



DENBIGHSHIRE CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

2008 – 2011

‘We unite to do good’

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce the Customer Service Strategy. It sets out the current customer service provision across Denbighshire and provides strategic direction for the next three years. All those who have contributed toward the significant progress made in customer service since the creation of Denbighshire County Council should be very proud of their achievements.

These include:

- Denbighshire has an advanced network of facilities providing face to face services to Citizens throughout the county. Cash offices have been in existence since the creation of the council in 1996 while the first One Stop Shop was opened in Corwen in 1997.
- The launch of the Corporate Customer Service Centre (CCSC) in 2005 providing a dedicated team of bilingual staff to resolve a range of customer enquiries at the first point of contact.
- The introduction of a Customer Relationship Management system to enable us to record and analyse the reasons for customers contacting us and to become more proactive in responding to customer requirements.
- The Customer Care and Equalities Group, a cross-directorate group which progressed the customer service agenda and whose successes included the creation of Denbighshire's Customer Service Statement.
- The recent implementation of a website content management system which enables us to provide a fully bilingual website with improved navigation and accessibility.
- The creation of the Customer Care Service which amalgamated a number of methods used by customers to contact the Council – face to face through Cash Offices, electronic via the website and email, and telephone through the Corporate Customer Service Centre and main Council switchboard. The emphasis the Council places on its interaction with citizens is reflected in the creation of this new service and this strategy which will provide a framework for customer service to be progressed in a cohesive manner across the Authority.

Customer service has been high on the Council's agenda for the last few years. The Council's 2004/5 priorities included:

“By 2005, the public should be able to receive 80% of all services in the way that best suits them. They will be able to contact the Council by a single telephone centre, face to face in our one stop shops and through our website on the internet”.

It is fair to say that we have come a long way in delivering this and there are pockets of excellent customer service across the Council. Implementing this

strategy will ensure we will make further improvements in our efforts to deliver a consistently high standard of service to all customers.



Councillor Sharon Frobisher
Lead member for Communities

FEEDBACK INFORMATION

Your comments on this strategy are welcomed. Please send any comments by using one of the following methods:

By e-mail: customerservicecentre@denbighshire.gov.uk

In writing:

Head of Customer Care
Denbighshire County Council
County Hall
Wynnstay Road
Ruthin
Denbighshire
LL15 1YN

By fax: 01824 706180

This Customer Service Strategy is also available at:
<http://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/customercare>

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Denbighshire Customer Service Strategy sets out the current customer service provision across Denbighshire and provides strategic direction for the next three years.

Denbighshire's Customer Service vision is:

“We will provide effective Council services by delivering them promptly and efficiently, providing certainty for citizens and gaining their trust and respect.”

Background

Telephone Contact: The Council launched its Corporate Customer Service Centre in October 2005 which is open 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. Not all services are currently delivered through the Centre and as a consequence the service delivered to customers via the telephone is inconsistent across the Council.

Electronic Contact: The Council has a bilingual corporate website which was established in 1997. Citizens can find information on the Council and also request services through the website any time of the day. It is not always easy for citizens to find the information they require. In some cases they cannot request services via the website if the online form does not exist.

Face to Face Contact: There are a number of locations in Denbighshire where citizens can request services from the Council face to face, through the network of One Stop Shops and Cash Offices. We are unable to provide a consistently high level of customer service due to the inappropriate location and layout of some of our face to face facilities. We are also currently unable to answer enquiries on all Council services due to only having access to a limited number of electronic information resources.

Postal Contact: Currently post is directed to individual officers across the Council. The quality and speed of response is dependant on the officer/section receiving the request.

Complaints and Customer Feedback: The Council is committed to providing efficient and effective services in a courteous manner but we do not always get it right. We require a more robust complaints procedure that will be user friendly and readily available to our customers.

Main Principles:

The main principles of the strategy are:

- Providing a choice for citizens, recognising that they have different needs and prefer to contact us in a variety of ways.
- Encouraging citizens to use lower cost methods to contact the Council, such as Corporate Customer Service Centre and the website.

- Ensuring citizens only have to contact the Council once to get an issue addressed.
- Delivering services within timescales promised to customers.
- Making it easy for citizens to contact the Council.
- Promoting the Council's website to answer citizens' enquiries as it is the most cost effective communication method.
- Establishing and maintaining clear, effective and regular channels of communication with all the Council's stakeholders incorporating:
 - Integrity and honesty - we will never knowingly mislead the public on an issue.
 - Openness and accessibility - we promote openness and accessibility in our dealing with the public, whilst respecting confidentiality.
 - Clarity - All spoken, written and electronic communications will be clear, easily understood, timely, relevant and up to date.
- Encouraging a culture of consultation and participation among members, staff and partner agencies.

The Way Forward

Telephone Contact - Over the next 3 years we aim to:

- Deliver more services through the Corporate Customer Service Centre so that it receives the majority of the Council's telephone enquiries
- Ensure that we have sufficient resources in place to complete enquiries within the timescales provided to citizens
- Ensure that any disruption to telephone services is minimal and that all information we hold on our citizens is secure.

Electronic Contact - Over the next 3 years we aim to:

- Promote the Council's corporate website as the main method for citizens to contact the Council.
- Ensure the website is clear and provides relevant information for our citizens.
- Enable citizens to request Council services via the website using on line forms, searches and maps.
- Ensure that any disruption to the website is minimal, information provided by citizens is secure and the website is accessible to everyone.
- Reduce the number of websites and email addresses publicised by the Council so citizens find it easier to communicate with us electronically.

Face to Face Contact - Over the next 3 years we aim to:

- Provide welcoming and accessible facilities where citizens can make an enquiry to a member of Council staff face to face.
- Provide facilities which enable citizens to communicate with us in over 170 different languages and British Sign Language.
- Work with other organisations to provide services on their behalf or from a shared location.

Postal Contact – In the long-term we aim to:

- Open all postal correspondence from customers centrally (other than those marked as confidential/personal).
- Log all enquiries from customers on the Customer Relationship Management System.
- Scan paper correspondence converting it to electronic format and storing it in a corporate Electronic Document and Records Management System so it can be easily located and accessed by appropriate Council staff when required.

Due to funding constraints it is unlikely that this aim will be fully realised within the timescales of this strategy.

Complaints and Customer Feedback - Over the next 3 years we aim to:

- Revise and implement a clear complaints policy.
- Ensure we resolve complaints within agreed timescales.
- Monitor customer feedback and complaints and use the information to improve the service we deliver to citizens.

Staff Training and Development - Over the next 3 years we aim to:

- Provide appropriate customer service training for all staff.

Delivering the strategy

In order to deliver the strategy a detailed action plan has been produced and is part of the full strategy document which can be found at www.denbighshire.gov.uk/customercare

This action plan will be monitored by a steering group of senior managers. To ensure citizens are aware of Denbighshire's commitment to its customers and staff are informed of their responsibilities, marketing and communication plans will be created and delivered.

2. INTRODUCTION

As a Local Authority, Denbighshire County Council's purpose is to provide and deliver a service for the citizens of Denbighshire and in recognition of this has created its first Customer Contact Strategy.

