first contact (27/35).
- 23% of replies were not fully resolved at first contact e.g. directed to another person or SBC website for the information (8/35).

In terms of whether the email response included **contact details**

- 77% of replies contained the name and service of the responder (27/35).
- 23% of replies did not contain the name of the responder (8/35).

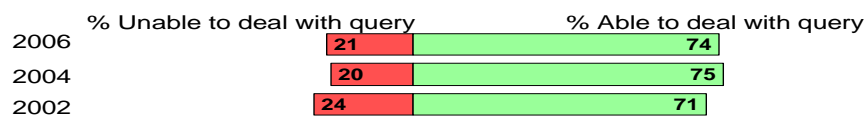
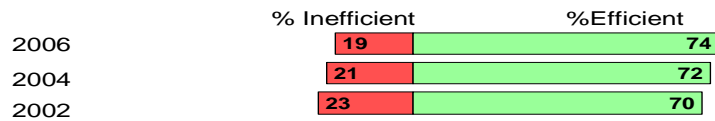
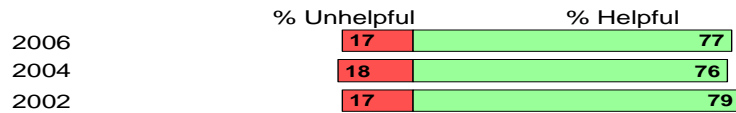
Ipsos MORI data – Satisfaction with Contact with the Council

4.13 Data collated by Ipsos MORI regarding contact with the Council and overall satisfaction levels with contact was also considered by the Committee. This includes data comparing Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's performance over time (between 1998 and 2006) and with other local authorities who have asked the same questions in their Ipsos MORI polls. Ipsos MORI data is collected bi-ennially (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006) in Stockton, although not all questions included in this report were asked in all of these years and therefore comparisons are not always possible.

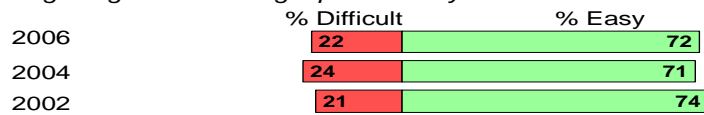
4.14 The data showed that in 2006 almost half of Stockton residents (46%) had contacted the Council in the last year or so, which remained in line with 2004 levels. Consistent with 2004, seven in ten (70%) of these contacted the Council by 'phone, whilst around one in seven made contact in person (15%), with 6% and 5% respectively stating that they had made contact by letter or email in 2006. Relatively small proportions used letters (6%) or emails (5%). Ratings of staff amongst those who have made contact with the Council also remained very similar from 2006 to 2004, with no statistically significant variations.

Ratings of Council Contact

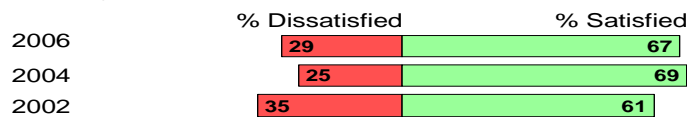
Q *And when you contacted the Council did you find the staff there . . . ?*



Q *Was getting hold of the right person easy?*



Q *And were you satisfied or dissatisfied with final outcome?*



Base: All those who have contacted Stockton Council in the last year.
 2006 (468), 2004 (440); 2002 (530)

Source: Ipsos MORI

4.15 The Ipsos MORI Poll also included questions on whether staff at the Council were considered helpful, efficient, and able to deal with the customers problem(s). The results, which are presented as a comparison with Stockton's results over the last two Ipsos MORI Polls in 2006 and 2004 and with other authorities who asked the same question, are reproduced below. On the basis of this information, it appears fair to state that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council perform consistently well in relation these three criteria.

Q <i>When you last contacted the Council (..... Service) did you find (the staff there) helpful/unhelpful?</i>		
	Year	Helpful %
<i>Base: All contacting the Council</i>		
Southampton	2004	78
Stockton-on-Tees	2006	77
Stockton-on-Tees	2004	76
Sunderland	2005	75
Westminster	2005	73
South Tyneside	2004	73
Leicester	2005	70
Southwark	2005	70
Birmingham	2004	69

Q <i>When you last contacted the Council (..... Service) did you find (the staff there) efficient/inefficient?</i>		
	Year	Efficient %
<i>Base: All contacting the Council</i>		
Stockton-on-Tees	2006	74
Stockton-on-Tees	2004	72
Southampton	2004	71
South Tyneside	2004	68
Westminster	2005	65
Leicester	2005	62

Q <i>When you last contacted the Council (..... Service) did you find (the staff there) able to deal with your problem?</i>			
		Year	Able to deal with problem %
<i>Base: All</i>			
Stockton-on-Tees		2004	75
Stockton-on-Tees		2006	74
Southampton		2004	67
South Tyneside		2004	62
Sunderland		2005	60

- 4.16 The next data set was asked of all respondents who stated that they had contacted the Council in the last year or so. It provides comparative data from 1998 to 2006 regarding the areas discussed on the previous page and a new criterion introduced in 2006 regarding whether staff are considered knowledgeable or not. Of all of the categories, only the ability to deal with a query / enquiry experience an overall net fall from 1998 and 2006.

Q68-71		And when you contacted the Council, did you find staff there ?					
		1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	
		(505)	(480)	(530)	(440)	(468)	
		%	%	%	%	%	
Q68		Helpful	74	74	79	76	77
	OR	Unhelpful	21	20	17	18	17
		Neither/don't know/not relevant/not stated	4	5	4	6	6
		NET	53	54	62	58	60
Q69		Efficient	67	70	70	72	74
	OR	Inefficient	25	24	23	21	19
		Neither/don't know/not relevant/not stated	7	6	6	7	7
		NET	42	46	47	51	55
Q70		Able to deal with your query/enquiry	76	72	71	75	74
	OR	Unable to deal with only query/enquiry	18	23	24	20	21
		Neither/don't know/not relevant/not stated	5	5	4	5	5
		NET	58	49	47	55	53
Q71		Knowledgeable	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	71
	OR	Not knowledgeable	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	19
		Neither/don't know/not relevant/not stated	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10
		NET					52

Base: All who have contacted Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council in the last year.

- 4.17 The Ipsos MORI poll included a question regarding how easy it was to get hold of the right person within the Council. As is clear, Stockton has experienced a net increase in respondents stating that it was easy to get hold of the right person from 1998 to 2006 of 9%.

Q72		Was getting hold of the right person ?					
			1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
			(505)	(480)	(530)	(440)	(468)
			%	%	%	%	%
		Easy	67	73	74	71	72
	OR	Difficult	26	20	21	24	22
		Neither/don't know/not relevant	6	7	5	6	6
		NET	41	53	53	47	50

Base: All who have contacted Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council in the last year.

- 4.18 Finally in this section, respondents were asked if they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the final outcome of their contact. As is clear, similar overall net increase in satisfaction have been made since 1998, 8% overall, but a drop of 6% was evident between 2004 and 2006.

Q73		And were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the final outcome?					
			1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
			(505)	(480)	(530)	(440)	(468)
			%	%	%	%	%
		Satisfied	61	58	61	69	67
		Dissatisfied	31	35	35	25	29
		Don't know/not stated	7	7	4	6	5
		NET	30	23	26	44	38

Base: All who have contacted Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council in the last year

Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) General Survey data (2006/07)

4.19 All English local authorities are statutorily required to undertake Best Value Performance Indicator surveys on a three-yearly basis to collect data for Best Value user satisfaction indicators. The first round of these surveys ran in 2000-01, the second in 2003-04, and the third in 2006-07. These survey-based measures form part of the wider suite of BVPIs, which councils are statutorily required to report on. Local authorities collect this survey data following a methodology and a timetable prescribed by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Audit Commission. Following data collection, authorities submit their data to the Audit Commission for collation and further analysis at national and regional aggregate levels. The data included in this report provides information from the BVPI General Survey contact with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and satisfaction with service.

Response rates

Year	Response	Response rate
2006	2,215	46%
2003	2,167	43%
2000	1,248	15.6%

Contacting the Council for other reasons

4.20 Questions 31 to 35 concerned respondents' most recent contact with the Council for reasons other than to make a complaint.

Q31. How many times have you contacted the Council in the past twelve months for any other reason than to make a complaint?

Have not contacted them in past 12 months	39.7%	Four times	1.9%
Once	15.6%	Five or more times	4.9%
Twice	11.5%	Don't know/can't remember	14.4%
Three times	6.8%		

Q32. Which of these describes the reasons why you made YOUR MOST RECENT contact with the Council?

Reported an issue or problem	21.8%	Don't know/can't remember	1.5%
Asked for advice/information	44.1%	Any other reason	10.5%
Applied to use a service	28.1%		

Q33. How were you in contact with the Council?

In person	20.1%	Via a website/ Internet	3.7%
By telephone	75.4%	By letter	12.4%
By e-mail	8.2%	Other method:	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Councillor • Planning hearing 	

Q34. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received the last time you made contact with the Council?

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Satisfied	Net satisfaction
29%	43.7%	10.6%	10.3%	6.3%	72.7%	56.1%

Q35. Still thinking about your most recent contact with the Council, please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with each aspect of the service you received. If any aspect does not apply to your particular experience, please tick not applicable.

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Satisfied	Net satisfaction
How easy it was to find the right person to deal with	27.8%	47%	10.7%	8.7%	5.8%	75%	60.3%
The length of time it took to deal with the person you contacted	27.3%	47.2%	11.3%	8.1%	6%	75%	60.4%
Any information you were given	26.5%	46.1%	10.2%	10.1%	7.1%	73%	55.4%
How competent the staff were	31.1%	43.8%	13.6%	6.4%	5.1%	75%	63.4%
How helpful the staff were	35.4%	42.3%	10%	7.3%	4.9%	78%	65.5%
The final outcome	32.1%	35.4%	12.3%	8.1%	12.1%	68%	47.2%

4.21 Direct comparisons with Ipsos MORI data do not appear to be entirely suitable as research methodologies may have differed. However, net satisfaction ratings appear broadly similar with the Ipsos MORI ratings, if on average slightly lower, from the BVPI data.

Commendations and Complaints

4.22 Information was provided to the Committee concerning complaints and commendations for the last two available quarters of 2007/08 (quarter 2 and quarter 3). This information provides the main areas of complaint for different service areas. Subsequently, information relating to quarter 4 and for the year 2007/08 became available and is set out below.

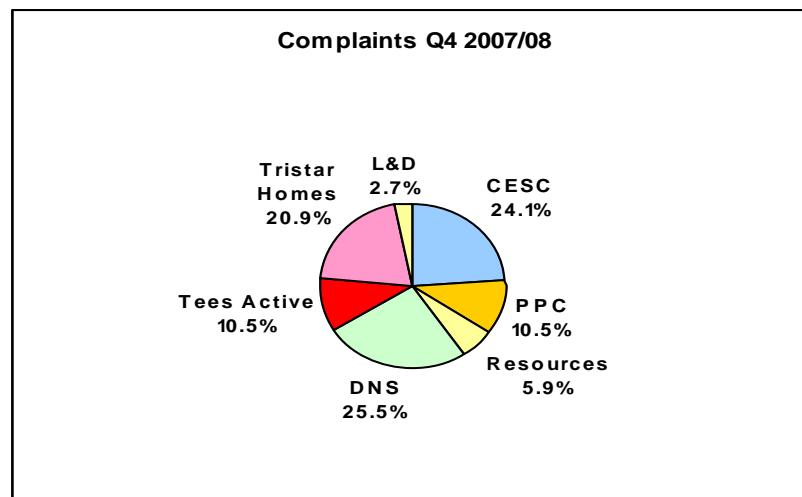
Complaints

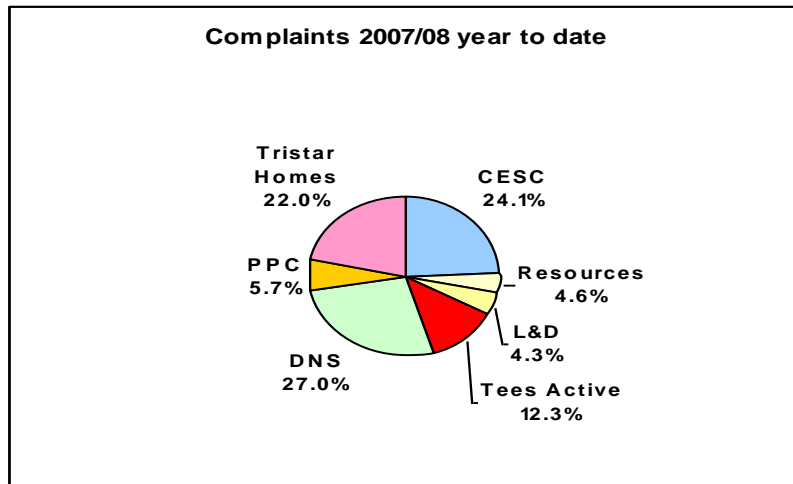
4.23 In total the Council received 220 complaints in Quarter 4, this compares to 226 complaints received in the same quarter last year. The number of complaints received for the whole of 2007/08 is 863. This compares to 825 in 2006/07. Of the 220 complaints, one is at Stage 3 and one at Stage 4 and of the Stage 1 and 2 complaints 86.7% (189) were responded to within timescales, an improvement over quarter 3, where 86.4% of the Stage 1 and 2 complaints were responded within timescales.

