

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY
(Report by the Corporate Director, Commerce & Technology)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In March 2002 we initiated a project called "Transforming Customer Access to Services", later shortened to "The Access Project". The intention of this project was to identify opportunities to make it easier for customers to access our services, taking advantage of new technology to do so.
- 1.2 In carrying out research and evaluating the options it became clear that what we really need is a Customer Service Strategy. Better access is only one aspect of improving customer service. We must address other issues, including sharing information between departments and making things simpler for our customers.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The proposed Customer Service Strategy, together with comprehensive background information, is set out in the attached document. This includes analyses of current performance and comparisons with other local authorities which are considered to be leaders in the field, having received Beacon status or other awards for customer service.
- 2.2 The strategy has been through the following process of review and discussion with officers and members, both during its development and in its final, current form:
- Two series of presentations to all officers, one in May 2002 and one in February / March 2003, attended by a total of over 550 employees
 - Three discussions at Corporate Strategy Advisory Group (Heads of Service & Directors), culminating in formal sign-off of the strategy on 22nd May 2003
 - Discussions by the e-government Programme Board, consisting of Cllrs Simpson (chairman) and Rogers and the 3 Directors
 - Discussions at a series of meetings of the member group carrying out the Best Value Review of Access to Services
 - Presentations to the member e-government Advisory Group
 - Presentations to the two Overview & Scrutiny Panels on 3rd and 10th June 2003

3. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 3.1 In summary, the strategy proposes the following major developments:
- Introduction of a contact centre, using the hardware and software infrastructure of Cambridgeshire Direct, either to be staffed by HDC employees and delivering only HDC services, or by partnering fully in Cambridgeshire Direct, effectively outsourcing our front line customer telephone contact to the County Council (as South Cambridgeshire District Council have decided to do). The pros and cons of these options are set out in section 8.1.10 on page 49 of the attached report.

- Creation of a customer service centre in Huntingdon, bringing together the services currently provided from 5 separate reception areas in Pathfinder House and the cash office in Castle Hill House, and providing comprehensive face to face services at other locations, yet to be determined, around the District. A summary of the options which we have evaluated is set out in section 8.2.7 on pages 58 / 59 of the attached report.
- Upgrading the HDC website to enable customers to use it to carry out a full range of transactions with the Council, and to ensure high quality, consistent content. The rationale for this is set out in section 8.3.1 on page 59 of the attached report.

3.2 The Scrutiny Panels' comments on these proposals are set out at Appendix A.

3.3 The location of the contact centre and the Huntingdon customer service centre will be considered later, in the light of member decisions about Pathfinder House.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 MTP scheme no. 03/301/A – “Transforming Customer Service through the e-government programme” – included sums for various projects covered by the Customer Service Strategy, based on certain assumptions and the best financial information available at the time. The main assumptions were:

- Telephone call handling – partnership in Cambridgeshire Direct contact centre
- Face to face – 1 Customer Service Centre (“CSC”) in Huntingdon and 5 kiosks with video links around the District

4.2 A comparison of the costs of these elements of the MTP bid to the estimates in the Customer Service Strategy are as follows:

	Capital (see note 1) £000	Revenue (see note 2) £000
Contact centre		
HDC	1260	644
Cambs Direct	1060	542
MTP	1103	463
Customer Service Centres		
Huntingdon + 3 others	241	206
Huntingdon only (for info)	185	84
MTP	458	96
Additional / (reduced) cost of recommended options v. MTP		
HDC contact centre + 4 CSCs	(60)	291
Cambs Direct + 4 CSCs	(260)	189

Note 1: Capital costs relate to hardware, software, staff time and consultancy. They exclude any costs of new buildings or building alterations, which are assumed to be covered by MTP scheme 03/300/A – “Pathfinder House Improvements and One-Stop-Shop” (i.e. CSC).

Note 2: Revenue costs include the revenue impact of capital expenditure.

- 4.3 It is important to note that these costs are still estimates at this stage, and that they are based on certain assumptions. In particular, the key assumption underpinning the revenue cost estimates is the number of additional staff that will be required.
- 4.4 Website development is already under way through two projects approved as part of the e-government MTP scheme – Corporate Payments & Bookings and Content Management System.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Cabinet is recommended to:
- a) Approve the centralisation of telephone call handling in a contact centre
 - b) Decide which model of contact centre should be implemented – one owned, staffed and managed by HDC or full partnership in Cambridgeshire Direct
 - c) Approve the establishment of a customer service centre in Huntingdon, bringing together the services currently provided from 5 separate reception areas in Pathfinder House and the cash office in Castle Hill House
 - d) Confirm that the Huntingdon customer service centre should be on the ground floor of a suitable building, and note that evaluation of the options for its exact location will follow members' decisions on the future of Pathfinder House
 - e) Approve in principle the establishment of additional customer service centres around the District
 - f) Note that further work will be undertaken to determine the best location for these centres based on an assessment of customer need and demand
 - g) Note the indicative nature of the costs and the intention of officers to provide further reports once firmer costs are available.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Customer Service Strategy (attached)

Contact Officer: David Oliver
 01480 388241

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

COMMENTS BY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANELS

The Panel for Service Delivery & Resources, at the end of its discussion on the Customer Services Strategy, considered a series of questions. In response to these questions the Panel:

- a) supported the concept of a contact centre
- b) did not support the principle of a shared facility
- c) supported the idea of a central customer service centre
- d) requested that the provision of a mobile service be investigated
- e) supported the planned Internet developments.

The Panel for Planning & Finance RESOLVED

- a) that the Panel support the implementation of a contact centre owned and operated by the District Council using the technology / infrastructure of the County Council's Cambridgeshire Direct service; and
- b) that the recommendations contained in the Strategy for the implementation of improved face-to-face service provision in terms of one customer service centre initially in Huntingdon be supported.