Customer service is about meeting and exceeding customers' expectations of service. It involves dealing fairly, properly and impartially with our customers. It represents a commitment to delivering the best service possible to our customers in an effective and caring manner.

This strategy sets out the current customer service provision across Denbighshire and the strategic direction for the next three years. It focuses on the Council's key access channels¹, that of telephony, face to face and electronic access.

2.1 Background

Customer service within Denbighshire has evolved and significant progress has been made since the creation of Denbighshire County Council. Prior to the creation of the Customer Care Service this progression was directed under the banner of Electronic Government². Following research into citizen engagement, in 2003 the Council announced its corporate priority, to enable citizens to be able to receive 80% of all services through their preferred access channel by 2005. This was the catalyst for the rapid expansion and improvement to the Council's access channels.

2.1.2 Telephony

Since its inception in 1998, the corporate telephone answering policy has been a key element of the Council's customer service programme in order to ensure all staff across the Authority provide a professional and consistent service to citizens. However the policy is not consistently implemented or monitored across the entire Council.

In order to fulfil the 'single point of contact telephone centre' element of Denbighshire's 2004/5 priorities, the Council launched its Corporate Customer Service Centre in October 2005. Operating between 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday, a dedicated team of bilingual staff answer enquiries ranging from Highways, Council House Maintenance and Environmental Services to requests for job application forms. Only two telephone numbers are publicised: 01824 706100 for Welsh speakers and 01824 706101 for English speakers. Call volumes have expanded by 38% from 4049 in November 2005 to 5,614 in November 2007 as new services have been introduced and

¹Channels are a means for organisations to deliver services to citizens and for citizens to access government through a variety of communication and delivery methods (for example, post, telephone, face to face, online, mobile, digital television, fax and kiosks)

² Providing customers with services in the way and at a time that best suits them, and completing their request at the first point of contact, through the use of technology.

awareness of the Centre has increased. The Centre continually meets its service level target of 80% of calls answered in 30 seconds and exceeds its target of satisfying more than 70% of enquiries at the first point of contact.

The Council's switchboard was co-located with the Centre in 2006 to improve the pooling of knowledge between telephony staff. In 2007 the Centre's telephony system was implemented on the switchboard which provides numerous advantages including a queuing facility for callers and comfort messages whilst waiting to be answered. A system of 'warm transfers' has also been introduced where the switchboard operator announces the caller to the member of staff, ensuring the caller is connected to an individual available to take the call, instead of an automated voicemail message.

2.1.3 Electronic access

Corporate website

The Council provides access to online information and services to citizens and businesses via its bilingual corporate website www.denbighshire.gov.uk. Since its launch in 1997, the website has been developed to provide customers with the flexibility to access information and services online whenever it best suits their needs. Visitors have increased from 61,000 per month on average in 2005 to 116,000 in 2007.

The website is fully bilingual and allows anyone with internet access³ to view information about the Council and request services online, regardless of their ability or circumstances. There are a number of other facilities on the website such as a sophisticated search engine, maps, answers to frequently asked questions and online surveys. The site also provides a 'Talking Pages' facility which enables citizens with low literacy and reading skills or visual impairments to listen to the text on the web page.

A Content Management System (CMS) is used to control and standardise new content on the website. This system allows citizens to switch between content in English and Welsh and change the size of the text being viewed.

The website is maintained by a small corporate web team, the ICT service, and over twenty web content editors (called Electronic Information Officers) based in departments across the Authority who create and publish content on behalf of their service.

In addition to the corporate website there are a number of other websites which have been commissioned by services across the Council⁴. This can

³ Every 1 in 2 households now has internet access compared to 1 in 10 households in 1999 – *Internet Access, Households and Individuals*, Office of National Statistics, August 2006. Free internet access is available in all Denbighshire libraries.

⁴ other websites include – <http://planning.denbighshire.gov.uk/portal/>, www.sportdenbighshire.co.uk/home.html, www.amcan1.org.uk/, <http://www.ridetheclwyds.co.uk/>, www.denbighshiresupportingbusiness.co.uk, <http://www.cyberden.org.uk/>, <http://denbighddms.wisshost.net/english/default.asp>

make it hard for citizens to know where to find the most up to date information about Council services.

Youth website

Historically, there were a number of organisations throughout the county producing a variety of information for young people. However no single comprehensive electronic source of information and support existed for young people. The Council therefore recognised the need for an easily accessible and friendly way for children and young people to access information. As a result www.youthden.com was created with the first phase of the website launching in January 2007. The website utilises the same technology as the corporate website and is maintained by the Customer Care Service.

E-mail

The primary e-mail addresses for the Council is customerservicecentre@denbighshire.gov.uk. It is administered by the Customer Service Centre in accordance with guidelines and currently receives approximately 700 e-mails per month.

In addition most Council services have at least one e-mail address where they can be contacted direct and the web provides an efficient method for citizens to locate the service's e-mail address. Since the creation of Denbighshire over 70 customer facing e-mail addresses have been created which can be confusing for customers.

2.1.4 Face to face

Denbighshire has an advanced network of face to face access where citizens can interact with the Council. The Council's strategy has been to expand the network of One Stop Shops throughout the County by utilising existing Council premises and staff where possible. Cash offices have been in existence since the creation of the Council in 1996 while the first One Stop Shop was opened in Corwen in 1997.

There are now seven One Stop Shops situated in libraries in Corwen, Llangollen, St Asaph, Rhuddlan, Denbigh and in Council Offices in Ruthin and Prestatyn. Currently there are five Cash Offices situated throughout the County in the towns of Rhyl, Prestatyn, St Asaph, Denbigh and Ruthin. All these locations are central to the towns and are co-located with other Council services to make them as accessible to citizens as possible.

There is ample provision of face to face facilities in the main towns with the notable exception of Rhyl, which has the largest population of 25,000⁵. A cash office exists which answers queries on a wide range of enquiries but it is not publicised as a One Stop Shop due to the current layout in the building. It has been proposed that the Council and North Wales Police collaborate in order to deliver services from a shared location.

⁵ 2001 Census

In Prestatyn Council Offices there is a One Stop Shop and Cash Office. Since 2006 the Cash Office facility has been shared with North Wales Police (NWP) who provide a police enquiries counter to citizens. This has improved access for citizens who are now able to interact with either the Council or North Wales Police in one location in the centre of the town. Prior to this the nearest police presence was 1 mile out of the town centre.

An opportunity has been identified for the Council and NWP to work collaboratively to provide joint police and council services for citizens in Ruthin. Due to a reduced police presence in Ruthin Police Station, the aim of the project is for Council staff based in the Ruthin One Stop Shop to provide certain services on behalf of NWP.

Staff delivering face to face services across the Council have different line management which results in varying levels of training and support. In addition these staff are on different salary grades which is detrimental to staff morale.