Commendations

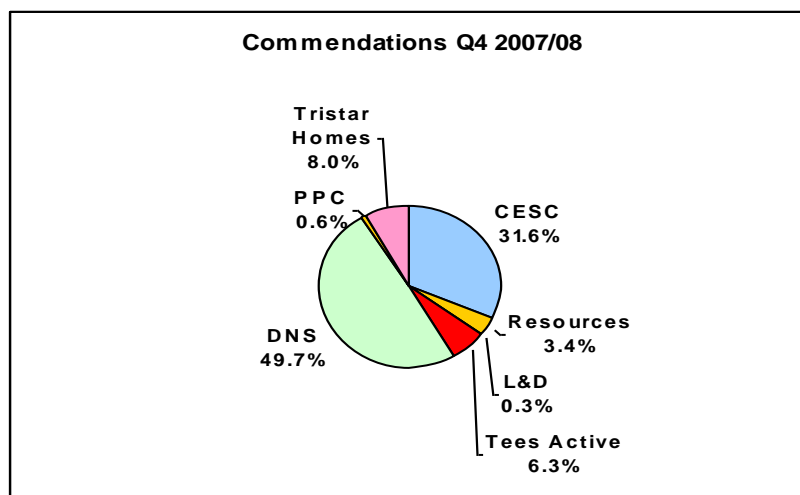
4.24 A total of 348 commendations were received in Quarter 4, this compares to 372 commendations in the same quarter last year. The total number of commendations received in 2007/08 was 1,607; this compares to 1,749 in 2006/07.

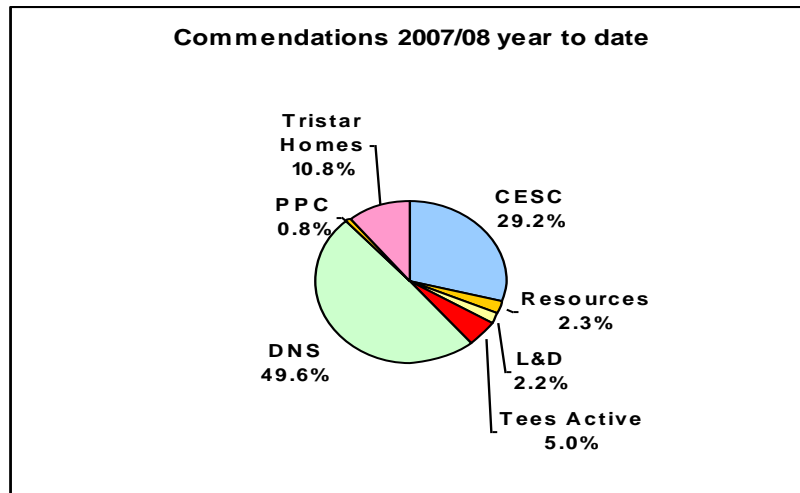
4.25 The pie charts below show a breakdown of complaints and commendations by service grouping.





- The main trend from Quarters 1 to 4 identifies that on average almost 75% of the complaints are in relation to the 3 service areas Children, Education, and Social Care (CESC), Development and Neighbourhood Services (DANS) and Tristar (Housing) - each receiving approximately a quarter of the total complaints.
- Of the 14% of complaints which are not responded to on time the main areas are DANS and CESC with an approximate failure to respond rate of 6% and 35% respectively. Most of those within CESC are in Health and Social Care.
- Within CESC the majority of the complaints are within the children and young people service.
- Within DANS the complaints are evenly spread across Direct Services (e.g. street cleansing, refuse, horticultural services and highways) and Community Protection.
- For Tristar the main areas of complaints are repairs procedure, modernisation works not delivered on time, neighbour disputes and some in relation to staff approach.





- Of the total commendations almost 82% are received for 2 service areas CESC and DANS, approximately 50% of these are compliments for DANS.
- Within CESC the majority of the compliments are within adults' services.
- Within DANS the majority of commendations are within the Direct Services area (e.g. street cleansing, refuse, horticultural services and highways).
- For Tristar the main areas of commendations are thanks to teams and to individuals.

Main areas of complaint and commendation in Quarter 4 2007/08

Complaints

Service Grouping/ Division	Q4 total	Main area(s)	Number
CESC	53		
Education and Culture	13	Pupil & Student Support	2
		Community Education	5
Children's & Adults' Social Care	40	Children & Young People's Services	25
		Adults' Services	9
DNS	56		
Performance & Business Services	4	Unauthorised memorials	2
Community Protection	14	Noise & anti-social behaviour/ consumer advice/ dog fouling/ parking	10
Direct Services	14	Refuse collection, highways, bulky waste and recycling	9
Technical Services	10	Roadworks & street lighting	4
Housing	7	Letters, correspondence, service	4
Planning	6	Planning application	3
Regeneration	1	Staffing	1
Law & Democracy	6		
		Electoral registration process	2
		Conveyancing	3
Policy, Perf. & Comms.	23		
		Non-delivery of Stockton News	
Resources	13		
		Taxation - procedural problems	3
		Transactional HR	4
Tees Active	23		
		Swimming	2
		Class numbers	8
		Gym aircon (Splash)	4
Tristar	46		
		Repairs procedure	7
		Staff attitude	5
		Neighbour disputes	6
		Modernisation	5
		Gas servicing	5
Total	220		

Commendations

Service Grouping/ Division	Q4 total	Main area(s)	Number
CESC	110		
Education and Culture	44	Libraries, Sports Development & Community Education	33
Children's & Adults' Social Care	66	Children & Young People's Services	10
		Adults' Services	43
		Support Services	10
DNS	173		
Performance & Business Services	15	Staff commendation/ customer service/ marriage ceremonies	7
Community Protection	22	Trading Standards & Consumer Advice	15
Direct Services	88	Refuse collection, customer service, horticultural services, street cleansing and highway maintenance	74
Technical Services	9	Road works, blue badge scheme	3
Housing	32	Thanks to staff	11
Regeneration	5	Thanks to staff/ service received	2
Planning	2	Staff commendation	2
Law & Democracy	1	Thanks to staff	1
Policy, Perf. & Comms.	2	Diversity event feedback	1
		Congratulations on CPA results	1
Resources	12	Helpfulness of staff/ teams	10
Tees Active	22	Creche/ playgroup facilities	4
		Thanks to staff	2
		Works experience	3
Tristar	28	Thanks to staff	26
Total	348		

4.26 As is clear, many of these complaints relate to a specific service outcome or aspect of a service and not necessarily customer service as part of service delivery. It was also raised that complaints can often be a combination of these problems.

4.27 In addition to this data, the Committee received relevant questions and results from the Viewpoint Survey on the 'Access to Services' programme from 2007. Although Customer First and Access to Services are separate and distinct programmes, some of the elements overlap between the two. Open comments regarding this survey were also provided (see Appendix 1). The results and comments from a series of discussion groups held around 'Access to Services' from 2006 were also provided to the Committee. Again, these are not wholly

relevant to the purposes of this review, but did include the views of Viewpoint Panel Members on customer services (see Appendix 2).

4.28 The Committee also received examples of customer satisfaction assessments and data from individual services. These were primarily identified from those listed on the Consultation Plan on the SBC Intranet and/or supplied by services that have/ are currently completing Customer First Stage 2. These consultation exercises are service specific and utilise a range of different methodologies. They should therefore be treated with a degree of caution for the purposes of this review and appear largely incomparable. However, they were included as evidence of services within the Council consulting on customer service / satisfaction and how they do this. Examples included:

- information from Taxation and Administration – Telephones and Reception – Kingsway House – 2007;
- information from Taxation and Administration – Telephones and Reception – Municipal Buildings – 2007;
- analysis of Care for Your Area satisfaction Surveys for November 2007;
- information from Housing Conditions;
- information from Community Safety – Care Call Satisfaction Survey;
- information from Trading Standards; and
- housing – consultation with the Disability Advisory Group in relation to the reception area in 16 Church Road.

4.29 The Committee were pleased to see a positive picture of customer service and satisfaction at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The Committee considered the utility of this data in determining the impact of Customer First Stage 2. The Committee felt that as much of the data preceded the introduction of Customer First Stage 2 (Ipsos MORI, BVPI data) there could be no claimed link between the two. The mystery shopping data also covers all Council services and not just those that have completed Customer First Stage 2. There is also no breakdown of the data made by the Customer First Team to examine if those services that have completed Customer First Stage 2 performed any better than those without in terms of adherence to and upholding of the Customer Service Standards. That Stockton was performing strongly in all these areas based on all data available at that point indicates that Customer First Stage 2 was based on solid footing and should meet its stated aim of bringing all services up to an excellent standard. Customer First is also not linked in any way requiring the programme demonstrates an improvement in Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's results in relation to customer service and satisfaction as a result of investment in Stage 2 of the programme. More data should be available later this year following the 2008 Ipsos MORI Poll in Stockton, but the Committee felt that more could be done to directly link the Customer First Stage 2 programme or any programme following it to demonstrable improvements in Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Ipsos MORI Poll ratings for example.

4.30 As previously mentioned, one aspect of the Committee's original remit was to review the Customer Service Standards. The Committee therefore requested that research be undertaken to ask Stockton residents for their opinions on the standards.

- 4.31 From the Committee's experience, Voicemail was often of concern to residents and Members when trying to get in touch with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council officers.
- 4.32 The Committee felt the provision of children's toys was important in some reception areas which were likely to be used by people with young children; however health and safety assessments had resulted in toys being removed from reception areas.
- 4.33 Further to the discussion on toys the Committee were informed of an example of a hospital reception area where cube toys were available for children to use. Four children could comfortably play with the toys at any one time, yet they were safe as there were no removable parts so did not present a health and safety issue.

Meeting 23rd June 2008

- 4.34 The Committee received evidence on the new Customer Service Excellence Standard as a possibility for a programme to follow Customer First Stage 2. The Customer Service Excellence Standard initially arose from a report written by Bernard Herdan in 2005 entitled 'The Customer Voice in Transforming Public Services'. The 'Herdan Report' as it became known was commissioned by the government to review the effectiveness of the Charter Mark scheme, to make recommendations for its future, to strengthen its role in improving public services and to examine the measurement and use of customer satisfaction scores and customer insight in the design and delivery of public services.
- 4.35 The key recommendation of the Herdan Report was that the Charter Mark should be replaced by a new standard combining a diagnostic quality improvement tool and a new customer satisfaction measurement framework and methodology. The government accepted this recommendation and subsequently devised the Customer Service Excellence Standard.
- 4.36 Herdan found that Charter Mark holders were generally very positive about the scheme, viewing it as a valuable tool for driving up standards and motivating staff. However, the Herdan report primarily only identified anecdotal evidence of the Charter Mark's effectiveness.
- 4.37 The Charter Mark scheme was found to have low percentage penetration of the public sector as a whole and there was a very low level of public awareness of the Charter Mark, and a general scepticism about quality schemes and awards was displayed by members of the public that participated in focus groups. However, it was found that, on balance, people do believe that the holding of some form of quality scheme or award might influence choice where this applies.
- 4.38 The review referred to research undertaken by Ipsos MORI which identified five key drivers of customer satisfaction and ranked the drivers in order of relative importance amongst the members of the public interviewed. The results suggested that adoption of the key drivers could be an important tool to assist organisations delivering public services:
- delivery of promised outcomes and handling problems effectively;
 - timeliness of service provision;

- accurate and comprehensive information, and progress reports provided;
- professionalism and competence of staff and treating customers fairly;
- staff attitudes – friendly, polite and sympathetic to customers' needs; and
- additionally: physical environment and access – There are two additional drivers which, though important, are not as strongly indicated as the other drivers.

Evolution of Charter Mark 1992-2006

4.39 The Charter Programme, both Charters and Charter Mark, date from the early 1990s as part of the (then) Conservative government's 'Citizen's Charter' initiative. The UK Government published Charters for a range of public service sectors which were formal statements setting out the standards that users of public services might expect to receive, and were regarded as a powerful incentive for public service organisations to set and maintain standards.

4.40 Charter Mark was launched in 1992 as an award for excellent customer service within the public sector, which has increased from 35 winners in 1992, to 949 ten years later. The scheme was owned by the Cabinet Office with all applications subsidised. However, the expansion of the scheme conflicted to some extent with the financial implications of doing so and the scheme was, therefore, subject to a review in 2002 with objectives to strengthen it as a tool for customer focused improvement, to widen participation across all public services and to reduce the cost of the scheme to the Cabinet Office and offer value for money to applicants. To meet these objectives, the Cabinet Office repositioned Charter Mark (in 2003) as "a tool of customer service excellence" with updated standards and new assessment arrangements, leading to the present arrangements of four certification bodies conducting Charter Mark assessments.

4.41 The move for the Charter Mark was seen as going from an award or badge to a standard or benchmark. Whilst Herdan noted reduced costs, Herdan noted that "the added value of the scheme... [in terms of its impact in driving up standards]...has still not been effectively validated other than by anecdotal evidence".

