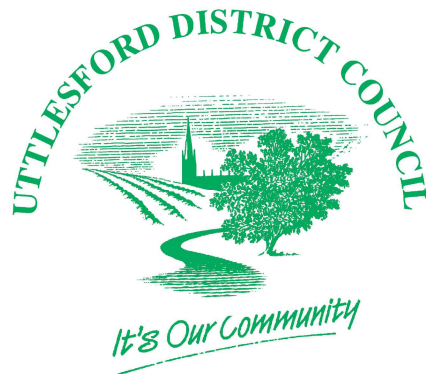


UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

CUSTOMER SERVICES



SERVICE PLAN

2005 – 2008

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 The Customer Services executive unit was established following the re-structuring of Council services on 1 June 2004. This is the first service plan for the new executive unit and all staff are being given the opportunity to comment on it. This plan is only a summary of the main objectives for Customer Services. Detailed service plans have, in turn, been developed for each component section of the executive unit.
- 2 Leading Councillors and Officers have stated that our customers are one of the Council's top priorities. We are currently looking at the way in which frontline services are delivered to our customers through the Access to Services Review. This involves implementing improved information technology in the form of a Customer Relationship Management system, which will help the Council deliver it's First Point of Contact objective. This review will also investigate extending the Community Information Centre network and the use of a contact centre. Workshops are being held to consult with staff and Councillors on the options for service delivery, which will help shape the future of the Customer Services executive unit.
- 3 Customer Services is made up of the following frontline and support service sections: -
 - Council Tax;
 - Business Rates;
 - Housing and Council Tax Benefits;
 - Cashiering;
 - Community Information Centres;
 - Tourist Information Centres;
 - Information Technology;
 - Telecommunications;
 - Reprographics;
 - Mailroom.

THE COUNCIL'S MISSION STATEMENT

- 4 The service plan has been developed to support the attainment of the Council's mission statement which describes the overall purpose or aim of the services provided by the Council: -

“Working together we create a better community”

THE COUNCIL'S FIVE KEY THEMES

- 5 The Council's has five key themes, developed following the joint Councillor leadership and Executive Management Team away day in June 2004.

Uttlesford's Corporate Plan sets out the priorities for improving the quality of life in the district over the coming years. For the Council to be able to deliver on its key themes and priorities, it is extremely important that they are translated into meaningful targets and objectives for staff throughout the whole Council. Customer Services has a vital part to play in shaping the future of the district and the way in which it will help to deliver the five key themes is shown in the diagram at appendix 7. The Corporate Plan for 2005 – 2008 will be developed around these themes, which are listed below: -

- CUSTOMERS;
- EXCELLENCE;
- COMMUNICATION;
- PEOPLE;
- COMMUNITY.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCE

- 6 Attached to this plan at appendix 6 is a summarised employee organisation chart, which illustrates the staffing structure of the Customer Services executive unit.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES REQUIRED TO MEET AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 7 The additional financial resources required to fulfil the key aims and objectives detailed at paragraph 9 below are shown where appropriate.

SUMMARY OF ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

- 8 The annual work programme for Customer Services is shown at appendix 2. It summarises the normal day-to-day work of the service.

SUMMARY OF KEY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2005 - 2008

- 9 This section of the service plan summarises the key objectives for Customer Services over the next 3 years linked to the Council's five key themes. Where appropriate, individual action plans will be developed to ensure that the objectives are met within the required timescale.

CUSTOMERS

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Integration and development of Customer Relationship Management system.	√			Existing resources	All
Integration of Corporate document imaging system and processes.	√			Existing resources	Support Services & IT
Promotion and publicity of benefits to increase take-up.	√	√	√	Existing resources	Benefits
Promotion and publicity of discounts, exemptions and reliefs to increase take-up.	√	√	√	Existing resources	Local Taxation
Ensure that information is quickly and easily accessible to all customers.	√	√	√	Existing resources	All
Implementation of changes to telephony and personal caller operations following Access to Services Best Value Review. Will include interviewing and reception facilities, contact centre and opening hours. Facilities to be DDA compliant.	√			Pending BV Review outcome	All
Consideration of extension to Community Information Centre network.	√			Pending BV Review outcome	Support Services
Introduction of improved payment facilities such as plastic payment cards, automated Direct Debits and automated telephone payments.	√			£15 000	All
Ensure that culture of customer care exists in all areas of service.	√			£5 000	All

CUSTOMERS

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Development of corporate debt policy.	√			Existing resources	Local Taxation