Along with the provision of face to face services within council buildings, it is also recognised that in certain situations, alternative arrangements are more appropriate. Accordingly, services are also provided from a variety of different external locations including citizen homes and independent, neutral venues e.g. community centres etc. This service ensures equity for those who may not be able to access our buildings but who would benefit from a face to face service. Services which provide such provision include our Welfare Rights, Complaints and Social Work teams etc.

2.1.5 Post

Currently post is directed to the individual offices across the Council. The quality and speed of response is dependant on the office receiving the request.

2.1.6 Complaints

The Council is committed to providing efficient and effective services in a courteous manner but we do not always get it right. We therefore require a robust complaints procedure that will be user friendly and readily available to our customers.

Definition of a complaint:

"A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public or an organisation about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken by the Council itself or a person acting on behalf of the Council."

A complaint is not:

- reporting a fault (e.g. a street light not working);
- a first request for service (e.g. council house repairs);

- a first request for information or explanation (e.g. who decides the council tax rates); or
- a matter for which there is a right of appeal (e.g. refusal of planning permission or parking fines).

Since 1996, complaints have been administered in accordance with the Council's feedback policy. We recognise that the policy itself could be considered ambiguous, and therefore needs to be clearer and better promoted to make it more accessible to citizens.

2.1.7 Training

The Council demonstrates a commitment to ensuring all staff understand the importance of customer service through its provision of two mandatory customer focus courses, one for managers and one for staff. The Council's corporate trainer delivers this programme and to date 827 members of staff and 125 line managers have attended since the courses commenced in 2004. This is achieved through workshops using role-play, discussions and video to convey good and bad examples of customer service.

Whilst this goes a long way to ensuring that all Council employees understand the necessity of excellent customer service and the required standards, the fact that only 29% of managers have attended raises the question as to whether a customer service ethos is widely adopted throughout the authority.

There are also a variety of training modules available to all staff via the e-learning facility which supports customer service including freedom of information and equalities: race, disability, gender, age, language, religious beliefs, sexual orientation.

In a further attempt to instill the ethos of customer service throughout the Council, the behaviour 'Customer Focus' was included in the annual performance appraisal process introduced in 2006. This is defined as "The desire and ability to meet both external and internal customer requirements by accurately identifying their needs and providing a high standard of service". An individual's performance within this behaviour is measured against vague indicators which could lead to a subjective assessment.

In the Customer Care Service new staff are provided with a detailed induction programme and support when joining the team. However ongoing training can be adversely affected by workload, staffing levels and physical location of offices. As a result, some teams within the service are better equipped to provide good quality training while others struggle to find the time and resource required to develop their staff adequately. These challenges are faced by managers of all customer facing staff throughout the Authority.

2.1.8 External communication and promotion of council services

The Council produces daily news releases that are published in County Voice, the local press and on the corporate website. This allows all interested parties the opportunity to access information about the Council and its activities and

has resulted in greater publicity for the Council. It has also raised the profile of the authority on a local, regional and national level.

County Voice is the corporate residents' newsletter that provides news and views from the Council. This is distributed to 44,000 households across the county on a monthly basis.

The Council actively gets involved in major public events across the county, including the Denbigh and Flint Show and the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod. This is an opportunity to showcase council services to all and inform residents and partner organisations of some of the key issues facing the authority.

A series of Cabinet Question Times are also arranged each year to allow members of the public to learn more about the work of the Cabinet and an opportunity for one to one discussions with Cabinet Members and officers. This is also part of our campaign to encourage more people to become actively involved in the work of the council and to promote democracy.

2.1.9 Consultation and public engagement

Consultation and public engagement is an important issue for all local authorities in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government's 'One Wales' Agreement and 'Making the Connections' call on the public sector to put the citizen at the heart of their services. In addition, all Council departments consult with a wide variety of people on different issues throughout the year.

Denbighshire has a long tradition of active citizenship and many services are regularly involved in community engagement and participation activities. In addition many staff work and support events and initiatives developed by other organisations.

Over the course of a given year Denbighshire consults on a wide variety of matters in a number of different ways. The Council carries out surveys, holds focus groups and consultation events and has a variety of local forums that people can tap into including the older people's forum, learning disabilities forum and carers forum which helps the organisation consult with people from hard-to-reach groups. However, at the moment none of this consultation is coordinated and it is done to varying degrees of effectiveness.

2.2 Challenges

In implementing this strategy, the Council is faced with a number of challenges:

- Leadership - there are pockets of excellent customer service across the Council, however more work is required to ensure that customer service is delivered at a consistently high level throughout the whole authority. The cultural change required to achieve this will require strong Leadership.

- Corporate support – there is a need to view the customer experience from a corporate perspective as opposed to individual departments. Departments will need to work together to develop processes around the citizen not the business. This will require visible and proactive support from all senior managers across the Council to ensure its success.
- Financial constraints – there is a need to improve service delivery within the constraints of the Council’s existing financial position and with a view to the Varney review and Welsh Assembly Government’s “Making the Connections”. Whilst improvements to service delivery are the priority this must be considered within the long-term aim of a more efficient and cost effective public service.
- Baseline information – there is a need for more co-ordinated and comprehensive management information across the Council if existing customer requirements and Council performance is to be fully understood.
- Process improvement – end to end business processes across the Council need to be reviewed and changes proactively implemented to create a more streamlined approach and to realise the objective of first point of contact resolution.
- Geographical constraints – the geography of Denbighshire provides a broad range of challenges and implications in respect of access to services. There is a need to ensure that customers in outlying rural areas of the County are provided with the same quality of service as those in urban areas, and are able to utilise access channels that meet their individual needs.

3. STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

A strategic assessment has been undertaken in developing this strategy. A variety of reference tools are available and Denbighshire has chosen to take the following into consideration:

3.1 Vision

Any vision should be aspirational, take a positive long-term view and be consistent with other national, regional and local strategies/policies. At the national and regional levels, key strategies include the following:

- 3.1.1 Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer, Sir David Varney, December 2006.
- 3.1.2 Transforming Access to Public Services in Wales; enabled by technology, Feb 08.
- 3.1.3 Making the Connections: Building Better Customer Service, March 2007.
- 3.1.4 Making the Connections: Customer Service Core Principles for Public Service December 2006.

At a national level this strategy supports WAG's vision for Wales in 2020:

"...using technology to deliver efficient bilingual public services that meet citizen need in ways with which they feel comfortable. There has been a complete transformation in the appearance, quality, accessibility and responsiveness of public services, through combining the principles of citizen centred services with technology."

This strategy also links to the 2025 Vision for Denbighshire:

"We will bring services closer to communities, with some areas identified as focal points where a range of services such as health and social service, youth facilities, education and neighbourhood policing can be accessed from one location. These centres will be connected using up to date technology."

Denbighshire County Council councillors and staff are guided in their work by the council motto 'We unite to do good' and the four values of:

- Unity
- Pride
- Respect
- Integrity

As councillors and staff we aim to maximise performance, act with a high standard of conduct and present a positive image of Denbighshire. We aim to

be realistic with our colleagues and citizens about our achievements and the challenges we face and to be open and honest in the information we provide.