Strengths and Weaknesses

4.42 Herdan considered that the Charter Mark "remains a unique quality standard with elements that differentiate it from potential competitors" referring particularly to:

- Charter Mark as a framework that acts as a 'route map' to good customer service;
- comprehensive criteria, and focused on continuous improvement;
- generic standard applicable to all service areas;
- broad eligibility covering (almost) all public service delivery irrespective of sector; and
- the integrity of the Charter Mark standard is upheld by a rigorous assessment process, which is accredited by UKAS;

In terms of weaknesses of the Charter Mark it was felt that the standard had a low profile and was perceived by many as out of date and old-fashioned.

Research among the Public - Summary of Findings (From pp. 100-101 in Cabinet Office (2006) The Customer Voice in Transforming Public Services – Report Annexes)

4.43 As part of the research for the Herdan Report, six discussion groups were held with the public looking into customer service.

The key findings included:

Broad agreement on the principal features of good service across sectors and the relevance of these as criteria for a quality mark in the public sector. Some of these features related to how the service was delivered by individual staff members and others to how it was delivered as an organisation. They were as follows:

- personal characteristics of staff at the customer interface;
- appearance, welcome, courtesy, communication skills, attitude, honesty etc.;
- 'product' knowledge;
- a willingness to take ownership of a customer's request or complaint;
- efficient organisation of resources to address the customer's needs including accessibility and timeliness of response;
- consistency of service standards so that customers know the service they can expect;
- communication at all stages of the process in order to understand the customer's needs, keep them informed of progress, manage their expectations and check on satisfaction levels; and
- well organised after 'sales' service and complaints handling.

4.44 Across the groups, there was some awareness of quality marks and schemes but this proved a catch-all for a wide range of statutory inspections and optional schemes, internal minimum service standards and quality control procedures. Awareness came from the workplace as employees rather more than the marketplace as 'customers'.

4.45 As 'customers', the marks that carried most weight were those that indicated a product or service was associated with a tangible level of quality and/or was backed by guarantees. More generally, there was scepticism about the value of many 'awards' based on their sheer number, a lack of knowledge about what underpinned them (reinforced by negative publicity about meaningless awards), questions about an organisation's motivation for 'acquiring' them, and most importantly, a lack of positive experience that suggested they offered a markedly better service.

4.46 While there was some support for quality schemes in the workplace, there was also a high level of cynicism based on experience of the manipulation of situations or figures to achieve targets, a sense that little changed or did so only temporarily, and a feeling that schemes could 'get in the way' of doing the job. These attitudes were compounded by the multiplicity of initiatives facing employees of the public sector in particular.

4.47 The attitude to the further development of a scheme to encourage excellent customer service in the public sector was obviously influenced by this experience but also by a perception that while the intention to provide high levels of customer service was laudable, very often other factors came into play that made this difficult. Most however, were willing to admit that it might have

an influence on decisions where they had a choice of say, a doctor's surgery, but only as one of the influencing factors.

- 4.48 A number of suggestions were made for enhancing the credibility of any such award but central to these was the actual experience of the service, summed up as 'the delivery of an excellent service by staff who care about the customer, day in, day out'.
- 4.49 The other spontaneously mentioned criteria (some by very small numbers) were as follows:
- involvement of staff at all levels;
 - bringing sub-contracted staff on board (individuals and outsourced service suppliers);
 - responsibility for customer service located at a high level in the organisation;
 - involvement of the public in development of the service and ongoing feedback;
 - information provided to the public about the award;
 - design of the standard so that it addresses some of the factors that impact on customer service e.g. staffing and resourcing;
 - consistency across organisations;
 - an awarding body with a reputation for expertise in the field;
 - inspectors who are independent and spot inspections;
 - the possible involvement of the private sector as eligible candidates, spokespeople, the awarding body; and
 - a cost to organisations that does not prevent them investing in the staff and resources needed to provide a good service.

Customer Service Excellence Standard

- 4.50 Following the Committee's overview and introduction to the Customer Service Excellence Standard, the reasons why it was felt necessary to implement it and what factors above and beyond the old Charter Mark it was considered to offer, the Committee then requested that a document mapping the Customer Service Excellence Standard to the Customer First Stage 2 programme. This is provided at (Appendix 3).
- 4.51 The Committee were advised that the Customer Service Excellence Standard was generally a more challenging standard than Customer First Stage 2, and was considered a positive next step for the authority to pursue following corporate completion of Customer First Stage 2. The Committee were informed that the main appeal of Customer Service Excellence above a further internal programme was the external assessment and accreditation, which was considered to possibly hold greater weight with customers and inspectors under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment for example.
- 4.52 Out of a total of 57 criteria included in the Customer Service Excellence Standard, 20 were considered not to match with any of the criteria contained in the Customer First Stage 2 programme and 6 did not match with any further SBC council wide activities. 17 and 21 further criteria were only felt to match partially with the Customer First Stage 2 criteria and SBC wide criteria respectively. The 6 criteria that did not match with any further SBC council wide activities included:

- 1) We have developed '**Customer Insight**' about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences;
- 2) We regularly review our strategies and opportunities for consulting and engaging with customers to ensure that the methods used are effective and provide reliable and representative results;
- 3) We have made positive changes to services as a result of analysing customer experience including improved '**Customer Journeys**';
- 4) We can demonstrate that information we provide to our customers is accurate and complete and that when this is not the case we advise customers when they will receive the information they requested.
- 5) We identify individual customer needs at the first point of contact with us and ensure that an appropriate person who can address the reason for contact deals with the customer;
- 6) We promptly share customer information with colleagues and partners within our organisation whenever appropriate and can demonstrate how this has reduced **unnecessary contact** for customers;

4.53 The Committee accepted that standing still following corporate customer completion of Customer First Stage 2 was not a viable possibility for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. A further Customer First Stage 3 programme was considered, but it was considered that the external assessment which the Customer Service Excellence Standard offered was a more significant selling point and greater bonus for the Council. The estimated costs of set-up and revenue budgets were also considered, and the Committee felt that these appeared to offer good value for corporate completion of the programme.

Meeting 21 July 2008

The Committee received the following evidence as part of the review:

- 4.54 Information following the consultation exercise which asked Stockton residents for their opinions on the Customer Service Standards. Responses were obtained from 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.
- 4.55 A list of the responses was included with the evidence. In total there were 71 responses from the consultation exercise on Customer Service Standards. Customers' opinions of the Standards ranged from '... your service is 'first class' to 'very bad'. Overall, 64% of customer responses gave a good or acceptable opinion on the Standards and whether the Council consistently met those standards when they made contact, with 33% of responses indicating having experienced a problem or bad service of one kind or another. Only one respondent gave an opinion of 'very bad' and one other respondent had no opinion.
- 4.56 An additional consultation exercise was undertaken involving customers exiting the Municipal Buildings Reception and the Billingham Cash Office. They were shown a copy of the current Charter Mark symbol and asked if they had seen this symbol before and were then read the following statement: 'This logo is awarded to organisations that have been recognised by external Government assessors as providing excellent customer service. Knowing something of whet

the logo means, if you saw an organisation displaying this logo, would it make you feel more confident about the quality of service you might receive? (If yes, in what way?)’.

- 4.57 Of those customers who provided responses, 29 had not seen the Charter Mark symbol previously and 9 had seen the symbol before. A total of 29 customer comments were received: 10 indicated specifically that they would feel more confident about the quality of service they might receive if they saw the Charter Mark logo and 11 said it would make no difference – 2 of these responses indicated it would make no difference: in one case the respondent said the Council was good at customer service already and another was happy with the way it is currently. Another 5 responses provided favourable comments generally about Charter Mark and good customer service and 3 responses were less positive.
- 4.58 Information concerning the use of the ‘ringback’ and 1471 functions associated with the Council’s current telephone system. This had been discussed by the Committee at its meeting on 9 June following which Members requested more information on call barring and the use of the ring back function. Officers from Nextiraone and Xentrall were contacted regarding the suppression of the 1471 function when residents receive a telephone call from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.
- 4.59 The message relayed by BT using the 1471 function is termed a Calling Line Indicator (CLI). This is suppressed deliberately by SBC and a generic number (528998) is provided instead. The use of this function was considered to be more appropriate as it was felt that residents would receive a better service, if a resident was given a specific officer’s number the officer in question may not always be available meaning that in some cases the resident would not be able to access any information immediately and would have to wait to have their query dealt with or receive an explanation of time-frames. Certain officers may also receive a high number of direct calls from residents. There may also be confusion if residents were provided with, or had access to, many telephone numbers which would negate the use of ‘golden numbers’ or the telephone numbers of the Customer contact centres.
- 4.60 The suppression of the ring-back function has to be implemented Council wide or not at all. Information was also provided about advertisements relayed to individuals whilst on hold when telephoning the Council.
- 4.61 The Committee had previously discussed the advertisements / messages relayed whilst on hold when contacting Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council at its meeting on 9 June. Reference was made to the appropriate use of these adverts (i.e. what services were advertised and whether residents contacting the Council should effectively pay to listen to advertisements of Council services and events).
- 4.62 Officers from Nextiraone and Xentrall were again contacted regarding this. The use of such advertisements is at the discretion of individual services, and is implemented by Nextiraone at the request of services. These are used predominately by Leisure services and Tristar Homes. The customer (the service which has requested that their advertisement be implemented) is responsible for the advertisements and must manage it accordingly, removing messages once they are out-of-date for example to ensure that accurate data

is provided to the public. The use of such advertisements does not have a wide take-up rate throughout the Council and the use of such advertisements can be isolated to certain groups of phone lines to ensure that inappropriate or specific messages are not relayed to everyone contacting the Council but can instead be targeted only at specific customers who are likely to use certain groups of phone lines. The caller is also not put on hold for any longer than they would if the advertisements were not in place (i.e. the caller does not pay an increased call charge to listen to all or part of a message) and it is also worth considering that this provides another communication channel for services to get important messages across to the public.

- 4.63 The Committee received details relating to the forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime under which any customer service programme following Customer First stage 2 will work in, and which would need to be considered as part of the review.
- 4.64 During the development of CAA, two separate consultation exercises have been undertaken already – one by Ipsos MORI on engaging the public on the development of CAA and a research study conducted for the Audit Commission involving citizen and reference groups.
- 4.65 Following both consultation exercises it is clear that the new CAA regime will have a strong citizen focus, particularly through the new partnership approach towards the provision of services for local people.
- 4.66 Also falling under the new CAA regime is a strengthened ‘Use of Resources’ framework for 2008/09. One of the key lines of enquiry (KLOE) questions under the theme of ‘Governing the business’ is ‘How well does the organisation govern itself and commission services that provide value for money and deliver better outcomes for local people?’ The KLOE will focus on how the organisation seeks to improve the customer experience, quality and value for money of services through service redesign, making effective use of IT.
- 4.67 The Audit Commission will publish the last stage of consultation on its proposals for CAA during summer 2008. Following the consultation response and evaluation of the trialing during the autumn, the final CAA framework will be published early in 2009, to take effect from April 2009.
- 4.68 The Committee also heard evidence towards the achievement of Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and Customer First’s role as part of this. Reference was made to Section 5 (‘Service Equality’) of the Customer First Stage 2 programme, previously distributed to Members in order to examine equality and diversity issues and compare the content relating to this with that contained in the Customer Service Excellence Standard.
- 4.69 Following consultation with the Diversity Team it emerged that the Council would struggle to achieve Level 3 based on the Customer Service Excellence Standard alone without the Customer First enhancements. As a result it was suggested adopting the CSE standard and adding on the Service Equality criteria from the Customer First Programme Stage 2 service standards (ref. criteria 5.1 to 5.9). This would then take the Council’s customer service model to a level over and above the CSE standard.

- 4.70 Consequently, external assessors may allow the Council to incorporate these Customer First enhancements with the Customer Service Excellence model, to be taken into account when determining the Council's overall level of compliance with the Equality Standard.
- 4.71 Details were provided of the new National Indicator 14 'reducing Customer contact: Minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer'. National indicator 14 is part of a suite of 198 national indicators. The new national indicator set came into effect from 1 April 2008 replacing existing BVPIs.
- 4.72 Three 'best' examples of other local authorities' customer service programmes (Devon, Mid-Bedfordshire and Kirklees) were also compared from a sample of 34 examples collected.
- 4.73 The work the Council undertakes towards the Customer service Excellence Standard (with an enhanced diversity strand) will support these other initiatives.

Conclusion

- 5.1 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is a customer focused organisation, committed to providing excellent service to all its customers.
- 5.2 Successful organisations strive to make continuous improvements to their customer standards and for the Council there is an opportunity to further improve its customer service by adopting the Cabinet Office's new Customer Service Excellence Standard corporately, replacing and building on the existing Customer First Stage 2 Programme. The external assessment which the Customer Service Excellence Standard offers is a more significant selling point and greater bonus for the Council. Nationally, nine local authorities are engaged in the Corporate Charter Mark programme.
- 5.3 Completion of Customer First Stage 2 by all services, coupled with existing corporate frameworks covering complaints, diversity and performance management means that most of the groundwork has been completed for the potential award of the Customer Service Excellence Standard corporately. However, Section 5 of Customer First Stage 2 programme relating to Service Equality should be reviewed and developed where necessary and included as an additional section above and beyond the Customer Service Excellence Standard.
- 5.4 From the review the Committee was pleased to see a positive picture of customer service and satisfaction at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.
- 5.5 The review also highlighted the importance of ensuring customer service standards continue to be upheld across the Council and identified a number of ways to maintain these standards including mystery shopping exercises, the implementation of a corporate staff suggestion scheme under the new Customer Service Excellence Standard, which would provide incentives to participate through awards for the best suggestions and for the increased involvement of elected Members in the customer satisfaction process .

