

**REPORT TO:** Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board  
**DATE:** 6 January 2009  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director Corporate and Policy  
**SUBJECT:** Scrutiny Review of Customer Services  
**WARDS:** Borough Wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To present a progress report to Corporate Services PPB regarding the Scrutiny Review of Customer Services.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

**a) the Corporate Services PPB considers and comments upon the report of the Topic Group**

**b) the Corporate Services PPB endorses the plans for taking the review forward subject to any amendments arising from above**

**c) the report be sent to Executive Board for consideration**

**3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 At its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2008 the Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board recommended that the Customer Complaints Review be followed up by a scrutiny review of Customer Focus, and it was agreed that this should be conducted by the same group of Members.

3.2 There are two strands to this Scrutiny topic:

- The first strand is to explore how best to implement the new Customer Excellence Standard, produced by Cabinet Office in February this year, to help drive improvement and consistency throughout the organisation.
- The second strand is to develop an overarching Customer Care Strategy which sets out the key areas the Council needs to focus on in order to secure improved outcomes for its customers.

**4.0 PROGRESS TO DATE**

4.1 The Customer Services Topic Group of Board Members and officers held their initial meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008. The meeting discussed:

## **The Scope and Purpose of the Review**

The scope and purpose of the group remain as originally agreed.

## **The new Customer Service Excellence Standard**

The aim of Government is for “public services to be efficient, effective, excellent, equitable and empower - with the citizen always and everywhere at the heart of public service provision”.

Standards, therefore, have been prepared and Local Authorities are expected to achieve accreditation through a Nationally recognised process.

## **Progress of the Work of the Officer Group**

The Strategic Director, Health and Community was asked to bring together an Officer group representing all Directorates to consider the standards and the development of a strategy. To date five officer group meetings have been held. As a result the following action has been undertaken.

- Research has been undertaken, including a visit to Rotherham Borough Council, who have received accreditation under the Cabinet Office Standards. In addition, representatives from the group agreed to “test” the toolkit standards against their own service areas and this has helped to shape the draft Customer Services Strategy. (Appendix 1).
- The group have considered working with one of the assessing organisations and meetings with CSE Assessment Services have taken place to better understand the process.
- Subject to Standing Orders, the group wish to procure CSE or a similar organisation to assess the Council’s Customer Services. Initially this will involve a corporate assessment. This does not receive accreditation in its own right but provides a basis against which to assess other services which can then receive accreditation in their own right.
- It has been suggested that following a corporate assessment, HDL Revenue & Benefits should be the first service to be assessed against the standard because of the strong direct link with customers.

## **Next Steps**

It is proposed that the:

- A brief/specification be prepared in order to obtain quotes from potential accreditation companies and that a company is appointed to prepare and assess the Council in relation to the Customer Service Excellence Standard.
- All current corporate strategies relevant to customer service

practices be reviewed to ensure documentation is relevant and up to date.

- A set of corporate guidelines be developed in relation to helping services to profile their customers and understand the best way to engage with them, through survey, focus groups etc., and the most relevant way to feedback information and document these undertakings.
- A method be established for sharing good practice in relation to customer service practices across the Council and its partners.
- A set of corporate customer service standards be developed in conjunction with staff and customers
- New technology be investigated to ensure the most recent forms of access are available to customers.
- Appropriate training be given to partners, Member and staff.

3.4 The topic group approved the actions of the Officer Group to date and agreed with the next steps subject to the Officer Group reporting periodically to the Topic Group and reporting information to the Corporate Services PPB and Executive Board

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None

#### 5.0 **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Financial - There will be a cost for undertaking the assessments and these will be contained within existing budgets.

#### 6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 The corporate customer service strategy will impact on all council directorates and priorities and its development should assist in more effective services and outcomes for customers.

#### 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

Failure to adopt the standards may disadvantage the Council's approach to customer services and outcomes.

#### 8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

The strategy and achievement of the Standard will ensure equal and fair access to customer services by all customers and potential customers

#### 9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Notes of Topic Group	2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor	Rob MacKenzie

Meeting

Municipal Building  
Kingsway  
Widnes

Notes of Officer  
Group meetings and  
draft Customer  
Services Strategy

6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Municipal Building  
Kingsway  
Widnes

Dwayne Johnson