Customer Service and Access Strategy 2008 - 2011

Putting customers at the heart of the City Council's priorities

Sunderland
City Council

Contents

1. Executive Summary

This document sets out how the council is ensuring that customers and customer focus are at the heart of the council's priorities.

Becoming a customer-focussed authority is one of the key drivers behind the councils improvement agenda. The council is committed to meeting the needs of residents and it is the City Council aim, in working with partners to create a city, which offers its residents a better future This document sets out the councils commitment to improve its customer service focus to achieve the ambitions set out in the Sunderland Strategy

This document sets out the context and key drivers for customer service in Sunderland.

- Aspirations to place the customer at the centre of what we do

- Nationally and locally resident's expectations are rising in respect not just of the services that are received but also in the quality of the interaction with the council.

- Increasing expectations to improve efficiency and accessibility, particularly harnessing the use of new technologies and the re-engineering of services

- Listening and understanding through consultation the various needs and aspirations of the wide range of customers and communities both users and non users in the city and delivering value for money services based on meeting those needs and aspirations

- Better Communication, clear, accurate and timely to enhance the reputation of the council

Customer services are a whole council approach to customers. At one level it is about delivering high standards of service at all times when people interact with the council, at another it is about designing services around the needs of clients, at another its about listening and acting on the views of residents.

To achieve this vision the council strategy will focus on the processes ie the way we do things; the organisation and solutions ie where we do things, the information and technology systems we use to support transactions; and the attitudes we have and the way we behave

The council is committed to improvements, which enhance customer service, deliver efficiencies and ensure smarter ways of working, some recent developments include:

- Completion of the Customer Service Centre at Bunny Hill with more on the way

- Continuing to develop the council Customer Contact Centre at Moorside

- Engaging with residents through the annual MORI survey and Community Spirit residents panel

- Developing Independent Advisory Groups under the umbrella of the Sunderland Partnership (disability, faith, gender, race, older people, sexuality, and younger people

- Supporting and developing inclusive communities through revitalised area arrangements and winning the national Digital Challenge

- Implementing an equalities e learning training programme across the whole of the council, that places equalities at the centre of customer service and service delivery

Our vision is that by 2011 we will have established a customer service model in Sunderland that provides services designed around customer need in their particular locality, delivered in partnership wherever appropriate to eliminate wasteful duplication and through access channels that are effective, efficient and appropriate.

customers have different levels of interaction with depending on their circumstances and needs and will make contact for a wide range of reasons, including information, advice, meetings, consultation, accessing services, complaints.

The overarching aim of the Customer Service and Access Strategy is to ensure end to end customer service and in doing so support the council to achieve its performance ambitions to deliver customer focused services and to be an efficient and effective council.

Implementing the action plan in Section 7 of the customer service and Access Strategy will ensure that we will have:

- Agreed the scope of services and processes to be part of the Customer Services function

- Service design and delivery that is fully based around customer need

- Processes and systems which are fit for purpose and sustainable, and on which our staff have been trained

- Delivered the Access, Processing and Delivery design principles required to implement the new customer service model

- Improved the interaction between the customer services function and service delivery teams utilising ICT solutions to enable this interaction

- Reviewed and evaluated the usage of existing Customer Service Centres to provide service offer which most meets customer need

- Increased the effectiveness and efficiency of the Customer Contact Centre

- Embedded a consistent standard of customer care across the council

- Ensured that all staff have a clear understanding of the new customer service model and their place in it

- Completed the building of capacity and skills required to enable the re-engineering of services to take place

2. Why a Customer Service and Access Strategy?

2.1 The City Council and Sunderland Partnership priorities

The council is currently working with its partners to produce the next sustainable Sunderland Strategy for the city. The Sunderland Partnership recognise the need to reflect on the existing priorities to make sure they continue to represent the needs of the city and focus on the key challenges:

- Creating a prosperous city
- Creating a liveable city
- Creating a healthy city
- Creating a safe and inclusive city
- Creating a learning city

The council is committed to the city vision and helps to achieve it through continuous improvements to service design and delivery. The councils Corporate Improvement Objectives have been refined to support delivery of the council's vision and delivering efficient and effective customer focussed services is at the heart of the council's vision.