Appendix 1 - Results from the Viewpoint Survey on the 'Access to Services' programme from 2007.



Viewpoint 21
Survey Results Report

Jenny Elstob

October 2007

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1 Introduction

Background

1. Viewpoint, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Residents' Panel, is one of the ways that the Council consults and involves local people. It is a demographically and statistically balanced panel of local people, who receive questionnaires at regular intervals throughout the year, asking for their views on a variety of local issues facing the Council and Stockton-on-Tees as a whole.
 - 1.1. Every year the panel is refreshed, with a third of the panel being replaced at any one time, to ensure that each member of the panel serves a limited period of time (up to three years). The refreshment is done by sending out recruitment packs to a randomly selected number of residents, using the Electoral Register. In addition, booster samples are sent out in areas with lower responses, to ensure the panel remains demographically representative of the Borough.
 - 1.2. Panel members are kept informed of the findings of Viewpoint surveys, and what the Council is doing in response, via a regular newsletter.
 - 1.3. This report details the results from the latest questionnaire, which was distributed in July 2007.

Aims of Viewpoint

- 1.4 The aims of the Viewpoint survey are:
 - To listen to the residents of Stockton-on-Tees
 - To involve local people in the Council's decisions and in its policy planning and reviews
 - To consult the panel regularly on important local issues
 - To discover what are the community priorities for future Council activities
 - The specific areas covered in this Viewpoint survey included:
 - SRF
 - Access to Services
 - Wynyard Planetarium/Observatory
 - Light Pollution
 - Scrutiny Process
 - Electoral Registration

2 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 Viewpoint in its current format was launched in September 2001 with a recruitment campaign. Ten thousand recruitment packs were sent out to randomly selected residents, using the Electoral Register. The recruitment packs included an invitation letter, information leaflet and recruitment form, which captured all the necessary background information needed to obtain a representative sample of the population.
- 2.2 A panel of 1500 people was formed, which represented a balanced sample based on gender, age and geographical location.
- 2.3 The panel is refreshed yearly, replacing one third of panel members at a time. This ensures that no member is on the panel for longer than three years and thus helps to ensure the panel does not become atypical of the population. Recruitment methods include taking random samples from the Edited Electoral Register, boosting exercises in low return areas and promotions via local media for example, Stockton News, and the Herald and Post
- 2.4 The main advantage of the panel is having access to such a large number of people from across the community, who have agreed to be involved in consultation on a regular basis. The main disadvantage is that panel members are recruited via a self selection process and at times may not be completely representative of the population.
- 2.5 In July 2007 the latest survey was carried out using a self completion questionnaire which could be completed either via a paper survey or via the internet. Panel members had 18 days to complete their surveys.

The sample

- 2.6 The questionnaire was sent out to all members of the panel, which equated to 1437 individuals.

Response rates

- 2.6 A response rate of 51% was achieved. The total number returned was 736.

The Report

- 2.7 All percentages in the tables are rounded to the nearest whole number. In some tables the total number of respondents may be less than the total number of returned questionnaires. This is because some respondents may choose not to answer a particular question. In some instances the number of responses is greater than 100 per cent due to the fact that respondents have been asked to choose multiple answers. Responses are also analysed by four diversity strands of age, gender, ethnicity and disability. Faith and sexual orientation will be incorporated into future reports when more data is available.

Section Two – Access to Services

<p>Key findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixty eight per cent of respondents preferred using the telephone if they wanted information about the Council. Respondents also preferred using the telephone (79%) if they wanted to request a service from the Council. • 178 respondents thought it was reasonable to wait 1 day before they got a reply from an e-mail or website, this was followed by 174 respondents thinking it was reasonable to wait 2 days. When they were asked how long they thought it was reasonable to wait for a reply to a letter, 215 agreed that 7 days was a reasonable time. This was followed by 166 respondents stating 5 days.
<p>FACE TO FACE CONTACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When respondents were asked if the current face to face enquiry hours of 8.30am – 4.30pm suit their needs, seventy three per cent agreed that they were. • Forty eight per cent would like to see the new multi-service centres to stay open after 5pm on an evening. • Thirty three per cent of respondents would like to the multi-service centres stay open until 7pm, Monday to Friday. • 159 respondents would like to see the centres open two evenings a week, three evenings per week (79 respondents) was the second most popular choice. • Sixty four per cent of respondents would like the centres open at the weekend. When asked what time of the day they preferred to visit, Saturday morning (84%) was the most popular followed by Sunday morning (69%).
<p>TELEPHONE CONTACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked if the current telephone contact suited their needs, eighty two per cent of respondents agreed that they were suitable. • Forty six per cent of respondents would like to be able to telephone the Council earlier in the morning. • Fifty two per cent of respondents would like to be able to telephone the Council after 5pm in the evening. Twenty six per cent of respondents would like to be able to telephone the Council until 7pm. • 124 respondents would like to be able to telephone the Council two evenings per week, five evenings per week (98 respondents) was the second most popular choice. • Sixty three per cent of respondents would like to be able to telephone the Council at the weekend. When asked what time of the day they preferred to telephone, Saturday morning (89%) was the most popular followed by Sunday morning (81%). • When respondents were asked which services listed should have extended opening hours for telephone contact, anti social behaviour (80%), environmental health (45%) and fly tip removal (39%) were the top priorities given. • Only twenty two per cent of respondents were aware that the Council had a range of Golden Numbers. Eighty seven per cent thought that the idea of Golden Numbers was a good one. • Fifty eight per cent of respondents would be happy to use a menu system, if they could speak to an operator. Twenty nine respondents said they would not be happy using a menu system as they thought it was too long. • When respondents were asked how long they thought it was reasonable to wait before their call is accepted, 30 seconds (40%) and 1 minute (35%) were the top answers.

- 206 respondents were prepared to wait five minutes for their call to be answered fully, compared to 151 respondents who thought it was reasonable to wait five minutes.
- When respondents were asked if they were waiting in a queue to have their call answered, what would they prefer to hear, seventy six per cent would like to be given an estimated time for their call to be answered. Sixty six per cent would like to be told their position in the queue and sixty one per cent of respondents would like to be given the option of leaving a voice mail message for someone to ring them back.
- When respondents were asked if they left a voice mail message, how long would they be prepared to wait for their call to be returned, forty per cent of respondents agreed within the hour. Thirty four per cent of respondents agreed the same day. Only seven per cent of respondents expected a call back within 2 – 3 hours.

12. **If you have a query and you want to find out information about Council services, how would you prefer to do this?** (Please tick one of the following)

When asked how they would prefer to find out information about Council Services, sixty eight percent of respondents preferred to use the telephone, only three per cent preferred to write. There was no variation by gender, disability or ethnicity but there was by age. None of the 85+ age group preferred to use the telephone to contact the Council and none of the 18 – 24 age group preferred to write.

13. **If you want to ‘Request a Service’ from the Council, for example, to request the repair of a faulty street light or to enquire about council tax, how would you prefer to do this?** (Please tick one of the following)

Seventy nine per cent of respondents preferred to use the telephone if they wanted to Request a Service from the Council, only two per cent preferred to write. Once again there was no variation by gender, disability or ethnicity but there was by age. Eighty seven per cent of respondents from the 65 – 84 age group preferred to use the telephone compared to the 85+ age group (50%). None of the 18 – 34 age group preferred to write compared fifty per cent of the 85+ age group.

14. **How many days do you think it is reasonable to wait before you get a reply from the Council if you made contact by the following?** (Please write below)

Email/Website	Frequency	% of respondents
1 day	178	24%
2 days	174	24%
3 days	73	10%
4 days	9	1%
5 days	31	4%
7 days	23	3%
10 days	1	*
14 days	1	*

Letter	Frequency	% of respondents
1 day	4	*
2 days	28	4%
3 days	95	13%
4 days	85	12%
5 days	166	23%
6 days	8	*
7 days	215	29%
8 days	8	*
9 days	1	*
10 days	39	5%
12 days	11	*
14 days	20	3%
17 days	1	*
24 days	1	*

FACE TO FACE CONTACT WITH THE COUNCIL

15. **The Council is planning opening multi-service centres in the town centres of Stockton, Billingham and Thornaby. These will deal with face to face enquiries relating to a range of Council services. At the moment our face to face enquiry areas are open weekdays from 8.30am – 5pm (4:30 pm on Fridays). Do these hours currently suit your needs?**

When asked if the current face to face enquiry areas currently suit their needs, seventy three per cent of respondents agreed that they did. There was no variation by gender or ethnicity but there was by disability and age. Eighty one per cent of respondents with a disability compared to without disability (69%) agreed these hours currently suited their needs. Over ninety five per cent of the 65 + age group thought the current hours suited their needs compared to only forty six per cent of the 18 – 24 age group.

16. **Would you like the new multi-service centres to stay open after 5pm in the evening?**

Forty eight per cent of respondents would like to see the multi-service centres stay open after 5pm on an evening. There was no variation by gender but there was by the other three diversity strands. Forty eight per cent of white respondents would like to see the centres stay open compared to BME respondents (28%). People without a disability (51%) compared to with disability (39%) and the younger age group would like the centres to stay open after 5pm.

17. **If yes, how late would you like to see the multi-service centres stay open Monday to Friday? (Please tick one option only)**

Seven o'clock in the evening the preferred time for the multi-service centres to stay open. This did not vary by gender or disability. None of the 85+ age group required a late night and none of the BME respondents requested a 7pm close.

18. **Please say how many evenings of the week you would like to see longer opening hours, so you can visit in person?** (Please write below)

How many	Frequency	% of respondents
None	12	2%
1	51	7%
2	159	22%
3	79	11%
4	14	2%
5	32	4%
6	2	*
7	5	1%

19. **Would you like the multi-service centres to be open at the weekend so you can speak to someone in person?**

When respondents were asked if they would like the multi-service centres open at the weekend so they could speak to someone in person, sixty four per cent agreed. There was no variation by gender, disability or ethnicity. The 35 – 44 age group (80%) would like to see the centres open on a weekend compared to the 75 – 84 age group (41%).

20. **If yes, what time of the day would you prefer to visit?**

Of those respondents who would like to see the centres open on a weekend, mornings were preferred on both days. Saturday morning (84%) was the preferred day and time followed by Sunday morning (69%). There was no variation by gender or disability but there was by age and ethnicity. None of the 85+ age group and none of the BME respondents preferred visiting at any time on a Sunday.

TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH THE COUNCIL

At the moment, a lot of people make contact with the Council by telephone. The majority of telephones will be answered between 8:30 am and 5:00pm (4:30pm on Fridays).

21. **Do these hours currently suit your needs?**

When respondents were asked if the telephone hours of 8.30am – 5.00pm (4:30pm on Fridays) currently suit their needs, eighty two per cent agreed that they did. There was no variation by gender or disability but there was by ethnicity and age. All the BME respondents agreed that the current hours suited their needs. All the 85+ age group agreed that their current hours suited their needs compared to only fifty per cent of the 18 – 24 age group.

22. **Would you like to be able to telephone the Council earlier in the morning, from 8:00 am?**

Forty six per cent of respondents agreed that they would like to be able to telephone the Council earlier in the morning from 8am. There was no variation by gender, disability or ethnicity but there was by age. Only twenty per cent of the 75 – 84 age group agreed that the current hours suited their needs compared to fifty six per cent of the 25 – 34 age group.

23. Would you like to be able to telephone the Council after 5:00pm in the evening?

Fifty two per cent of respondents would like to be able to telephone the Council after 5.00pm in the evening. There was no variation by gender or disability but there was by ethnicity and age. Sixty three per cent of BME respondents would like to be able to telephone the Council after 5pm compared to white respondents (52%). Of the 18 – 24 age group, ninety one per cent would also like to be able to telephone the Council after 5pm compared to the 75 – 84 age group (22%).

24. If yes, what time would you like to be able to telephone the Council until? (Please tick one option only)

When respondents were asked what time they would like to be able to telephone the Council until the most popular time was 7pm (26%) only one per cent of respondents chose 8.30pm. There was no variation by gender or disability but there was by ethnicity and age. Seventy five per cent of BME respondents thought 6pm was a suitable time to be able to telephone the Council but the younger age groups preferred the later time of 7pm.

25. Please say how many evenings of the week would you like to be able to telephone the Council? (Please write below)

How many	Frequency	% of respondents
None	9	1%
1	22	3%
2	124	17%
3	68	9%
4	18	2%
5	98	13%
6	9	1%
7	34	5%

26. Would you like to be able to telephone the Council at the weekend?

When respondents were asked would you like to telephone the Council at the weekend sixty three per cent agreed they would. There was no variation by gender, disability or ethnicity but there was by age. Eighty six per cent of the 18 – 24 age group compared to only thirty seven per cent of the 75 – 84 age group would like to be able to telephone on a weekend.

