

Committee: Performance Select

Agenda Item

Date: 2nd August 2007

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Title: Access to Services Inspection Action Plan

Author: Richard Auty, Head of Community Engagement

Item for decision

01799 510500

Summary

- In June the Audit Commission conducted an Access to Services inspection of Uttlesford District Council. This wide-ranging inspection looked at all aspects of access, from the way the council offers services to the public to physical access to its buildings.
- In the final report, published on July 19th, the council was rated fair, with promising prospects for improvement.
- The inspectors noted that in many of the areas which were highlighted for improvement, the council already had plans in place.

Recommendations

- That the committee notes the report and agrees the action plan set out below.

Background Papers

Audit Commission Access to Services inspection report, available on www.uttlesford.gov.uk or www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Appropriate internal and external communication on the changes the authority will make in terms of improving access to services.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	Improving access to services will have a positive impact in terms of ensuring fair and

	equal access for all sections of he community
Finance	The majority of actions can be met from existing budgets
Human Rights	None specific
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	Improved access such as redesigned website and contact points at district libraries greater contact has the potential to cut the number of car journeys to the Saffron Walden offices
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	Working patterns for some staff may change as the result of the continued move towards a more customer-focused operation, particularly with regard to more services moving into the Customer Service Centre

Situation

- 1 Two Audit Commission inspectors spent a week on site in June, looking at the way Uttlesford District Council’s customers access its services. The week-long inspection was preceded by a day of site visits, during which time they saw access points including the UConnect Customer Service Centre, museum and Lord Butler Leisure Centre. During the inspection week, they interviewed dozens of officers, councillors and representatives from partner organisations.
- 2 The Audit Commission rated the council fair with promising prospects for improvement.
- 3 In deciding on the fair rating, inspectors highlighted work including “much improved” access to buildings and customer contact arrangements, the ease of contact with, and responsiveness of, the council and that satisfaction with services was above average.
- 4 Among the reason they gave for the council having promising prospects for improvement were that improvement plans were thorough, detailed and challenging; that the public’s access to, and take up of, services was improving and that the council has demonstrated its ability to sustain an

above average trend of improvement while successfully handling major initiatives such as the Stansted application and recycling scheme.

- 5 The report details 11 recommendations, divided into the following three broad categories:
 - Develop deeper understanding of community and customer need to inform service design and delivery
 - Embed equality, diversity and cohesion into service planning, design and delivery
 - Improve the customer experience of services
- 6 The actions which the council is taking to address these recommendations are detailed in the action plan below. Further issues highlighted by the Audit Commission in the main body of its report are also included in the action plan.
- 7 There are several projects already under discussion or under way which will help meet the recommendations. These include:
- 8 **Mosaic** The council will be able to improve its understanding of customers through profiling software. It will soon be purchasing Mosaic Public Sector, a version of a segmentation package used within both the public and private sector. Mosaic Public Sector classifies every household and postcode in the UK into 61 types, under 11 group headings. It allows users to understand populations in terms of their socio-demographics, lifestyles, behaviours and attitudes. It is built around 400 sources of data, which are updated annually.
- 9 **Customer Data Project** Uttlesford District Council is one of four case study authorities in an LGA and National Consumer Council project looking at customer satisfaction measures. The project aims to provide local authorities with guidance and a protocol on how to record data about their customers' experience of their services. The results of this project will be of great help to Uttlesford District Council in terms of meeting recommendations in the Access to Services report.
- 10 **CRM** All staff in the Customer Service Centre will have received training on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system by the middle of August. The CRM is already being used to capture customer data. As more services transfer into the CSC (currently it handles general enquiries, revenues and benefits and some environmental health enquiries) the council can begin to make use of this information to help inform service design and delivery. The CRM can also be used to track and monitor complaints, information requests and customer care performance.
- 11 **Customer Excellence** The council is in discussion with Colchester Borough Council over a Customer Excellence programme that authority is setting up. Additionally, Uttlesford District Council is looking to join a mystery shopping and benchmarking programme organised by the East of England Regional Assembly. This involves local authorities carrying out such work in a reciprocal arrangement. The only cost is officer time – compared to benchmarking and mystery shopping through a private firm which would cost in the region of £3,500 a year for quarterly reports, per service assessed.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Council does not have the capacity or resources to fulfil all recommendations	Low	Medium	Majority of actions are work already planned, within existing budgets. Careful prioritisation and management of work will reduce likelihood of slippage
Customer experience suffers if recommendations are not acted upon	Low	Medium	Customer focus is a key aim of the authority.
Reputation of council will suffer if it is not seen to improve on inspection points	Low	Medium	Key milestones will be publicised internally and externally to demonstrate how work is progressing