

# **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## ***Committee Report***

**Public**

**Date of Meeting:**

**23 January 2002**

**Title: CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW - UPDATE**

**Report of: City Treasurer**

**Report reference: Financial Memo 2001/02 No 130**

### **Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Resource Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress so far of the Project Team conducting the Customer Contact Best Value Review.

### **Recommendations:**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and make comments as appropriate.

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## CITY OF CARLISLE

To: The Chairman and Members of the Financial Memo

Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2001/02 No 130

23 January 2002

### CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW – UPDATE

Since the last update to this Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, work has been progressing on a number of fronts and this report details that work.

#### 1. Current Service - Consultation Exercise

1. Work on consultation of the current customer contact service is now almost complete.
2. The results of the four focus groups which were held are now available and all comments made will be included in the final Consultation report. Those people who attended the focus groups have been sent copies of the notes made for their session.
3. A postal questionnaire has been sent out to 500 randomly selected citizens and the results will be available to the next O&S meeting on the 28<sup>h</sup> February.
4. Exit interviews took place outside the Civic Centre on Monday 14<sup>th</sup>. & Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup>. of this month. The results of these interviews are imminent.
5. Contact has been made with representatives of elderly and disabled groups. They are to be invited to make comments on existing customer contact arrangements.
6. Preparations for an exercise in mystery shopping have begun. This is scheduled to take place during early February through visits to a number of services via a number of channels.
7. Because some elements of the background research are not yet available the review team is not in a position to issue a final report from the consultation exercise. This will be available for the O&S meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup>. February.

#### 2. Analysis of existing service

1. The initial work on preparing a new customer contact delivery model requires an understanding of the current service.
2. One of the criticisms of the existing customer contact arrangements is that there is no corporate management information on the service.
3. To this end work is being carried out in assessing and measuring customer contact on a service by service basis across the whole Authority.
4. For the first time we hope to establish the extent and scale of this basic service on a corporate basis.

5. A detailed questionnaire has been issued to all service heads. These have now all been returned and are in the process of being collated.
6. A statement of the current corporate customer contact service will be available for the next O&S meeting.
7. Any outcomes from the challenge process can then be used with this data to outline a new customer contact model.

### 3. Customer contact policy

1. Work on a new customer contact policy is underway. Examples of current policies employed in other Authorities have been collected.
2. A draft policy is now being created based upon best practice established through this background research and informed by the early results of the consultation exercise.
3. The draft policy is designed to be couched in terms of customer expectation rather than be an internal policy document to which the customer cannot relate.
4. Opportunities will be available for Members to comment on the policy when the draft document is produced for Members consideration at the next O&S.

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### 4. Critical Friend

1. Members of the review team are to meet with the Customer Services Manager of a major retailer based in Carlisle with a view to inviting him to join the Review in the capacity of a critical friend. He has indicated that he would be more than willing to join with the Council and share experiences in this field with a view to improving our overall service.
2. In addition to the critical friend, the review team is looking to increase the external scrutiny of their work. They will seek to appoint an external consultant to perform a mid-term review of work carried out and authenticate that the approach being taken will deliver the significant improvements to the overall service as envisaged by the Best Value process.

### 5. Initial Challenge

1. Since the last meeting the review team have commenced the challenge part of the review. An initial exercise took place on 9<sup>th</sup> January.
2. The process involved examining the existing service and comparing it to where we want to be. This led to a gap analysis that highlights the differences between the current service and the expectations of any new service. It was then possible to identify the key issues standing in the way of bridging the gap. Based upon information gathered so far, a group exercise progressed quickly to identifying the key issues in this review. These are summarised in Appendix A.
3. A basic exercise in challenging the fundamental need for the service, appraising how effective it was and the way it's currently delivered was also carried out.
4. Although the full evidence has not yet been assembled it is clear that the service is fundamental to the Council and must continue to be provided. It is also clear that, with some exceptions the service is clearly failing. The extent and degree

of this failure will become apparent when the service is compared against other organisation's services.

5. Early possible alternatives to improving the service were explored. Possible alternative scenario's include:-

a) Continuing direct provision by the Council by either

i. improving on the current arrangements

ii. re-organising customer contact to be delivered by

- a separate, single customer contact unit
- a DSO run customer contact unit
- running customer contact under the Local Strategic Partnership banner
- running customer contact in conjunction with some other partner

b) Indirect provision by the Council through:-

i. Externalisation of the service through

- a private sector contract
  - a partnership based on the Liverpool model
1. These options need to be thought through and any other options which may have been missed included. This analysis will form the main part of the Compete part of the review which will result in a new customer contact model aimed at delivering an improved service for the Authority.
  2. This critical challenge stage of the review is still at any early stage and Members will be given a fuller opportunity to comment on these lines of thought, particularly about delivery, when the Interim Challenge report is presented at the next O&S meeting. However, any initial views would be welcome at this stage.

## 6. Revised Timetable for the Review

6.1 The projected timetable for the review is now as follows:-

- Final Report on Consultation: Interim Report on Challenge: Assessment of current customer contact service: Draft customer contact policy – 28<sup>th</sup>. Feb 2002
- Final Report on Challenge: Initial Report on Comparison: Final customer contact policy: Initial new Customer Contact Model – 18<sup>th</sup>. Apr. 2002
- Final Report on Comparison: Finalised Customer Contact Model: Initial Report on Competing: Initial draft of action plan. – May/June O&S 2002
- Finalised Action Plan: Final Best Value Report

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City Treasurer

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City Treasury, Carlisle 18 January 2002 JN/CH/f1300102

Appendix A

Initial Challenge

Key Issues:-

Environment Issues

Poor location of contact points

Civic Reception Area – Ugly layout, unpleasant, unwelcoming environment

Multiple points of contact

People should be dealt with at point of contact—not redirected to where officers are

Communication Issues

Limited access hours – Confused, conflicting and inconvenient

Lack of consultation with customers about service

No clear signposting of services

Ownership Issues

No ownership of queries

Customer contacts are not logged and tracked

Link to back office not seamless

Services not delivered from a single point (Customer passed from person to person)

Transfer of service requests not seamless

Performance Management Issues

Lack of management information

No performance measurement

Based on individuals knowledge and initiative

Poor face to face, voice and e-mail skills. No guidance or training

Organisation Issues

No Central Point of Contact

Silo working – Deal only with own service requests

No links to other organisations

No corporate approach to customer contact

No global customer contact policy

Not customer centric

No customer care culture

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