27. If yes, what time of the day would you like to telephone? (Please tick all that apply)

When respondents were asked what time of the day would you like to telephone the Council at the weekend, Saturday morning (89%) and Sunday morning (80%) were the two preferred times. Once again there was no variation by gender or disability but there was by ethnicity and age. All of the BME respondents preferred Saturday mornings only and fifty per cent of the 25 – 34 age group preferred a Sunday morning compared to eighty nine per cent of the 75 – 84 age group.

28. The Council already provides extended telephone contact for Health and Social Care, a 'make safe' emergency repairs service for Tristar Homes and any emergencies related to dangerous structures, insecure properties, street lighting and traffic light problems. Which of the

following services listed do you think should have extended opening hours for telephone contact? (Please tick all that apply)
Please note that whilst it may be possible to make telephone contact over extended opening hours to discuss a query or make a request for a service, it may not be possible for certain services to be delivered ‘out of hours’.

When asked which of the following services did they think should have extended opening hours for telephone contact. Anti social behaviour (80%) was the top priority, followed by environmental health (45%) and fly tip removal (39%). There was no variation by diversity strands.

29. **We are considering ways of reducing the large numbers of telephone numbers listed in our directory of services, so that it is easier to work out which number to ring if you want to make an enquiry or request a service. We currently have a range of ‘Golden Numbers’ (a golden number is a phone number that gives you direct access to services instead of going through the switchboard). There are existing ‘golden numbers’ for the Benefits Service, Council tax, Care for your Area and Social Services. Did you know that the Council has a range of Golden Numbers?**

Twenty two per cent of respondents were aware that the Council has a range of Golden Numbers. There was no variation by gender or disability but there was by ethnicity and age. Forty three per cent of BME respondents were aware compared to white respondents (22%). Only ten per cent of the 18 – 24 age group compared to twenty nine per cent of the 75 – 84 age group, were aware that the Council has a range of Golden Numbers.

30. **Do you think the idea of ‘Golden Numbers’ is a good one?**

When respondents were asked if they thought the idea of Golden Numbers was a good one, eighty seven per cent agreed it was. There was no variation by gender, disability or ethnicity but there was by age. All of the 85+ age group agreed that the idea was a good one.

31. **If no, please say why?**

Reasons why	Frequency	% of respondents
Can only remember 393939	3	*
Prefer more direct service	3	*
The current switchboard is good	2	*
Long queues	2	*

32. **One way of making it easier for telephone callers to get through to the service they require might be to present callers with a short menu of no more than 5 options when they ring the main switchboard number. For example, press number 1 for Care for your Area, press number 2 for Council Tax etc. From the list below what best describes your views on the menu system? (Please tick one option)**

Only seventeen per cent would not be happy using a menu system. There was no variation by gender, disability or ethnicity but there was by age. Respondents from the 18 – 24 age group were happy to use the menu system (45%) compared to twenty per cent from the 35 – 44 age group. Fifty five per cent of 18 – 24 respondents would be happy to use the menu system provided one of the options was to speak to an operator.

33. **If you would not be happy using a menu system, please tell us why below?**

Why	Frequency	% of respondents
Too long	29	4%
Prefer direct contact	16	2%
Not professional/not caring/unfriendly	13	2%
Don't like talking to computers	12	2%
Options may not be suitable	11	1%

34. **How long do you think it is reasonable for you to wait before your call is accepted? Accepted means either answered by the person you are calling, or being placed in a queue because all the customer service staff are already dealing with calls.**

Forty per cent of respondents thought it was reasonable to wait thirty seconds or less. Thirty five per cent thought that one minute or less, was reasonable, this was followed by 15 seconds (14%) and 45 seconds (11%). There was no variation by gender or disability but there was by ethnicity and age. Thirty five per cent of white respondents were prepared to wait 1 minute or less, compared to only fourteen per cent of BME respondents. The 75 – 84 age group were more prepared to wait longer for their calls to be accepted.

35. **If you have been placed in a queue because all the customer service staff are already dealing with calls, how long would you be prepared to wait and how long do you think it is reasonable to wait before your call is answered fully by a member of staff? (Please write the number of minutes in the box below)**

Prepared to wait	Frequency	% of respondents
1 minute	70	10%
2 minutes	150	20%
3 minutes	148	20%
4 minutes	22	3%
5 minutes	206	28%
6 minutes	2	*
7 minutes	2	*
8 minutes	1	*
10 minutes	38	5%
15 minutes	8	1%
45 minutes	1	*

Reasonable to wait	Frequency	% of respondents
1 minute	72	10%
2 minutes	125	17%
3 minutes	110	15%
4 minutes	23	3%
5 minutes	151	21%
6 minutes	1	*
7 minutes	3	*
10 minutes	30	4%
15 minutes	5	*
20 minutes	2	*
30 minutes	2	*

60 minutes	1	*
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36. If you are waiting in a queue to have your telephone call answered, what would you prefer to hear whilst you wait? (Please tick as many as you like)

When respondents were asked what they preferred to hear whilst they waited on the telephone, seventy six per cent would like to be given an estimated waiting time for their call to answered. Being told their position in the queue (66%) and the option of leaving a voice mail message for someone to ring back (61%) were the following two preferred options. There was no variation by diversity strands.

37. If you would like to be able to leave a voice-mail message, how long would you be prepared to wait for your call to be returned? (Please tick one option)

When respondents were asked if they left a voice mail message how long they would be prepared to wait for their call to be returned, forty per cent of respondents said within the hour. Thirty four per cent were happy to have their call returned the same day.

There was no variation by gender and disability but there was by ethnicity and age. Sixty three per cent of BME respondents would like their call returned within the hour compared to thirty nine per cent of white respondents. Fifty seven per cent of the 18 – 24 age group were happy to wait the same day compared to the 65 – 74 age group (27%).

38. If you have any further comments about how we might improve telephone access to Council Services, please write below?

Further comments	Frequency	% of respondents
Staff and service has always been good/excellent	15	2%
Improve customer service	10	1%
Ensure quick responses and returned calls	8	1%
Employ more staff	4	*
Don't have call centres/queuing system/music	4	*
Don't leave people on the phone	4	*
Make staff state their name	3	*

• Appendix One – Demographic profile of respondents

A1 Ward information

Ward	Number	Frequency	*Total of 16+ Ward population	* % of 16+ Ward Population
Eaglescliffe	46	6%	8570	5.64%
Hartburn	44	6%	5740	3.62%
Fairfield	43	6%	5180	3.28%
Norton West	42	6%	5390	3.38%
Yarm	40	5%	7950	5.09%
Norton North	39	5%	5310	3.56%
Grangefield	38	5%	5315	3.53%
Billingham North	34	5%	7640	5.11%
Billingham West	31	4%	5135	3.17%
Billingham East	31	4%	5375	3.64%
Newtown	30	4%	5465	3.87%

Roseworth	29	4%	5720	3.87%
Mandale & Victoria	29	4%	8270	5.54%
Ingleby Barwick East	26	4%	7210	5.02%
Billingham Central	23	3%	5455	3.63%
Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	21	3%	5440	3.48%
Ingleby Barwick West	21	3%	7555	5.67%
Stockton Town Centre	21	3%	5135	3.49%
Parkfield & Oxbridge	20	3%	5505	3.74%
Billingham South	20	3%	5190	3.55%
Norton South	19	3%	6245	4.05%
Village	19	3%	5345	3.37%
Hardwick	17	2%	5265	3.64%
Western Parishes	13	2%	2635	1.74%
Stainsby Hill	13	2%	5315	3.59%
Northern Parishes	12	2%	2560	1.74%
Unknown (online)	15			

*figures based on JSU estimates 2006

A2 Age of respondents

Age	Number	Frequency	* Borough Population 18+	* % Borough Percentage 18+
18-24	22	3%	14032	7.9%
25-34	40	5%	23976	13.47%
35-44	92	13%	28106	15.8%
45-54	146	20%	24633	13.8%
55-64	200	27%	18323	10.3%
65-74	159	22%	15141	8.5%
75-84	53	7%	8896	5.0%
85+	4	1%	2456	1.4%
Unknown	20	3%		

*figures based the 2001 Census

A3 Gender of respondents

Gender	Number	Frequency	*Gender of Borough 18+	*% Gender of Borough 18+
Male	358	49%	63952	47.96%
Female	363	49%	69380	52.04%
Unknown	15	2%		

**figures based the 2001Census

A4 Sexual Orientation

Status	Number	Frequency
Heterosexual	549	75%
Bisexual	5	1%
Gay Male	3	*
Lesbian	1	*
Unknown	178	24%

A5 Disability of respondents

Disability	Number	Frequency
Without disability	521	71%
With disability	186	25%
Unknown	29	4%

19.9% with limiting long term illness

A6 Ethnicity of respondents

Ethnicity	Number	Frequency	*Ethnicity of the Borough
White	703	96%	97.2%
BME	8	1%	2.8%
Unknown	25	3%	

*figures based the 2001Census

A7 Religion or Belief of respondents

Status	Number	Frequency	* % of the Borough
Christian (all Christian denominations)	476	65%	81.6%
Buddhist	2	*	
Hindu	2	*	0.2%
Jewish	0	*	
Muslim	3	*	1.4%
Sikh	1	*	0.2%
None	95	13%	10.0%
Unknown	157	21%	

*figures based the 2001Census

A8 Employment Status of respondents

Status	Number	Frequency	* % of the Borough
Full time	207	28%	38.3%
Part time	92	13%	13.6%
Self employed	25	3%	2.1%
Sick	21	3%	7.1%
Unemployed	14	2%	5.0%
Retired	296	40%	14.3%
House person	20	3%	7.0%
Student*	8	1%	2.2%
Asylum seeker	0	*	
Unknown	53	7%	

*figures based the 2001Census

A9 Social Class

Class	Number	Frequency
Very senior managers or top civil servants	23	3%

Middle management executives in large organisations. Owners of small businesses.	102	14%
Junior management, owners of small establishments and all jobs in non manual positions	100	14%
All skilled manual workers and manual workers with responsibility for other people.	55	7%
All semi-skilled and un-skilled manual workers	37	5%
All those entirely dependant on the state long term	99	13%
Unknown	320	43%

A10 Tenure of respondents

Tenure	Number	Frequency	* % of the Borough
Own home	599	81%	71.57%
Rent from Council (Tri-Star)	46	6%	17.8%
Rent privately	14	2%	5.23%
Lodge with family	28	4%	
Housing Association	17	2%	4.32%
Unknown	32	4%	

*figures based the 2001Census

A11 Household composition of respondents

Composition	Number	Frequency	* % of the Borough
Adults with children	145	20%	23.1%
Adults no children	358	49%	17.1%
Lone adult (non pensioner)	64	9%	9.9%
Lone pensioner	80	11%	13.5%
Unknown	89	12%	

*figures based the 2001Census

A12 Car ownership of respondents

Car Ownership	Number	Frequency	*Car ownership in the Borough
With car	563	76%	70.4%
Without car	148	20%	29.6%
Unknown	25	3%	

*figures based the 2001Census

A13 Internet Access of Respondents

Internet Access	Number	Frequency	* % of the Borough
With Internet Access	459	62%	61%
Without Internet Access	243	33%	
Unknown	34	5%	

*ONS 2007

VIEWPOINT 21 - TOPLINE RESULTS

SECTION TWO – ACCESS TO SERVICES

The Council is implementing a programme designed to improve the way that customers access our services in the future. The programme focuses on different access channels (telephone, electronic and face to face) and making it easy for customers to get in touch with the services they require. As part of this, we would like you to tell us how and when you would like to contact us. For more information contact Debbie Hurwood on 01642 527014 or e-mail Debbie.hurwood@stockton.gov.uk

12. If you have a query and you want to find out information about Council services, how would you prefer to do this? (Please tick one of the following)

By telephone	68%	Write	3%
Website	15%	In person	8%
By E-mail	7%		

Other	Frequency
Local Councillor	1
Text	1

13. If you want to 'Request a Service' from the Council, for example, to request the repair of a faulty street light or to enquire about council tax, how would you prefer to do this? (Please tick one of the following)

By telephone	79%	Write	2%
Website	6%	In person	4%
By E-mail	9%		

Other	Frequency
Local Councillor	2

14. How many days do you think it is reasonable to wait before you get a reply from the Council if you made contact by the following? (Please write below)

Email/Website	Frequency
1 day	178
2 days	174
3 days	73
4 days	9
5 days	31
7 days	23

10 days	1
14 days	1

Letter	Frequency
1 day	4
2 days	28
3 days	95
4 days	85
5 days	166
6 days	8
7 days	215
8 days	8
9 days	1
10 days	39
12 days	11
14 days	20
17 days	1
24 days	1

FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT WITH THE COUNCIL

15. The Council is planning opening multi-service centres in the town centres of Stockton, Billingham and Thornaby. These will deal with face to face enquiries relating to a range of Council services. At the moment our face to face enquiry areas are open weekdays from 8.30am – 5pm (4:30 pm on Fridays). Do these hours currently suit your needs?