EXCELLENCE

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Continuation of review of IT Service Desk operation to identify enhancements.	√			Existing resources	IT
Application for Charter mark accreditation.	√			£2 000	
Attainment of top quartile performance in all BVPIs.	√	√	√	Existing resources	Local Taxation and Benefits
Introduction of Customer Charter.	√			Existing resources	All
Ensure that general service standards meet all Corporate standards.	√	√	√	Existing resources	All

COMMUNICATION

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Review of telephony arrangements.	√			Existing resources	Support Services
Investigation of application for Plain English crystal mark.	√	√		£5 000	All
Undertake a review of Printing services facilities.	√			Existing resources	Support Services
Re-organisation of mailroom services in conjunction with implementation of Corporate document imaging.	√			Existing resources	Support Services
Investigation of new public access channels such as digital TV and kiosk technology.		√	√	£20 000	IT

PEOPLE

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Introduction of home working pilot study. Expansion of pilot to other areas.	√	√		£10 000	All
Introduction of Investors In People accreditation.	√	√		Existing resources	All

PEOPLE

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Review and implementation of organisational structure following Access to Services Review.	√			Pending BV Review outcome	All
Make use of the joint Essex training partnership to improve and promote development.	√	√	√	Existing resources	All
Implementation of revised organisational structure for IT	√			Existing resources	IT

COMMUNITY

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Establish credit union facilities within the district.	√			£ 3 000 (min)	All
Development of partnership working with the Pensions Service and Job Centre Plus to include use of Council offices to hold surgeries.	√			£5 000	Benefits
Development of Council website.	√	√	√	Existing resources	IT
Development of Citizens Advice Bureau e-Innovations partnership.	√			Existing resources	IT

COMMUNITY

Objective	By when			Financial Growth	Team
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08		
Development of stakeholder forums such as the benefits landlords meeting.	√	√	√	Existing resources	Benefits
Development of customer surgeries in satellite locations such as day centres.	√	√	√	Existing resources	Benefits
Development of partnership with Essex library service, including use of mobile libraries.	√	√		£3 000	Benefits
Extension of IT network to common areas of sheltered housing units.	√			£10 000	IT
Development of partnership working with other Council's, such as receiving cash payments.	√			Existing resources	All
Integration of new car parking enforcement arrangements.	√			Existing resources	All

CONCLUSION

- 10 The real measure of the success of this plan is whether it will drive significant improvements for our customers. This is an exciting and challenging time for Customer Services. It must aim to be the 'best in class' and provide excellent services in everything it does. There has been significant improvement in recent years in some areas of service delivery and we must build on this to demonstrate excellent performance and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Performance Information

Description	Actual 2003-04	Target 2004-05	Target 2005-06	Target 2006-07
Benefits				
Average number of days to process all types of new claims	26	22	21	20
Average number of days to process changes in circumstances	7	5	4	4
Percentage of correct calculations	96.20%	98.50%	99.20%	99.50%
Percentage of overpayments recovered	50.00%	55.00%	57.50%	60.00%
Local Taxes				
Percentage of Council Tax collected	98.97%	98.98%	98.99%	99.00%
Percentage of Business Rates collected	99.50%	99.75%	99.80%	99.82%
All				
Percentage of letters answered within 14 calendar days	92.33%	95.00%	96.00%	97.00%
Percentage of telephone calls answered within 15 seconds	93.00%	95.00%	96.00%	97.00%
Percentage of customers seen within 5 minutes	New indicator	90.00%	92.00%	95.00%
Percentage of IT Support Desk calls actioned within target	82.50%	85.00%	87.00%	89.00%
Availability of ICT service	99.00%	99.00%	99.00%	99.00%

Annual Work Programme

Benefits	
1	Annual year-end and year start processes.
2	Initial, interim and final subsidy claims.
3	DWP statistical returns.
4	Completion of Best Value Performance Indicators and monthly monitoring of performance.
5	Dealing with applications for Discretionary Housing Payments.
6	Reconciliation of benefit payments to external systems.
7	Processing of new benefit claims.
8	Processing of interventions.
9	Processing of changes in circumstances.
10	Dealing with correspondence.
11	Dealing with telephone enquiries.
12	Dealing with counter enquiries.
13	Dealing with returned and cancelled cheques.
14	Dealing with fraud statements.
15	Attending Court for fraud prosecutions.
16	Dealing with appeals, submissions to the Appeals Service and attending Tribunals.
17	Liaising with software supplier and FOX IT.
18	User administration of database.
19	Attending User group meetings.
20	Issuing invoices, reminder and final notices for benefit overpayments.
21	Preparation of overpayment case papers for County Court action.
22	Reconciliation of overpayments with external system.
23	Carrying out quality checking of benefit assessments.
24	Provision of information to Financial Services.
25	Budget estimates and monitoring.
Local Taxes	
1	Annual billing and year end processes.