Taking into account these wider plans and the specific needs of Denbighshire, the Customer Service vision is:

“We will provide effective Council services by delivering them promptly and efficiently, providing certainty for citizens and gaining their trust and respect.”

3.2 Principles

The Strategy’s core principles reflect those at national, regional and local strategic levels and are as follows:

- Providing a choice for citizens, recognising that they have different needs and prefer to contact us in a variety of ways.
- Encouraging citizens to use lower cost methods to contact the Council, such as Corporate Customer Service Centre and the website.
- Ensuring citizens only have to contact the Council once to get an issue addressed.
- Delivering services within timescales promised to customers.
- Making it easy for citizens to contact the Council.
- Promoting the Council’s website to answer citizens’ enquiries as it is the most cost effective communication method.
- Establishing and maintaining clear, effective and regular channels of communication with all the Council’s stakeholders incorporating:
 - Integrity and honesty - we will never knowingly mislead the public on an issue
 - Openness and accessibility - we promote openness and accessibility in our dealing with the public, whilst respecting confidentiality
 - Clarity - All spoken, written and electronic communications will be clear, easily understood, timely, relevant and up to date
- Encouraging a culture of consultation and participation among members, staff and partner agencies.

3.3 Strategic objectives

Within the context of the Customer Service vision, a number of objectives have been developed. They are so closely aligned with those issued by the Welsh Assembly Government that the Council has chosen to adopt WAG’s⁶:

3.3.1 Access: Citizens will be able to find and access information and advice about services (whether by phone, in person, in writing, through third

⁶ Making the Connections: Customer Service Core Principles for Public Service, December 2006

parties, or by self service/electronic means) and get a timely response with information and advice they are able to understand.

- 3.3.2 Personal Experience: Citizens will be dealt with politely, shown care and dignity, have options explained openly and constructively, and be kept informed of progress. Citizens and public services will treat each other on the basis of mutual respect. Citizens in Denbighshire will have the opportunity to comment on issues that affect them including the planning and development of services.
- 3.3.3 Responsiveness: Citizens will be offered services that take into account their needs, circumstances and any barriers they might face.
- 3.3.4 Language Options: Citizens who prefer to access and use services in English or Welsh⁷, or need to use minority ethnic languages or British Sign Language will be able to do so.
- 3.3.5 Redress: Citizens will find it easy to complain and get things put right when the service they receive is not good enough.

3.4 Action points and target outcomes

The Denbighshire Operational Plan contains actions under each of the strategic objectives shown above (see appendix 4).

⁷ 2001 Census - 26.4% of the population (23,760) said they could speak Welsh.

4. THE MAIN PRINCIPLES

4.1 Managing customers expectations

4.1.1 Delivering services within timescales promised to customers

We recognise that delivering services within the timescales promised to citizens is key to achieving their respect and trust. It is imperative that authority wide customer service standards are developed to support both the Customer Service Vision and Statement. These standards are necessary in order to monitor performance and highlight areas requiring improvement. It is important that any standards or timescales are reasonable, achievable and measurable. This should not only apply to corporate customer service measures but all aspects of service delivery to citizens, particularly services delivered through the Customer Relationship Management system.

4.1.2 Ensuring customers only have to contact the Council once to get an issue addressed

Citizens should only have to contact the Council on one occasion to request a service. They should not have to make repeat contacts to receive a response to their enquiry. Citizens should have the majority of information enquiries answered at their first contact with a member of staff, enabled by easy access to a wide range of resources containing current information.

4.2 Requirement for multi channel access

This strategy is based on the presumption that citizens wish to resolve issues at the first point of contact and want that contact to be as convenient and quick as possible. Citizens have different needs and prefer to contact us in a variety of ways.

- By developing electronic channels to offer joined up information and transactional services a high proportion of citizens will want to use them as the first point of contact.
- Contact centres offer the opportunity to improve the quality of timeliness of service to citizens who have more complex issues that cannot be resolved through an electronic channel.
- There will always be the need for essential face to face contact provision for particular citizens such as the vulnerable and excluded who find it difficult or are unwilling to utilise the latest technology.
- Investigate innovative methods for citizens to access Council services incorporating new technology such as Short Messaging Service (text), payment machines and video conferencing.

4.3 Rationalising the number of customer access points into the Council

There are several key access channels into the Council and in the majority of cases no clear primary contact method exists. This strategy aims to rationalise the number of access points into the Authority and to ensure these offer a consistent and high standard of service providing a corporate rather than

departmental service. This will also make it easier for citizens to contact the Council.

4.3.1 Telephone

We will significantly expand on the number of services delivered through the Corporate Customer Service Centre with the long term aim of developing it into one access point for the majority of incoming telephone enquiries, utilising two well publicised telephone numbers.

We will significantly reduce the amount of published telephone numbers making it clearer and simpler for customers to know who to contact.

4.3.2 Electronic

We will promote the corporate website as the primary access channel into the council.

We will reduce the number of externally advertised email addresses to make it easier for citizens to contact the Council. In future only a limited number of department email addresses (e.g. revenues@denbighshire.gov.uk) will be published.

4.3.3 Face to face

We will rationalise the provision of customer facing services in Council buildings. In four of the Council's buildings, in Ruthin, Rhyl, Prestatyn and Denbigh, we will consider to merging the separate Cash Office, One Stop Shop and Reception counters into one combined customer focused area. This would allow us to deliver a range of functions from one counter, branded as the One Stop Shop.

4.3.4 Post

We will log all postal enquiries from customers on the Customer Relationship Management System utilising a corporate Electronic Document and Records Management System.

4.4 Using more cost effective access channels / channel migration

Over the last ten years public services have increasingly been providing advice, information and services through modern ICT based channels such as the internet, e-mail, contact centres and mobile phones alongside more traditional access channels such as face to face and written correspondence. These newer channels are more convenient for the customer, such as the internet which is available 24/7 or a contact centre which guarantees a response to a call.

In addition to being more convenient, these access channels are also more cost effective. Varney's review of public service delivery and WAG's

Transforming Access to Public Services have both illustrated the cost efficiencies that can be realised through transforming access to services using modern ICT. The most prominent example is the case of Tameside Council which uses the web as its primary contact channel, where (using 2005-06 figures):

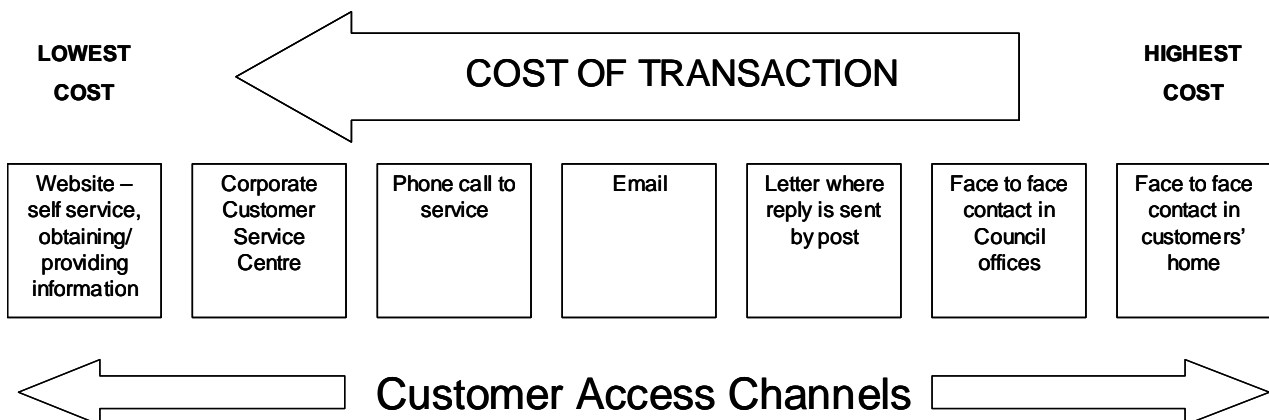
- an average customer face to face visit costs £16.20;
- an average call to the contact centre costs £1.55; and
- an average visit to a self-service website costs £0.12.