Yes 73% No 27%

16. **Would you like the new multi-service centres to stay open after 5pm on an evening?**

Yes 48% No 52%

17. **If yes, how late would you like to see the multi-service centres stay open Monday to Friday? (Please tick one option only)**

5.30pm	6%	6.00pm	19%	6.30pm	16%	7.00pm	33%
7.30pm	8%	8.00pm	14%	8.30pm	2%	9.00pm	2%

Other	Frequency
Current hours fine	3
Saturday mornings	2

18. **Please say how many evenings of the week you would like to see longer opening hours, so you can visit in person? (Please write below)**

How many	Frequency
None	12
1	51
2	159

3	79
4	14
5	32
6	2
7	5

19. **Would you like the multi-service centres to be open on a weekend so you can speak to someone in person?**

Yes 64% No 36%

20. **If yes, what time of the day would you prefer to visit?**

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Saturday	84%	15%	1%
Sunday	69%	31%	*

TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH THE COUNCIL

At the moment, a lot of people make contact with the Council by telephone. The majority of telephones will be answered between 8:30 am and 5:00pm (4:30pm on Fridays).

21. **Do these hours currently suit your needs?**

Yes 82% No 18%

22. **Would you like to be able to telephone the Council earlier in the morning, from 8:00 am?**

Yes 46% No 54%

23. **Would you like to be able to telephone the Council after 5:00pm in the evening?**

Yes 52% No 48%

24. **If yes, what time would you like to be able to telephone the Council until?**

(Please tick one option only)

5.30pm	5%	6.00pm	19%	6.30pm	17%	7.00pm	26%
7.30pm	9%	8.00pm	16%	8.30pm	1%	9.00pm	6%

Other	Frequency
5pm	2
24 hour service	2

25. **Please say how many evenings of the week would you like to be able to telephone the Council? (Please write below)**

How many	Frequency
----------	-----------

None	9
1	22
2	124
3	68
4	18
5	98
6	9
7	34

26. **Would you like to be able to telephone the Council at the weekend?**

Yes 63% No 37%

27. **If yes, what time of the day would you like to telephone?** (Please tick all that apply)

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Saturday	89%	10%	1%
Sunday	81%	18%	2%

28. **The Council already provides extended telephone contact for Health and Social Care, a 'make safe' emergency repairs service for Tristar Homes and any emergencies related to dangerous structures, insecure properties, street light and traffic light problems. Which of the following services listed do you think should have extended opening hours for telephone contact?** (Please tick all that apply)

Please note that whilst it may be possible to make telephone contact over extended opening hours to discuss a query or make a request for a service, it may not be possible for certain services to be delivered 'out of hours'.

Refuse collection	28%	Pupil/Student Support	11%
Street cleaning	23%	Licensing	7%
Grounds maintenance	7%	Anti-Social Behaviour	80%
Recycling	10%	Benefits	9%
Fly Tip Removal	39%	Environmental Health	45%
Council Tax	13%	Planning	7%

29. **We are considering ways of reducing the large numbers of telephone numbers listed in our directory of services, so that it is easier to work out which number to ring if you want to make an enquiry or request a service. We currently have a range of 'Golden Numbers' (a golden number is a phone number that gives you direct access to services instead of going through the switchboard). There are existing 'golden numbers' for the Benefits Service, Council tax, Care for your Area and Social Services. Did you know that the Council has a range of Golden Numbers?**

Yes 22% No 78%

30. Do you think the idea of 'Golden Numbers' is a good one?

Yes 87% No 3% Don't know 10%

31. If no, please say why?

Reasons why	Frequency
Can only remember 393939	3
Prefer more direct service	3
The current switchboard is good	2
Long queues	2

32. One way of making it easier for telephone callers to get through to the service they require might be to present callers with a short menu of no more than 5 options when they ring the main switchboard number. For example, press number 1 for Care for your Area, press number 2 for Council Tax etc. From the list below what best describes your views on the menu system? (Please tick one option)

I would be happy to use a menu system 25%

I would be happy to use a menu system provided one of the menu options was to speak to an operator 58%

I would not be happy using a menu system 17%

33. If you would not be happy using a menu system, please tell us why below?

Why	Frequency
Too long	29
Prefer direct contact	16
Not professional/not caring/unfriendly	13
Don't like talking to computers	12
Options may not be suitable	11

34. How long do you think it is reasonable for you to wait before your call is accepted? Accepted means either answered by the person you are calling, or being placed in a queue because all the customer service staff are already dealing with calls.

15 seconds or less 14% 30 seconds or less 40%

45 seconds or less 11% 1 minute or less 35%

Other	Frequency
3 minutes	3

35. If you have been placed in a queue because all the customer service staff are already dealing with calls, how long would you be prepared to

wait and how long do you think it is reasonable to wait before your call is answered fully by a member of staff? (Please write the number of minutes in the box below)

Prepared to wait	Frequency
1 minute	70
2 minutes	150
3 minutes	148
4 minutes	22
5 minutes	206
6 minutes	2
7 minutes	2
8 minutes	1
10 minutes	38
15 minutes	8
45 minutes	1

Reasonable to wait	Frequency
1 minute	72
2 minutes	125
3 minutes	110
4 minutes	23
5 minutes	151
6 minutes	1
7 minutes	3
10 minutes	30
15 minutes	5
20 minutes	2
30 minutes	2
60 minutes	1

36. **If you are waiting in a queue to have your telephone call answered, what would you prefer to hear whilst you wait?** (Please tick as many as you like)

I would like to be told my position in the queue	66%
I would like to be given an estimated waiting time for my call to be answered	76%
I would like to hear topical information about Council services and events	11%
I would like to hear music	13%
I would not like to hear anything other than periodic confirmation that I am still in the queue	24%
I would like to be given the option of leaving a voice-mail message for someone to ring me back	61%

37. **If you would like to be able to leave a voice-mail message, how long would you be prepared to wait for your call to be returned?** (Please tick one option)

Within an hour	40%	1 – 2 hours	19%
----------------	-----	-------------	-----

2 – 3 hours 7% The same day 34%

Other	Frequency
Next day	4
2 days	4

38. **If you have any further comments about how we might improve telephone access to Council Services, please write below?**

Further comments	Frequency
Staff and service has always been good/excellent	15
Improve customer service	10
Ensure quick responses and returned calls	8
Employ more staff	4
Don't have call centres/queuing system/music	4
Don't leave people on the phone	4
Make staff state their name	3

Appendix 2 – Access to Services Focus Groups

Access to Services Discussion Groups

Summary

2nd – 11th May 2006

Background

To gain the general public views on the proposed Access to Services Strategy, consultation took place with members of Adult Viewpoint, the residents' panel for Stockton-on-Tees, in the form of focus groups.

A total of six focus groups took place, both on an afternoon and evening between the 2nd and 11th May 2006. They were held in five locations, Billingham, Thornaby, Yarm, Ingleby Barwick and central Stockton. A total of sixty-five Viewpoint members, attended the sessions from all areas across the Borough.

The sessions were facilitated by Jenny Elstob, Kath Hornsey and Lianne Hope and were also attended by Debbie Hurwood, Sue Daniels, Craig Willows and Lesley King.

A summary of the comments made at all six sessions follows.

GENERAL CUSTOMER CARE QUESTIONS

Good experiences of Customer Care?

This question was a general one not necessarily related to Stockton-on-Tees Council services. The comments received were from across all six sessions and includes their views on what they thought good customer care is:

Friendly and helpful staff.

Listening skills.

Telephones being answered promptly and being put through to the right extension.

Getting feedback.

Taking concerns seriously.

Somebody who makes the customer feel important.

Staff providing their name when they speak to you.

Being able to make appointments within a specific timescale.

Well-trained, well-informed staff.

When somebody says they will do something, they do it.

English speaking so you can understand what is being said to you.

The main switchboard of SBC

CFYA (The Council's Care for Your Area service)

Council (Tristar) repair service

Bad experiences of Customer Care?

Again, this question was a general one not necessarily related to Stockton-on-Tees Council services.

People not ringing you back when they say they will.

No response when you ring someone.

Staff not providing their name when you talk to them.

Being put through to an answering machine.

Staff answering the telephone when you are stood at a reception desk.

Staff talking to each other and ignoring you when you are stood there.

Being transferred around.

Language barriers

“We value your call” or “your call is important to us” message when you have been waiting ages.

Turning up to see someone at an office then finding they are out.

BOROUGH WIDE ACCESS TO SERVICES

How can we make it easier for people with special needs or who live in out-lying areas to access services?

When asked this question, lots of ideas were given where access points for contacting the Council could be located in the Borough. A free phone number was suggested for people who found it difficult to get out of their homes to contact an officer from the Council. Another suggestion was to provide home visits for people with disabilities. It was felt staff should be trained to deal with people with special needs e.g. deaf awareness.

One group suggested that SBC should consult other authorities that have already been down this route and learn from their experiences. They also felt that a steering group should be formed and include people with special needs.

It was suggested that a mobile bus/contact centre could tour the area. The times and dates of its location could be published in local papers such as the Herald & Post and Stockton News.

It was suggested that electronic access channels such as Stockton on Line and interactive kiosks might help and that these could be located in existing Council buildings.

Reducing the number of phone numbers that people have to choose from would reduce confusion.

If they live in out-lying areas, could they access facilities in local libraries or community centres?

Using community centres was generally thought to be a good idea and people were happy to use libraries, Yarm library already has disabled access (as do all SBC libraries) and people can already access the Internet.

The mobile library was a popular suggestion as long as dates and times were published in advance. One person raised a note of caution stating that a mobile contact centre may not be well utilised. Examples given were the Durham Tees Valley Rail/Bus connection and the BBC bus, which tends to be empty.

Other Suitable venues for community access points?

Supermarkets, for example, Tesco, Ingleby Barwick.

Hospitals

Post Offices

Parish halls

Schools

Through local councillors

What should they look like/how should they be set out?

Most groups felt it was important that an area should be made to allow privacy for customers and there was access for the disabled. It was also felt that experienced informed staff with the same skills as the main centre should be employed.

Extension of opening times until 7pm on an evening and Saturday morning opening was suggested.

If a face-to-face service could be provided on part time basis, how often would be suitable and what days would be best?

It was generally felt that this was a difficult question to answer. Comments made were “we would rather just ring the Council.” One group suggested a couple of half days per week in Yarm in a suitable venue but that telephone access to the contact centre would suffice at other times and in emergencies.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

What benefits kiosks and video conferencing would be for them?

Young people may be happy to use it but it may be a barrier for older residents as training to use new technology might be required. Concerns were also raised over security, possible misuse and vandalism and that the technology would need to be located in a secure environment. Also, what would happen if systems went down. One comment was “why not use the telephone”. And “video conferencing little benefit over telephone but worth giving it a try.” It was generally felt that new technology should supplement, rather than replace, existing access channels.

Barriers?

Comments as above
Long queues might form if busy
Confusing

Suggestions for location of kiosks?

Mobile bus
Library (could also be used as a venue for video conferencing)
Places where they can be accessed on an evening
Community centres
Pubs
Supermarkets
Bus stops
Post Offices
Doctors surgeries
Schools

There were differences of opinion as to whether kiosks should be placed in outside locations so that they could be available on a 24/7 basis (risk of vandalism)

Why is the Internet good?

Feedback was positive from all groups with regard to using the Internet. Good comments were made about Stockton Council’s web site. Other comments made were

You get a quick response to queries
You can do almost anything on-line for example book tickets etc
Research purposes
Good for students
Access to information from the armchair
Can think about what you want to say in your own time
Great (when you know how to use it)

Why don't they use it?

The main comments made were

Fear

Can't find access to sites

Links need to be kept up to date

Cost

Don't have easy access to a computer

Prefer to use other methods such as the telephone

Slow response

No interest

Not being computer literate

Unable to due to disability or illness (for example arthritis)

24/7 internet access doesn't necessarily mean that services are provided 24/7

Loss of social interaction

GOOD AND BAD EXPERIENCES OF CUSTOMER CARE

Good experiences about telephone enquiries?

Very positive comments were made about the main switchboard with regard to answering telephones promptly and politely. Compliments were also made about the efficiency CFYA and the repairs service.

Bad experiences about telephone enquiries?

People prefer face to face contact

Insincere messages such as " your call is important to us" whilst waiting on the phone

Problems with automated call distribution service when the facility has too many options

When they can't get in touch with staff because they are in a meeting and then they don't call you back when promised.

Waiting in a queue for ages, then when the person answering your call is unable to deal with your query/problem.

Being charged when waiting on the phone for a long time.

What they would like to hear whilst waiting on the phone?

"Definitely not music" was the message from the majority of the groups. Other comments made were:

Position in the queue was the preferred choice

Would rather not wait in the first place

An option to leave a message for someone to ring them back

Not "Greensleeves"

SBC information rather than music

Preferences for Voicemail?

There was support for an option to leave a Voicemail message, provided that people's telephone calls were returned. One suggestion made was targets should be set and the system monitored to ensure that responses were prompt. It would be good to be given a choice whether to wait in the queue or leave a message for someone to ring back.

How can we improve? Face to face enquiries

Generally people were happy with the face-to-face experiences they have experienced. Suggestions for improvement were as follows:

Separate switchboard duties for reception staff to avoid waiting
More training for front line staff in customer care. Also train people to sign and provide training in sensory awareness. If this was expensive to provide, then ensure that some of these enhanced services are available part time.
Honesty, if we can't help people, promises shouldn't be made.
Dropped counters for wheelchair users.
Smaller queues

More privacy?