2	Dealing with applications for Council Tax discounts, exemptions and disabled relief.
3	Discount and exemption reviews.
4	Dealing with applications for Business Rates exemptions and reliefs.
5	Administration of Direct Debits.
6	Dealing with correspondence.
7	Dealing with telephone enquiries.
8	Dealing with counter enquiries.
9	Liaison with other internal and external orgs.
10	Reconciliation of cash and refunds to external systems.
11	Dealing with ODPM returns.
12	Completion of Best Value Performance Indicators and monthly monitoring of performance.
13	Issue of bills, reminders, final and summons notices.
14	Attendance at Magistrates Court.
15	Using statutory enforcement powers to recover local taxes.
16	Making and monitoring payment arrangements.
17	Liaising with software supplier and FOX IT.
18	User administration of database.
19	Dealing with system exception reports.
20	Attending User group meetings.
21	Account maintenance (write-offs etc).
22	Council Tax Base calculation.
23	Provision of information to Financial Services.
24	Budget estimates and monitoring.
25	Document imaging administration.
26	Debt counselling.
Information Technology	
1	Quotations
2	Ordering
3	Invoice processing
4	Software and hardware inventory
5	Website page maintenance

6	Service desk cover
7	FAST accreditation work
8	FAST project management
9	CMIS support
10	Software licensing
11	GGP support
12	NLPG hub updates
13	All system upgrades
14	New systems (Micro development projects uch as the new Personnel system)
15	Budget monitoring
16	Project planning, monitoring and management
17	Website infrastructure
18	Website development/rollout
19	Liaison with Parishes/charities/schools re websites
20	Build/implement and train users re Parishes/charities/schools websites
21	Liaison with Councillors re websites
22	DDA website compliance
23	Egms metadata compliance
24	Website code problem identification and fixing
25	Service desk calls on all supported applications
26	Building new servers
27	Monitoring down time
28	Network monitoring
29	Memory monitoring
30	UPS
31	Access issues
32	System security
33	New server builds
34	Computer room
Support Services	
1	Providing day-to-day cashiering function at Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow Offices.

2	Managing and implementing projects particularly those to move forward the choices and service to customers for making payments, ie Chip and Pin.
3	Control of imprests and compliance with proper use of petty cash throughout the authority.
4	Procurement, documentation and monitoring of Securitas contract, cheque stationery and associated secure storage arrangements.
5	Controlling the accuracy and timeliness of banking and coding of monies throughout the authority.
6	Overseeing systems administration of the cash receipting system and the continuing development of the cash receipting system.
7	Reconciliation of debit and credit card transactions between ledgers and merchant bank statements, to ensure the Council receives its monies
8	Responsible for ensuring the Members' mail goes out on time, internal stationery, goods inwards, vending, notice boards, photocopying.
9	Ensure the mail, courier, stationery and vending services run efficiently and effectively offering quality customer service and complying with audit and revenues regulations. Liaising with other departments to ensure full use of Mailroom equipment and to ensure the Mailroom meets the needs and expectations of customers.
10	Liaise with Royal Mail and DX service as necessary.
11	Guarantee prompt postage of all mail including Members' distributions.
12	Opening of all incoming mail and goods inwards ensuring they are correct and provide prompt internal delivery. Observance of security measures in respect of all incoming and outgoing mail.
13	Ensuring correct internal recharging for Royal Mail and DX services for internal customers, also recharge stationery.
14	Keeping stock levels of envelopes, various leaflets, stationery and vending supplies at proper levels. Provide annual stock taking with stock values.
15	Answer main switchboard efficiently and effectively to the required standard, ensuring callers are passed to the correct sections.
16	Monitoring of internal standards on how all telephones are answered, ensuring a consistent standard.
17	Monitor best use of the phone system for different services to ensure they are giving the right service/access to customers. Introduction of "Featurenet" Essex wide, which will reduce calls to all local authorities.
18	Provide reports on telephone usage, calls lost, are the corporate standards being met when answering the phones (within 15 seconds).
19	Select call providers to ensure we are getting best value ie low cost routing.
20	Ensure all customers visiting the CIC receive detailed information on all Council services and all problems/queries are dealt with.
21	Provide information from reference materials using new technology systems and other facilities as they are developed, use of internet for customer enquiries.
22	Promote the image of Uttlesford District Council by maintaining an attractive and up-to-date display of Council information and promotional materials at the Local Information Centre.
23	Acquire and maintain a detailed awareness of Uttlesford District Council, its departments and services, keeping up to date with vital information about all