The efficiency gains yielded by more cost effective access channels can be invested in more resource intensive face to face arrangements.

To enable us to achieve this channel migration we will promote the corporate website as the primary access channel into the Council, ensure that information is clear and comprehensive, and that citizens are able to complete transactions online.

While customers will continue to have choice about how they contact the Council, we will encourage them over time to use the lower cost methods.

This can be seen in the diagram below:



4.5 Contact with stakeholders

We will ensure regular, timely and accurate information is cascaded to:

- The public - to create a positive, informed and recognisable profile for Denbighshire County Council.
- Elected Members - to create a corporate environment of trust and loyalty in which aspirations to excellence are valued and encouraged.
- Welsh Assembly Government, Town and Community Councils - to share best practice and demonstrate partnership working.
- Key partners and stakeholders - to create effective working partnerships to benefit the local community as a whole.

4.6 Encouraging a culture of consultation and participation among members, staff and partner agencies

Consultation can be defined as: 'the dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views and normally with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action'.

This strategy aims to put consultation at the centre of Denbighshire's processes, policy and operational activities. It is hoped it will help the Authority to carry out consultation more efficiently, effectively and help encourage a culture of consultation within the Council.

The actions in this strategy aim to ensure that consultation is carried out to the highest possible standards. Consultation should be well planned, coordinated and conducted effectively by staff with the relevant skills and competencies using the most appropriate methods available. The Council would benefit from services working together and with other organisations on consultation to reduce costs and avoid consultation fatigue. It is important that the organisation effectively uses resources which already exist from, for example, the Local Government Data Unit and learns from good practice.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

Denbighshire's Corporate Customer Service Statement is:

We are committed to ensuring our services, facilities and resources provided by the authority are accessible and responsive to each individual and all communities.

All customers can expect:

- Provision of services that meet their individual needs.
- Courtesy and helpfulness when accessing our services.
- To have their views and comments listened to and any enquiry dealt with efficiently and correctly.
- To be listened to and their enquiry to be dealt with efficiently and correctly.
- Easily identifiable Council representatives.
- Provision of information that meets their individual needs.
- An easy means to give feedback to the Council.

In addition some services also have their own charter or statement. The Council requires one clear statement which all services support. This will promote a corporate rather than departmental approach so that all services are delivered to the same standards and is less confusing for the customer.

Regardless of the way that citizens choose to contact the Council, everyone should experience the same level of customer service. In order to manage customer expectations, a set of customer service standards and mechanisms for monitoring performance against them will be developed in conjunction with the Corporate Performance Management Group. These standards must be reasonable, achievable and measurable. This should apply to all aspects of service delivery to citizens, particularly services delivered through the Customer Relationship Management System.

Denbighshire's Corporate Customer Service Standards:

Contacting the Council:

- We will enable citizens to access services in Welsh, English, minority ethnic languages, British Sign Language, large print and Braille.
- We aim to communicate in clear language that is easy to understand.

Telephone calls:

- All telephone calls into the Council will be answered in accordance with the Corporate Telephone Answering Guidance.
- We will answer colleagues' telephones in their absence and attempt to answer customers' enquiries. If this is not possible we will take a message. On receiving the message we will return the call by the end of the following working day.
- Where required, we will telephone a customer to acknowledge a voicemail message by the end of the following working day.

- 80% of telephone calls into the Corporate Customer Service Centre will be answered as soon as possible, within a maximum of 30 seconds.

Website:

- The corporate website will be updated bilingually on a regular basis. Any changes to service delivery will be updated as soon as possible, and at the latest within 2 working days from when the change occurred.

Written correspondence:

- All e-mails sent to departmental e-mail addresses (e.g. revenues@denbighshire.gov.uk) will be acknowledged by an automated bilingual e-mail response to the sender.
- All e-mails sent to departmental e-mail addresses (e.g. revenues@denbighshire.gov.uk) and letters that require a response will be replied to within 10 working days. Where this is not possible we will provide an update on the enquiry with a revised response date.

Service delivery:

- Services requested via the Customer Relationship Management System will be delivered within the timescales stipulated to customers.
- We will provide services in accordance with departments' own service delivery standards.

Requests for information:

- Requests for information under the various legislation will be dealt with in accordance to the prescribed time-scale, for example freedom of information requests will be acknowledged within 5 working days and responded to within 20 working days.

Complaints:

- In accordance with the Corporate Complaints Policy, all complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days and responded to as soon as possible, within timescales. Where this is not possible we will provide an update on the complaint with a revised response date.

Publicity:

- We will use every opportunity possible to promote council services, achievements, aims and objectives to stakeholders.
- Encourage greater participation in council-arranged initiatives.

Corporate publications:

- Ensure all promotional materials are produced, in accordance with corporate policies.
- Ensure that all promotional materials are accessible in a format of the customer's choice, e.g in hard copy, electronically or in large print, Braille etc.

Public events:

- Ensure that the Council is accessible at all major public events.

- Promote council services to all.

These will be communicated to all services via the Corporate Performance Management Group and Service Business Plans. Performance against these standards will also be reported via these mechanisms.

6. CUSTOMER ACCESS CHANNEL: TELEPHONE

The Council aims to improve the service it provides to customers who prefer to use the telephone to contact the Council. We aim to provide a service that is easy to access, provides a consistently high level of service and answers the majority of enquiries at the first point of contact.

Over the next 3 years we aim to:

6.1 Significantly expand on the number of services delivered through the Corporate Customer Service Centre with the long term aim of developing it into one access point for the majority of incoming telephone enquiries, utilising two well publicised telephone numbers

The Centre currently delivers a variety of Council services. Expanding this range will enable Denbighshire citizens to utilise one contact number in the language of their choice to carry out the majority of their transactions with the Council. Significantly reducing the amount of published telephone numbers will make it clearer and simpler for customers to know who to contact.

In order to expedite this the next large phase of implementation has been identified. Revenues and Benefits answer on average 9,000 calls per month (50% of calls received) whilst the Customer Service Centre also currently answers 9,000 per month (97% of calls received). The successful implementation of this high volume area of the Authority into the Customer Service Centre, if sufficiently staffed and supported by technology and training, will have a large impact on customer satisfaction.