All six groups felt it was important that private rooms were available to discuss personal matters. They were aware that SBC had private rooms if required but perhaps they could be slightly larger for wheelchair access.

Glass counters as opposed to open counters?

Although open counters were preferred everybody recognised the need for security in certain areas. They were happy as long as the staff behind them could clearly hear what they were saying without having to shout.

Queuing systems. What do they feel?

All six groups thought this was a good idea. The idea of a ticketing system was popular because it was felt that nobody could jump a queue and you could sit down whilst waiting. Another suggestion made was that you should be able to purchase refreshments whilst waiting.

MEASURING SUCCESS

How do we know we have been successful?

No complaints

Different methods of measuring customer satisfaction were suggested – these could be used to monitor trends.

Monitor the time taken between the initial complaint/request and the conclusion.

Feedback to customers

Produce performance Indicators

Mystery shopping

Random sampling

Effective consultation

More queries/calls resolved at the first point of contact

Following up some questions by telephone, how do they feel about that?

Comments were mixed; concerns were raised about the costs involved if everyone was given a follow up call, others thought it was a good idea to follow up with telephone calls. One group felt that Stockton was already doing this in many cases; Viewpoint was given as an example.

What standards do they expect?

Customers expect a prompt and efficient service from SBC and an acknowledgement letter for enquiries to be sent to them within one week of receipt. Targets and response times should be published for all to see, for example how quickly street lights are repaired. There should be feedback and an explanation if the target time is not going to be achieved.

Appendix 3 - MAPPING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE (THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD) WITH CUSTOMER FIRST STAGE 2 (SBC STANDARD) AND THEN WITH COUNCIL-WIDE ACTIVITIES

Explanation of the colour content and the colour coding used in the document

<u>1st Column 'element number'</u>	Fully matched with Customer First elements
	Partly matched with Customer First elements
	No matching with Customer First elements
<u>2nd Column</u>	Fully matched with Customer First elements and/or other Council initiatives
	Partly matched with Customer First elements and/or other Council initiatives
	No matching with Customer First elements and/or other Council initiatives
<u>3rd Column 'Element'</u>	Fully matched with Customer First elements and/or other Council initiatives
	Partly matched with Customer First elements and/or other Council initiatives
	No matching with Customer First elements and/or other Council initiatives

For certain Customer Service Excellence elements the description of the element incorporates several different themes relating to that element. Where this is the case, the element has been split into bullet points to ensure each part of that element is fully considered.

4th Column – 'Guidance'

The text in the Guidance column comes directly from the Cabinet Office document describing the Customer Service Excellence Standard.

5th Column – Matching Customer First criteria

- Customer First criteria that match partly or fully with new Standard elements [shown thus](#)
- Signposting to other Customer First criteria where potentially useful evidence may be found [shown thus](#)

Criterion 1 Customer Insight

This criterion focuses on the importance of developing an in-depth understanding of your customers. This includes consulting customers and using the information you receive to design and provide services. It also covers the importance of monitoring the outcomes of your services and whether customers are satisfied with them.

Understanding customers in this way is essential for public services. Organisations that provide public services have raised their standards and levels of service and continue to build on this success. Effectively identifying your customers, consulting them in a meaningful way and efficiently measuring the outcomes of your service are a vital part of this approach. It is not just about being able to collect information. It is about having the ability to use that information, and developing a culture within your organisation that values this kind of understanding and constantly looks to improve.

Criterion 1 Customer Insight				
1 Customer Identification				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
1.1.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of our current and potential customer groups based on recent and reliable information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A profile of the organisation's main customer groups and their characteristics. Details of how these groups were segmented and classified. Details on the frequency and reliability of the research to identify customer groups. 	<p>No matches with Customer First (but some services have done some segmentation and stats@stockton/JSU research may help)</p>
1.1.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have developed customer insight about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods and approaches used for developing understanding, such as focus groups, one-to-one interviews, surveys, observation, customer journey mapping and other ways of collecting information about customers. Details of how you improved your services as a result of the understanding you gained into your customers' needs. 	<p>No matches with Customer First (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 – Viewpoint surveys and focus groups, MORI)</p>

1.1.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We make particular efforts to identify hard to reach and disadvantaged groups and individuals and have developed our services in response to their specific needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods used to consult and involve hard-to-reach and disadvantaged groups and individuals, particularly people who have a number of different needs and customers whose views you rarely hear. Examples of how you identified needs that you were not meeting and the changes you made to avoid excluding or under-representing certain people. 	<p style="color: #2e8b57;">1.4, 5.1, 5.9</p> <p>Disability Advisory Group, Diversity events</p> <p>Equality Impact assessments, single equality scheme</p>
1.2 Engagement and Consultation				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
1.2.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a strategy for engaging and involving customers using a range of methods appropriate to the needs of identified customer groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies, strategies and leadership for engaging, consulting and involving customer groups. Evidence of how you use a wide range of tools, including feedback from customers and staff (letters, e-mails, comments, complaints, forums, focus groups and so on) as well as research. 	1.1, 1.2
1.2.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have made the consultation of customers integral to continually improving our service and we advise customers of the results and action taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings and analysis of engagement activity, consultation exercises and other methods for capturing feedback. Details of actual improvements, with evidence of how these are directly linked to the ways you consulted and involved customers. Examples of how you involved customers in designing and providing services (for example, through allowing them to take part). Information on how you tell customers about the changes you make as a result of their involvement. Current service improvement and development plans showing that your policies, projects and activities are shaped by how you consult and involve customers. 	1.1, 1.2, 1.3 (but don't think we go to the level of detail expected here)

1.2.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We regularly review our strategies and opportunities for consulting and engaging with customers to ensure that the methods used are effective and provide reliable and representative results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcome of reviews on the effectiveness of engagement and involvement, showing levels of participation, assessment of how representative the results are, and quality of information collected. How mechanisms, processes and approaches are adapted to respond to emerging issues, service priorities, demographic changes etc. Examples of innovation, learning from best practice or benchmarking, suggestions of staff etc. 	<p>No matches with Customer First</p> <p>1.15</p>
1.3 Customer Satisfaction				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
1.3.1		We use reliable and accurate methods to measure customer satisfaction on a regular basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods used would in most cases include survey work and other forms of feedback and qualitative information. Information on survey methodology e.g. sample sizes, potential biases, margins of error and any advice taken on design. Reasons for the decisions you made on how to measure customers' satisfaction. Details on how often you collected information 	<p>Inherent in the assessment procedures relating to Customer First criterion 1</p> <p>Corporate consultation e.g. Ipsos MORI and viewpoint plus input from Policy Unit</p>
1.3.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We analyse and publicise satisfaction levels for the full range of customers for all main areas of our service and we have improved services as a result. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment and analysis of satisfaction within all groups (identified). If you provide a range of different services, you should assess how satisfied customers are with all of them. Evidence of any differences in levels of satisfaction between groups, or any unexpected outcomes. Published information about the action you plan to take or have taken as a result of measuring customers' satisfaction with your service. Examples of other methods you used. 	<p>1.12, 1.14 (we don't evidence how services have improved as a result and don't go to the level of detail expected here e.g. assessment and analysis within all groups, and describing unexpected outcomes) Ipsos MORI surveys and action plans will help to provide evidence for this.</p>

1.3.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We include in our measurement of satisfaction specific questions relating to key areas including those on delivery, timeliness, information, access, and the quality of customer service, as well as specific questions which are informed by customer insight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfaction surveys and other ways of gathering feedback that include these specific questions. Evidence of investigation into customers' priorities and local key drivers of satisfaction. 	Criterion 2
1.3.4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We set challenging and stretching targets for customer satisfaction and our levels are improving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfaction levels of all customer groups for all the main areas of your service, and the targets you want to achieve. Evidence of how levels of satisfaction have improved over time. 	Customer First requires services to set targets, but not specifically for customer satisfaction – however this is covered in the CF assessment process and some services include targets in their BUPs as they are required to monitor customer satisfaction. 1.9 , 1.12
1.3.5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have made positive changes to services as a result of analysing customer experience, including improved customer journeys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of how you analyse customers' experience. Specific information on how you map customers' journeys and the steps you have taken to improve these (for example, through limiting the amount of unnecessary contact they have with people in your organisation). Evidence of savings or reinvestment (or both) as a result of making your systems and processes more efficient. 	No matches with Customer First

Criterion 2 The Culture of the Organisation

The transition to a customer focused culture can be challenging but at its core is a business model based on a detailed understanding of customers. In building a customer focused culture, organisations look at how those that work within the organisation demonstrate the necessary values and understanding as well as how the operations and procedures meet customer needs and expectations.

This criterion is therefore concerned with the support for customer focused approaches throughout the organisation so that excellent service is delivered to all customers. Also included here are two of the key drivers relating to staff behaviour – professionalism and attitude. These have been brought together and reinforced by a requirement that this approach is fully supported by the leadership team.

Taken together these elements should help to build and develop a customer focused culture which supports improved service delivery.

Criterion 2 The Culture of the Organisation				
2.1 Leadership, Policy and Culture				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
2.1.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is corporate commitment to putting the customer at the heart of service delivery • and leaders in our organisation actively support this and advocate for customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate vision and values statements. • Examples of how your organisation’s leaders have shown that they recognise the importance of customer focus and actively promote activities that allow your organisation to gain an understanding of its customers. 	<p style="color: red;">No matches with Customer First</p> <p>(but we have core competencies, vision and core values, the customer first programme itself and awards, Council Plan which demonstrate corporate commitment)</p>

2.1.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We use customer insight to inform policy and strategy and to prioritise service improvement activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers' and staff's views on how your knowledge of customer groups informs your policies. Examples of how customer insight drives your policies, and how this influences the way in which you design your services. 	<p>No matches with Customer First 1.1, 1.3, 3.5, 3.12</p> <p>Ipsos Mori / use of stats@Stockton</p>
2.1.3		<p>We have policies and procedures which support the right of all customers to expect excellent levels of service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer care, equal opportunities, disability and other policies and procedures relating to fair treatment. Information you provide to customers on what they are entitled to. 	<p>1.8, 1.11</p>
2.1.4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We ensure that all customers and customer groups are treated fairly and this is confirmed by feedback and the measurement of customer experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence from mystery shoppers (where this is relevant and appropriate). Customers' and staff's testimony and other feedback. 	<p>4.2 1.12 (single equality scheme, but - we don't measure customer experience)</p>
2.1.5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We protect customers' privacy both in face-to-face discussions and in the transfer and storage of customer information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures for making sure you protect customers' privacy, including having secure computer systems and making checks on customers' identity. Policies on data protection and staff guidance on this. 	<p>3.9 (together with all the info security policies and procedures that sit behind this)</p>
2.1.6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We empower and encourage all employees to actively promote and participate in the customer focused culture of our organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of customer and staff testimony about their involvement and empowerment. Staff policies and procedures manuals. Examples of your approaches to promote customer focus throughout the organisation. 	<p>3.12 3.6, 3.7 Customer First Scheme, Customer first assessors</p>

2.2 Staff Professionalism and Attitude				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
2.2.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can demonstrate our commitment to developing and delivering customer focused services through our recruitment, training and development policies for staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job specifications and recruitment procedures. Details of the training you have provided to all your employees, and the opportunities for them to develop further. 	<p style="color: red;">No matches with Customer First</p> <p>(but we will have sample job specs and competency framework, support for Customer Service NVQs, training plans/courses)</p>
2.2.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our staff are polite and friendly to customers and have an understanding of customer needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer service policies and staff guidance. Evidence from mystery shoppers (where relevant) and internal monitoring. Customers' views and other feedback, including comments on the service provided by individual members of staff. 	<p style="color: green;">3.11</p> <p style="color: blue;">4.1, 4.2, 3.13</p>
2.2.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We prioritise customer focus at all levels of our organisation and evaluate individual and team commitment through the performance management system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of how customer feedback is linked to your assessment of staff. Include staff recognition and reward schemes, if relevant and appropriate. 	<p style="color: green;">3.13</p> <p style="color: blue;">3.1. 3.6</p>
2.2.4		<p>We can demonstrate how customer-facing staffs' insight and experience is incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ways in which staff give their views and details on how you use their feedback. Details of improvements that you have made as a result of staff feedback. Examples of how you have improved the processes for passing on customers' information throughout your organisation. 	<p style="color: green;">3.12, 1.19</p> <p style="color: blue;">1.13</p>

2.2.5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We value the contribution our staff make to delivering customer focused services, and leaders, managers and staff demonstrate these behaviours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of how your organisation values the role of customer service staff, by recognising and rewarding the contributions of individual members of staff and teams. Evidence that providing customer-focused services is a priority at all levels of the organisation, from the front line (members of staff who deal with the public) to senior managers and all levels in between. 	3.6 (involvement of leaders and managers in supporting Customer First and at award events?)
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Criterion 3 Information and Access

We know that information is vital to customers. They particularly value accurate and detailed information, and this criterion aims to make sure that we have this in mind in everything we do. As a result, we need to focus on making sure that we consider this as part of an effective communication plan for consulting and involving customers, rather than seeing communications as a one-off exercise. Customers also tell us that one of the most frustrating parts of public services is not being kept informed about what is happening. Because of this, we ask you to particularly look at this part of your communication policy.