	Council services.
24	Maintain a record of all enquiries in order to monitor usage of the local Information Centres, so if new CICs are set up we have useful information on what/doesn't work.
25	Encourage more partnership working with other local authorities and the private sector.
26	Provide the first contact point for visitors to the Council and ensure that they receive the relevant help, information and support required, whilst ensuring a sympathetic approach to all visitors and having sufficient knowledge of local services and a good local knowledge of the District in order to be of assistance. Updating the way that Reception works, into a CRM – giving more detailed knowledge on all Council services.
27	Booking and maintaining Civic Suite Diary for the whole Council and external visitors. Providing costings for rooms and organise refreshments/catering and Stewards monthly rota.
28	Supervise security arrangements, signing of visitors book and maintain fire lists.
29	Provide advice/direction on enquiries eg. Essex County Council, Highways, Social Services, Town Council, Tourist Information, Adult Education, Grants, Job Centres and Social Security.
30	Provide a Tourist Information Centre and provide Tourist Information Point (TIP) services for the District to ensure effective and efficient provision of local visitor information service.
31	Supporting the Visitor Information Points at Great Dunmow and Thaxted by giving advice and assistance with supply of information material.
32	Promoting the Uttlesford District to visitors around the Country, stands at exhibitions.
33	Providing an in-house printing service to the whole Council.
34	Carrying out printing of all of the Councils internal printing requirements plus those of our external customers. Meeting the highest possible quality and delivery targets. Maintain stocks of all consumables, advise Office manager and other officers on technical matters. Ensure all equipment is in good order and liaise with engineers. Responsible as line manager for health and safety and COSHH Regulations.
35	Advising customers on design, corporate image, delivery and cost.
36	Keeping up to date with technical issues and equipment (trade magazines), ensuring the services provided are relevant and meeting the changing demands in the way the Council works, ie partnership working with Parish Councils.

Risks associated with service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritisation exercise may result in a deterioration in some services, particularly those which are statutory and have a high impact on CPA rating.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insufficient resources available for key political objectives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in key specialist areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Executive managers required to balance strategic/operational role – sufficient time not devoted to a strategic initiative.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Silo working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expectations of CPA improvement.

Accommodation

At the moment, Customers Services staff occupy a number of Council buildings: -

- Majority of staff occupy fragmented accommodation in the Saffron Walden offices;
- CIC and cashiering staff occupy offices in Great Dunmow;
- TIC staff occupy premises in the town centre and Thaxted;
- Some staff are starting to work from home.

A staff working group has been set up to review the office accommodation arrangements following the recent re-structuring of services. The Access to Services Best Value Review is currently looking at how services should be delivered in the future, especially in the light of the Council's objective to provide a first point of contact for customers.

The benefits team is currently piloting homeworking and it is intended that up to 10 staff will eventually work remotely as part of this pilot.

Hard To Reach Groups

The service aims to ensure equality of opportunity in service delivery for all its customers. It recognises the need to make reasonable adjustments to the accessibility of its services in accordance with the needs of different groups of people. A review of the access facilities is being carried out as part of the Access to Services Review. This will address the needs of different groups of people.

The Customer Services Benefits Team is committed to ensuring that those that are entitled to claim benefit do so. The benefit take-up strategy can be viewed in the Benefits Team's own service plan. Vulnerable customers are offered a visit to help them with their Council Tax or Benefit. Also, surgeries have been held with the Pensions Service at day centres to assist elderly claimants with their Benefit.

Information on claiming Benefits is available in different formats including large print, audiocassette and Braille. Council staff can also access the Language line facility. Voluntary organisations meet at the Benefits Network Group where issues relating to vulnerable groups are discussed.

An analysis of the ethnic minority groups in Uttlesford District Council has been carried out based on the census data for 2001.

This shows that the district does not contain a significant percentage of people in ethnic groups. Of the ethnic groups that are represented, the following are the largest in number: -

- White and Asian 0.25% (172 people)
- Indian 0.24% (165 people)

It is considered that due to the low percentage of ethnic minority groups within the district, it is not feasible to hold stocks of the Council's own leaflets and forms in a variety of languages. However, in the event that a request for information is received from someone in one of the above ethnic minority groups, it has been decided to hold stocks of the DWP nationally produced leaflets on benefits. Also, in the event that someone wishes to make a claim for benefit, it has been agreed with the local DWP office that a claim on a DWP form would be made in the appropriate language.

Mike Brean
Executive Manager – Customer Services