6.2 Meet customers expectations

One of the clear benefits of the implementation of the Corporate Customer Service Centre is that it has improved customer access to Council services, through the closely monitored service levels⁸, sophisticated telephony technology and highly trained staff. However a more fundamental benefit has been realised through the Customer Relationship Management System which is utilised in the Centre to log and monitor the progress of all enquiries.

As Varney states, 'In the private sector it is commonly understood that failure of contact centres and the back office transactions that underpin them have a significant impact on customer trust'. In Denbighshire, if an enquiry is not completed by the appropriate Council service within the timeframe specified to the customer, the enquiry is included in a monthly 'escalation report' which is presented to senior management. This highlights areas of the Council with service delivery issues which could be caused by inefficient and ineffective practices or insufficient funding.

⁸ 80% of calls answered in 20 seconds and 70% of enquiries satisfied at the first point of contact

It has become apparent that in preparation for a service being delivered through the Centre, a review of how we deliver the entire service to the customer is required, not just of how the Centre relays information to the relevant service.

6.3 Provide a resilient and secure service

Denbighshire citizens prefer to contact the Council by telephone and are therefore dependent on this method of access. It is therefore vital that the Council has a resilient contact centre operation. Resilient infrastructure, responsive support and a sound business continuity plan are critical to enabling this. In addition we will continue to ensure that all electronic customer information is secure using appropriate technology.

6.4 Improve the telephone contact into services

Improvements to switchboard technology have highlighted issues in services not currently delivered through the Centre, where the switchboard operator is unable to find an extension that is answered or a member of staff in the service willing to take calls on behalf of colleagues. In order to address this, until they are delivered through the Centre, services will be required to supply one telephone number on behalf of each department or service where bilingual staff are available to answer during office hours. This will ensure that even if the officer the caller requires is unavailable, the caller will be informed when they will receive a call back and the onus is on the Council not the citizen.

To support services in achieving this the Corporate Telephone Answering Policy will be revised. Navigation of the Lotus Notes phonebook will be improved and guidance created for staff who will be responsible for updating their own entries, including their ability to converse with customers in Welsh .

7. CUSTOMER ACCESS CHANNEL: WEB

Over the next 3 years we aim to:

7.1 Promote the corporate website as the primary access channel into the Council

We will create a marketing plan specifically for the corporate website in order to encourage more citizens to interact with the Council electronically.

7.2 Develop comprehensive, clear content

We will provide a corporate website that has clear, easily understood content. In order to achieve this we will ensure that the Electronic Information Officers (EIOs) in each service receive initial and ongoing training to ensure they are equipped to produce content of the required standard. EIOs, the central web team and the corporate Communications team will be provided with training in Plain English⁹ and Cymraeg Clir¹⁰. In addition we will explore the possibility of making training in Cymraeg Clir a prerequisite for external translators.

In order to promote the corporate website as the main access channel into the Council it must have comprehensive information on all Council services. To achieve this we will undertake a gap analysis by auditing the current website contents against the Local Government Navigation List¹¹. Services will then create new website content on any areas not currently covered.

7.3 Develop transactional content

In adherence with the recommendations of the Society of Information Technology Managers (SOCITM) we will provide useful, usable and used content to achieve, as a minimum transactional status.

We will ensure information is useful by providing:

- Current and accurate service information.
- Appropriate external links.
- Up to date news items.
- Online transactions.

We will ensure information is useable by:

- Improving website navigation.
- Ensuring the A-Z is intuitive and easy to use.
- Design content and transactions using DirectGov guidelines.

⁹ The Plain English Campaign works with organisations helping them make sure their public information is as clear as possible.

¹⁰ Cymraeg Clir, based at the University of Wales, Bangor encourages organisations to create Welsh documents using clear, simple and natural Welsh.

¹¹ The Local Government Navigation List (LGNL) represents the standard Local Authority Web site browse navigation structure and is designed to provide full navigation to all standard local authority services.

We will ensure information is used by:

- Using Web analytics to measure website traffic and improve content.
- Improve feedback facilities for customer participation.
- Promote the website using marketing strategies to increase customer awareness.

7.4 Provide a resilient, secure, accessible website

With rising customer expectations, online information and services should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Providing resilient website infrastructure and responsive support is critical to enabling this.

Website availability will continue to be monitored via performance reporting using web analysis software to ensure that we can resolve issues quickly and with as little disruption to citizens as possible.

We will provide a fully accessible website that conforms to level Double A of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines¹² 1.0, including all Priority 1 and Priority 2 checkpoints defined in the Guidelines. This will involve a review of all of our non standard webpages not contained in the Content Management System. Webpages found to be inaccessible will then be redeveloped in accessible technology and Directgov¹³ guidelines for online transactions will be incorporated into the new versions.

We will continue to ensure that all customer information handled online is secure using appropriate web technology.

7.5 Rationalise the number of Council websites

We aim to market the DCC corporate website as the primary electronic point of contact into the council.

In order to do this we will complete a review of other websites supported by the Council and rationalise these where appropriate. This will provide clarity to customers as to how they source Council information electronically, and will eliminate any unnecessary duplication of resource utilised for maintaining and updating additional websites. If additional websites are warranted they will be required to link into the corporate website at appropriate points to enable citizens to find the information they require seamlessly.

7.6 Rationalise customer facing e-mail addresses

We will reduce the number of externally advertised email addresses to make it easier for citizens to contact the Council.

¹² The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international consortium working to develop Web standards.

¹³ Directgov is an initiative from the Central Office of Information and provides best practice guidance on public sector website design, content and transactions.

We will ensure that the remaining e-mail addresses are routed to the correct service, checked regularly and enquiries are replied to within pre-determined timescales thereby meeting customers' expectations. Customers will receive a bilingual automated response informing them that their enquiry has been received and the timescale within which they can expect a full response.

The Freedom of Information Act gives this action heightened importance given that any individual or organisation can request information, by letter or e-mail, held by the Council which must respond to the request and supply the information within 20 working days.

7.7 Further develop our youth website and encourage participation from young people

We will continue to source funding to enable new topics to be included on www.youthden.com and increase the participation of children and young people in the development of the website. External groups will also be encouraged to add their own content to provide greater variety of content.

To enable information to be more specifically targeted at appropriate age groups, a split in the age ranges will be implemented (0 – 10, 11 – 16 and 17 – 25).

We will continue to increase the number of editorial groups to allow further participation of children and young people around the County, particularly aiming at those who are vulnerable and hard to reach.

8. CUSTOMER ACCESS CHANNEL: FACE TO FACE

The Council aims to change the physical layout of our face to face facilities and the role of our staff to provide a consistently high level of service that is easy to access and answers the majority of enquiries at the first point of contact.

Over the next 3 years we aim to:

8.1 Provide accessible face to face services

WAG's Core Principle 4 states:

"Citizens who prefer to access and use services in English or Welsh or need to use minority ethnic languages or British Sign Language will be able to do so."