Putting customers first can be an important first step towards providing effective communication.

Criterion 3 Information and Access				
3.1 Range of Information				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
3.1.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We make information about the full range of services we provide available to our customers and potential customers, including how and when people can contact us, how our services are run and who is in charge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of contact and service information, for the range of communication methods used. 	2.1 (but only talks about basic info) and Service Standards Some services providing more detailed info as it was a requirement of Charter Mark.

3.1.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where there is a charge for services, we tell our customers how much they will have to pay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published information about any charges for services. Details of how and when customers can make payments. 	4.12
3.2 Quality of Information				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
3.2.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We provide our customers with the information they need in ways which meet their needs and preferences, using a variety of appropriate channels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance to staff about clear communication, including testing information with customers. Customers' views on the communication methods you use. 	4.5 4.10, 4.11
3.2.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We take reasonable steps to make sure our customers have received and understood the information we provide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details of how you check that individual customers have received and understood the information. Examples of the changes you make to your communication methods to meet customers' needs. 	4.13 (refers to written information) and covered in Customer First assessment process
3.2.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have improved the range, content and quality of verbal, published and web based information we provide to ensure it is relevant and meets the needs of customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of changes to the way you provide information after receiving feedback. Schedule for when you review the information you provide. 	4.5, 4.9 CRM scripts, Web group

3.2.4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can demonstrate that information we provide to our customers is accurate and complete, and that when this is not the case we advise customers when they will receive the information they requested. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers' views and feedback on the accuracy of the information. Details of the service standards for responding to customers' enquiries. Complaints and comments from customers. Examples of when you have provided the wrong information and how this was rectified. 	2.3 + service standards
3.3 Access				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
3.3.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We make our services easily accessible to all customers through provision of a range of alternative channels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details of the range of options available for contacting the organisation. Different ways of communicating and specific arrangements and sample materials. Details of how you have reviewed services to make life easier for people. Outcomes of reviews and the improvements you made and planned as a result. 	4.5
3.3.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We evaluate how customers interact with the organisation through access channels and we use this information to identify possible service improvements, and offer better choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data and analysis relating to channel usage and action taken to improve services as a result. Details of how you use information to improve the choice of services. 	4.3, 4.5, 4.7, 4.10, 4.11, 4.13
3.3.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We ensure that where customers can visit our premises in person facilities are as clean and comfortable as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on how you have reviewed the physical environment of your premises, arrangements for maintaining quality and details of any recent improvements you have made. 	1.8 (appearance of reception areas is part of service standards)

3.4 Co-operative working with other providers, partners and communities					
CF only	S	BC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
3.4.1			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have made arrangements with other providers and partners to offer and supply co-ordinated services, and these arrangements have demonstrable benefits for our customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal and informal partnerships and plans for improving access and services. Information on the success of joint working arrangements, including improvements you have made to services as a result. Customer feedback on the services provided through partnerships, including the quality and range of services and how these are tailored to the individual customer's needs. 	<p>No matches with Customer First (but plenty of evidence of partnership working from other sources)</p>
3.4.2			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have developed co-ordinated working arrangements with our partners that ensure customers have clear lines of accountability for quality of service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on how you monitor and assess services you provide in partnership with other organisations. Evidence of any service level agreements, particularly handover arrangements and other measures that make sure that the customer receives a 'seamless' service. Details of how customers can complain about the services you provide in partnership with other organisations. Details of how you publicise joint working arrangements, including clear information for customers on who is responsible. Examples of how you help customers to access services, where appropriate. 	<p>No matches with Customer First (but plenty of evidence of partnership working from other sources)</p>

3.4.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We interact within wider communities and we can demonstrate the ways in which we support those communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on how your organisation works with and contributes to the wider community, beyond the direct service it provides to customers. 	<p>No matches with Customer First (plenty of evidence from other sources in relation to supporting communities)</p>
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Criterion 4 Delivery

A vital part of any organisation is how successfully it achieves its main business aims. This is, of course, also very important to the customers of those organisations. As a result this criterion relates to how you carry out your main business, the outcomes for the customer, and how you manage any problems that arise.

Research shows that many customers are satisfied with the outcome of their contact with public services but fewer are satisfied with the way the service kept promises and handled any problems. Handling problems in particular often receives one of the lowest ratings out of all the different areas measured. Other research has shown that learning from mistakes is an important way for public services to gain trust from their customers. Listening to, and asking for, comments, feedback and complaints about your service can be a great way to make small adjustments to the way your organisation runs, and both formal and informal feedback can be equally important.

Criterion 4 Delivery				
4.1 Delivery standards				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
4.1.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have challenging standards for our main services, which take account of our responsibility for delivering national and statutory standards and targets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details of all standards, performance indicators and targets set for main services. Include national, statutory and local standards and targets. 	No matches with Customer First (but could meet this criterion through the Council's performance management framework)
4.1.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We monitor and meet our standards, key departmental and performance targets, and we tell our customers about our performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details of how often you monitor your performance and the methods you use. Current performance against all standards, key departmental standards, statutory inspections and audits and internal performance targets for the last full year. 	1.9, 1.14
4.1.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We consult and involve customers, citizens, partners and staff on the setting, reviewing and raising of our local standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods you use to consult and involve customers and others about local standards and targets. Outcomes of your consultation on standards and targets. Information showing past and present standards and targets that you can use to compare your performance with previous years. 	1.9
4.2 Achieved Delivery and Outcomes				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
4.2.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We agree with our customers at the outset what they can expect from the service we provide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show that you use the promises and aims to make appropriate commitments to each customer. 	1.11, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3

4.2.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can demonstrate that we deliver the service we promised to individual customers and that outcomes are positive for the majority of our customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers' views and feedback on their experience of the service. Include responses to specific survey questions and information and figures for positive outcomes. 	<p>No matches with Customer First 1.12, 2.4</p> <p>Performance monitoring framework will help, and Viewpoint survey results</p>
4.2.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can demonstrate that we benchmark our performance against that of similar or complementary organisations and have used that information to improve our service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from benchmarking exercises (where this information is available). Exercises can include comparing functions as well as whole services. Evidence of peer reviews, discussion groups, taking part in forums or other methods for comparing your performance with other organisations. 	<p>1.15 but it is not mandatory</p>
4.2.4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have developed and learned from best practice identified within and outside our organisation, and we publish our examples externally where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show how you share and apply best practice within your organisation and how you apply best-practice examples from outside the organisation. Examples of best practice you have published recently. 	<p>No matches with Customer First (role of Customer First Team in sharing best practice could contribute, also Beacon awards)</p>
4.3 Deal effectively with problems				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria

4.3.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We identify any dips in performance against our standards and explain these to customers, together with action we are taking to put things right and prevent further recurrence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes of monitoring processes. Details of any action you have taken. Examples of how you explain dips in performance to customers. Examples of effective procedures you have put in place to keep customers informed during exceptional circumstances such as emergencies. 	<p>No matches with Customer First 1.14</p> <p>Services that hold Charter Mark are required to do this. Emergency helpline, messages in telephone queues.</p>
4.3.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have an easy to use complaints procedure, which includes a commitment to deal with problems fully and solve them wherever possible within a reasonable time limit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer complaints procedure as provided for use by customers. 	<p>1.16 and the corporate Commendations, Comments and Complaints procedure</p>
4.3.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We give staff training and guidance to handle complaints and to investigate them objectively, and we can demonstrate that we empower staff to put things right. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints policy. Guidance and training you give staff in how to respond to and deal with complaints. Assessment of how effective your complaints-handling training is. Examples of where staff have been given the authority to resolve complaints. 	<p>1.16, 1.17</p>
4.3.4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We learn from any mistakes we make by identifying patterns in formal and informal complaints and comments from customers and use this information to improve services and publicise action taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Records of formal and informal complaints and comments relating to problems. Information you regularly publish showing trends in complaints, both formal and informal, and the action you have taken as a result. 	<p>1.18, 1.19</p> <p>(No specific requirement to publicise action taken, but some services do)</p>

4.3.5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We regularly review and improve our complaints procedure, taking account of the views of customers, complainants and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer and staff feedback on the effectiveness of the complaints procedure. Process for reviewing your complaints procedure and the improvements you have made. 	<p>No matches with Customer First (procedure in place for gathering customer feedback + Equality Impact Assessment on complaints procedure with regular review) 1.20</p>
4.3.6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We ensure that the outcome of the complaint process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from customers on the outcome of complaints processes. Details of procedures for staff and feedback processes. 	<p>No matches with Customer First</p> <p>(Covered by complaints procedure?)</p>

Criterion 5 Timeliness and Quality of Service

This criterion looks in more detail at the standards you have relating to how you carry out your main business. It draws heavily on what public-service users have identified as the most important factors of excellent customer service. Separating customer service standards from the main business standards makes the requirements for setting and monitoring standards in these areas much more strict. This plays a major part in developing the customer-focused culture discussed in Criterion 2.

What is covered here is not meant to be a full list of every factor that affects how you run your service. Clearly, local factors will also be important but we know from research that the speed of your initial contact with the customer and your ability to keep to agreed timescales is vital. However, because organisations can sometimes focus on providing a speedy service while forgetting to also consider quality, we have combined both these factors here.

Criterion 5 Timeliness and Quality of Service				
5.1 Standards for Timeliness and Quality				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
5.1.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We set appropriate and measurable standards for the timeliness of response for all forms of customer contact including phone calls, letters, e-communications and personal callers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details of standards and targets set for timeliness of response to customer contact for all access channels. 	1.8 together with Customer Service Standards
5.1.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We set comprehensive standards for all aspects of the quality of customer service to be expected in all dealings with our organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full customer service standards – including the quality of your response to phone calls, letters, communications and personal callers – for all stages of the customer journey. 	1.8 together with Customer Service Standards
5.2 Timely Outcomes				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
5.2.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We advise our customers and potential customers about our promises on timeliness and quality of customer service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published information and all methods for advising customers and potential customers of standards for timeliness and quality of customer service. 	1.8 together with Customer Service Standards, 1.10, 1.11

5.2.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We identify individual customer needs at the first point of contact with us and ensure that an appropriate person who can address the reason for contact deals with the customer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of the processes you use when you first have contact with the customer – for example, interview techniques, mapping customer journeys, reviewing information you already hold about the customer. Show an understanding of how customers are using the different methods to contact you, and the problems you face in providing a successful service. 	No matches with Customer First
5.2.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We promptly share customer information with colleagues and partners within our organisation whenever appropriate and can demonstrate how this has reduced unnecessary contact for customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes you have in place to make sure that complete information is transferred promptly and to all relevant people within and outside the organisation. Examples of how you have shared information promptly and in a useful and appropriate way, whilst keeping to the regulations on data protection and confidentiality. Examples of where you have shared information about customer groups (for example, with service managers, front-line staff and partners) to provide more efficient services. 	No matches with Customer First 4.6
5.2.4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where service is not completed at the first point of contact we discuss with the customer the next steps and indicate the likely overall time to achieve outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers' views which show how the service has been tailored to consider their individual circumstances. Details of how you have communicated the likely timescales with customers. 	2.3
5.2.5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We respond to initial enquiries promptly, if there is a delay we advise the customer and take action to rectify the problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on wait times for initial responses to telephone, e-mail, text and personal callers. Information on your procedures to tell customers about any problems. 	2.3 and Customer Service Standards

5.3 Achieved Timely Delivery				
CF only	SBC wide	Element	Guidance	Matched Customer First criteria
5.3.1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We monitor our performance against standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we take action if problems are identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods used for monitoring performance in relation to standards for timeliness and quality of customer service. Steps taken to address timeliness of delivery where this does not meet customer expectations. 	2.4, 4.2, 4.3
5.3.2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are meeting our current standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we publicise our performance against these standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current actual performance against all standards and targets for timeliness and quality of service and evidence of publication. Customer feedback on achievement of service delivery within agreed timescales. Examples of 'mystery shopper' evidence where relevant. 	1.9, 1.14, 4.1
5.3.3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of service compares well with that of similar organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative performance data relating to timeliness and quality of customer service obtained from benchmarking exercises. 	No matches with Customer First but Charter Mark holders are required to do this

N.B.

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Summary

1. Customer Insight			
Matching with Customer First only	4	5	2
Matching with Council-wide activities/initiatives	3	5	3
2. The Culture of the Organisation			
Matching with Customer First only	3	3	5
Matching with Council-wide activities/initiatives	0	4	7
3. Information & Access			
Matching with Customer First only	4	4	4
Matching with Council-wide activities/initiatives	1	4	7
4. Delivery			
Matching with Customer First only	6	4	3
Matching with Council-wide activities/initiatives	0	6	7
5. Timeliness & Quality of Service			
Matching with Customer First only	3	1	6
Matching with Council-wide activities/initiatives	2	2	6
TOTAL			
Matching with Customer First only	20 (35%)	17 (30%)	20 (35%)
Matching with Council-wide activities/initiatives	6 (10%)	21 (37%)	30 (53%)