Welsh

We will deliver services in accordance with Welsh Language Indicator WLI 2 for Front Line Services:

"An ability to guarantee a Welsh Language service at main receptions, contact centres or one stop shops".

When new customer facing staff are recruited the requirement for the individual to be Welsh speaking will be assessed and reflected in the person specification when the post is advertised.

Minority Ethnic Languages

We will continue to subscribe to a translation and interpretation facility, covering 170 languages, to enable non Welsh or English speaking customers to transact with the Council.

British Sign Language

In order to provide accessible face to face services to the 691 Denbighshire citizens with a hearing impairment¹⁴ the Council will train one customer facing member of staff from each One Stop Shop/Cash Office in basic sign language skills.

8.2 Engage in collaboration projects

Joined up service delivery through collaboration provides benefits for citizens who have access to a wide range of inter-connected services from one location and can resolve a number of issues at the first point of contact.

The success of the ongoing pilot collaboration projects with North Wales Police in Ruthin, Rhyl and Prestatyn will dictate the direction of future joint working. We will continue to investigate other collaboration opportunities

¹⁴ Social Services Statistics Wales 2004-5, Physical and Sensory Disability

either to provide services on behalf of a third party or by co-locating in a shared facility.

8.3 Ensure customer-facing areas reflect corporate branding and image

The corporate identity plays an important part in achieving a positive and successful image for the Council. It is essential that the visual image of Denbighshire clearly communicates who we are and this will be achieved by the consistent presentation of the Council's image and attitudes in the reception areas in our buildings.

In accordance with the Corporate Identity Guidelines produced by the Corporate Communications team we will undertake an audit of all Council building receptions, One Stop Shops and Cash Offices to ensure they deliver a strong corporate image, reflect the Welsh culture and language and have bilingual signage.

8.4 Migrate payments to more cost effective methods

As highlighted previously certain access channels (i.e. web and phone based contact) are more cost effective and will be actively encouraged.

We will continue to encourage customers to make payments by direct debit, online or by telephone in order to reduce the number of face to face payments made to the Council. Currently any Council bills (council tax, business rates, council rents and car parking fines) can be paid electronically through the Council website, by 24/7 automated payments phone lines or by credit and debit card by telephoning the publicised Cash Office phone numbers.

In order to further improve efficiency in this area we will pilot a self service payment machine which will take cash, credit and debit card payments. To make better use of the staffing resource in cash offices we will transfer all telephone payments into the Customer Service Centre.

8.5 Rationalise the provision of customer facing services in Council buildings

In four of the Council's buildings; in Ruthin, Rhyl, Prestatyn and Denbigh, we plan to merge the separate Cash Office, One Stop Shop and Reception counters into one combined customer focused area. This will allow us to deliver a range of functions from one counter, which will be branded as the One Stop Shop.

It is imperative that all citizens can access the Council buildings, housing our face to face facilities and will therefore ensure that 90% of reception areas and entrances to occupied civic buildings (excluding schools) are DDA phase 1 compliant by the 1st April 2009.

8.6 Introduce a generic customer facing customer service role

In order to make our provision of customer facing services more efficient and customer focused, a generic multi skilled customer service role will be created. The post holder will be responsible for providing all council customer facing services. These could include Cashiering, One Stop Shop, Reception. In some locations this could incorporate the delivery of services on behalf of external partners. These individuals will also provide cover for overflow calls from the Customer Service Centre calls, allowing greater flexibility and resource efficiencies throughout the Customer Care Service as a whole.

Initially the role will be introduced in the Ruthin One Stop Shop as part of a project re-designing the customer facing area in County Hall. Further work will then continue to deliver the role in other key customer facing facilities in the county.

8.7 Taking services out into the community

In order to meet the needs of vulnerable citizens or those living in remote areas of the county, we will continue to offer some services in citizens' homes. This can include carrying out assessments of individuals' needs, arranging services to meet eligible need and reviewing packages of care. Staff attending home visits will provide advice and guidance on a wide range of issues that are relevant to the citizen.

Where appropriate staff will signpost people to other council services and services that are provided by the voluntary sector that may help.

9. COMPLAINTS

Over the next 3 years we aim to:

9.1 Develop a clear and comprehensive complaints procedure

In future complainants who are dissatisfied will be able to easily find and use our complaints procedure. It will be well publicised, clearly defined, easy to understand and straightforward to use. The procedure will be comprehensive, covering all aspects of the services we provide.

We will have clear guidance for citizens, staff and Councillors alike so everyone's expectations will be understood. Citizens will be able to complain using the method and language of their choice.

We will review the policy annually and where necessary amend and re-publicise it. The Council's performance in managing complaints will be reported to senior management on a quarterly basis, and annually to the Corporate Governance Committee.

9.2 Ensure we resolve complaints within agreed timescales

We will take ownership of the complaint, investigate and inform the complainant of our findings within a given timescale. If we are unable to fully resolve the complaint within the agreed timescale, we will inform the complainant why and revise the date.

9.3 Eliminate failure demand

Requests are received from customers asking about the progress of an enquiry after the date that they were informed it would be completed. This is known as failure demand, which if eradicated would reduce the number of interactions between staff and citizens and significantly improve customer trust and satisfaction.

In future, services with enquiries logged on the Customer Relationship Management System which are more than three months beyond their target date will be referred to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee who will monitor progress. In addition, if a customer contacts the Council on two occasions after the expected date of completion of the service, the enquiry will automatically become a complaint. This will highlight areas of the Council not delivering services in accordance with customer expectations and options for rectifying the situation will be explored sooner rather than later.

9.4 Monitor complaints in order to improve service

Complaints will be monitored and their content analysed for trends. If the issues being highlighted can be addressed they will be incorporated into service business plans for the forthcoming year. When an improvement has been made as a result of feedback we will let citizens know by publicising it.

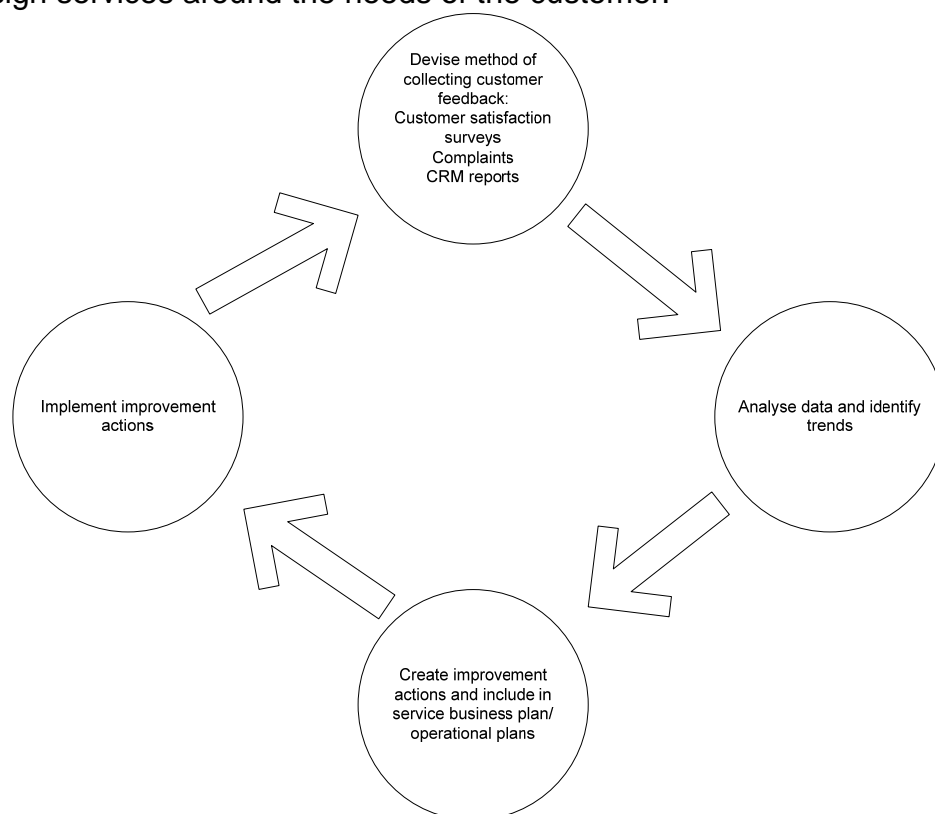
We will therefore use the information gleaned from complaints to improve the service the Council delivers to citizens.

10. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

The Council receives extensive customer feedback which when analysed and acted upon significantly improves levels of customer satisfaction. Some methods of feedback are listed below:

- Consultation through various methods, for example satisfaction and other surveys, forums, face to face interviews, workshops – these can reveal issues important to the customer which otherwise could be overlooked by the service.
- Complaints – if trends are apparent, when analysed they can highlight processes in need of re-engineering to put the customer at the heart of the transaction.
- Customer Relationship Management escalation reports – these demonstrate areas of the Council which are not managing the expectations of customers, and therefore requiring investigation.

Many services use this information in formulating their service business plans. In future we will ensure that all services take this information into account and redesign services around the needs of the customer.



In addition we will volunteer to be a pilot for WAG's evaluation of customer satisfaction software which enables Councils to understand the quality and quantity of service delivery across all access channels (including One Stop Shops, the Customer Service Centre and the website). This pilot would provide information on:

- Which channels customers are using.
- Which services customers are accessing.

- How satisfied customers are with the service.
- How services compare with their peers.

11. TRAINING

The provision of excellent customer service is reliant on adopting a structured approach to developing the skills and attitudes of all customer facing staff, enabling them to deliver customer focused services. This strategy therefore includes a number of steps to build on the foundations already laid in the Corporate Induction and Customer Focus courses and other best practice found within the Council.

We will take a proactive approach in the provision of training for all staff to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to deliver high levels of customer service throughout the Authority.

Over the next 3 years we aim to:

11.1 Equip all staff to deliver high levels of customer service through corporate induction and customer focus training

We will ensure that all new staff attend both Corporate Induction and Customer Focus courses. Subjects covered on these courses include understanding the need for good customer service, recognising customer needs, effective listening and questioning and telephone techniques. They provide ample instruction and information to ensure that staff are aware of the Council's customer service standards and understand the importance of and are able to deliver high levels of customer service.

11.2 Raise awareness and standards of customer service throughout the Council through the performance appraisal process and customer service training

To assist managers in appraising staff on the behaviour 'Customer Focus' we will create objective guidance expanding on the criteria required to attain each of the four standards. Employees will be encouraged to give feedback on colleagues in the Council if they feel they have received good or poor internal customer service.

If an individual's rating is unacceptable or needs improvement, then attendance on a corporate customer focus course will be a requirement in the 'Development Action Plan' section of the performance appraisal. If this course does not address the needs of the particular service the Manager will consult the Learning and Development Team in Personnel to devise a more suitable training opportunity for the individual. In this way we will continue to ensure that throughout the Authority all staff are trained in and aware of the need for excellent customer service.

11.3 Develop a training plan within the Customer Care Service that reflects the training needs of teams and individuals

From information gathered through performance appraisals we will identify development needs and any additional skills required to ensure staff continue to deliver high levels of customer service. As a result a comprehensive

training plan will be produced that updates the skills of the team as a whole, and those of individuals depending on their specific role and training needs. This will incorporate a variety of training methods including in-house training, formal training schemes (e.g. National Vocational Qualifications) and more flexible methods such as e-learning. The training programme will address a wide range of subjects ranging from interpersonal skills to using information resources to find answers to enquiries, to British Sign Language.

11.4 Roll out the training plan to all customer facing staff across the Council

The training plan for staff in the Customer Care Service will be made available to managers of other customer facing staff such as receptions, libraries and leisure centres. It will be possible to deliver some training to staff in their own workplace through e-learning so that staff cover is not required.

11.5 Develop consultation skills across the Council

Through external consultation training courses, we will equip appropriate staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out high quality consultation with Denbighshire citizens using appropriate methods.

12. GOVERNANCE

12.1 The strategy outlined in this document requires a series of projects and actions to achieve the required objectives and as such it requires careful co-ordination and integration between the various initiatives. In addition each of the initiatives range in size and complexity and therefore in the need for formal project structures.

12.2 The Corporate Director Resources and Deputy Chief Executive has overall responsibility for delivery of this strategy. A group of senior officers and Members would support him in this. The group would consist of:

- Head of Customer Care
- Heads of Service in Environment
- Heads of Service in Lifelong Learning
- Heads of Service in Resources
- Heads of Service in Personal Services
- Lead Member for Customer Service and Community Safety

12.3 The strategy group would provide strategic direction to the project, ensure corporate commitment and provide financial assurance that the project remains within agreed tolerances.

13. COMMUNICATION (INTERNAL)

As an organisation we need to promote the objectives of the strategy in order to drive change. Effective two way communication is vital to the success of any organisation and there needs to be clear channels of communication with all stakeholders. Any communication needs to be timely and accurate, targeted to the relevant audience and should always make clear reference to council aims and objectives.

14. MARKETING (EXTERNAL)

The successful promotion and marketing of the new customer service standards, the existing customer service statement and appropriate customer access channels are key to achieving some of the objectives in this strategy. In order to be successful it has to be both consistent and co-ordinated so that mixed messages are not disseminated. To achieve this, we will create a marketing plan for all customer service activity, with particular emphasis on the two most cost effective access channels: the corporate website and Customer Service Centre.

15. CONCLUSION

This strategy outlines where the Council hopes to be in terms of customer service delivery in 2011 and how it intends to achieve it. A firm foundation for the improvement of customer service is already in place in the form of the Customer Service Service, a Customer Relationship Management System, the Corporate Customer Service Centre, corporate customer service training and a Customer Service Statement. This is a challenging agenda, particularly in light of the financial settlement. However in some respects it is opportune as the settlement will act as a catalyst to encourage services to undertake business process re-engineering which will realise efficiencies, put the customer at the heart of transactions and utilise more cost effective access channels. In addition, the implementation of this strategy will improve both the Council's reputation and job satisfaction for staff.