CI01 – Delivering Customer Focused Services

This commits the council to providing an enhanced customer experience through a better understanding of customer needs and by delivering services through the most appropriate access channels whilst ensuring maximum value for money. Customer segmentation will be important in identifying the differing requirements of our customer groups and will be essential if we are to address the equality dimension that needs us to understand the differing access needs of our customers, particularly those that are from hard to reach groups.

CI02 – People Development and Being 'One Council'

The council recognises that its employees are its most valuable resource and are key to the council continuing to improve its services. This requires the council to provide better enabled and trained employees who will have the necessary tools including appropriate ICT solutions to fulfil their duties. It requires us to fully embed the principles of equality and inclusion into all elements of service delivery and employment practice to ensure that equality is pro-actively considered as part of all function planning and management.

CI03 – Efficient and Effective Council

The council needs to continuously improve if it is to provide high quality, accessible and relevant sustainable service delivery. It is committed to providing services that will optimise access channel choice and usage and will do this through developing more efficient and effective business processes and ICT solutions and systems.

CI04 – Improving Partnership Working to Deliver 'One City'

Providing services that yield efficiency savings and reduce duplication in service delivery requires the council and its partners to provide joined up services designed around the needs of their customers. The council will exploit future partnership working and will align business processes and practices with those of partners to ensure that this can happen.

2.2   Sunderland City Council Improvement Programme

Sunderland City Council is committed to improvement and has ambitions to deploy new technologies and adopt better ways of working to achieve further step changes in customer service and performance. These improvements will enable the council to exceed the expectations of multiple stakeholders from staff to suppliers and residents to local businesses.

To ensure that the outputs from all initiatives are maximised a coherent Improvement Programme (IP) has been developed. The aim of the IP is:

"To enable the council to deliver effective, efficient, equitable and economic customer service – building on its position as a leading authority"

This aim is supported by two guiding principles:

- The programme will improve our understanding of where we can work smarter, adopt partnership approaches as required, empower staff and make better use of ICT where necessary

- The programme recognises that customer service represents the whole customer journey, from initial contact to the service being delivered through to closing the request for service and then acting on customer feedback

The IP has three objectives:

- To improve the quality of customer experience and accessibility of services

- To improve customer choice of when, where and how services are delivered based on relevance, affordability and equity

- To improve the performance and efficiency of services, ensuring benefits are realised and be recognised as an innovator

The council has agreed an approach to this work through the development of 'service enhancement' projects. These projects will review and examine the journey that our customers make when they contact the council to make a service request, making them even more customer focused and as effective as possible. All services within the council will be reviewed in this process.

Many of these projects will impact on how we use technology in the future to deliver improved services. The programme will enable the council to more effectively co-ordinate the projects and maximise the benefits from resources allocated to them, avoid duplication and ensure that progress and achievements are optimally managed and monitored.

The Customer Service and Access Strategy is an integral part of the IP process and will establish the framework required to ensure that end to end customer service is realised. Establishing the framework requires the council to undertake a review of its current customer service provision which is explored in greater detail in Section 3 'Where are we now'. Section 4 'What customers have told us' provides information in relation to consultation that was undertaken in the development of the Customer Service and Access Strategy, this is influencing the direction of the review and the type of projects that will be undertaken within the IP

2.3   Supporting local and national priorities

Local priorities

The council's Customer Service and Access Strategy will be key to achieving sustainable and rapid efficiency gains and achieving the performance ambitions in Sunderland City Council's Corporate Improvement Plan. This has two organisational principles:

- Integrating front-facing services with the appropriate access channel and investing in multi- skilled staff, ICT enabled systems and training to deal with a range of customer enquiries at first point of contact

- Migration of all customer enquiries where appropriate via the contact centre where appropriate(for telephone and other e-contact) or through any centres which are part of the Customer Service Centre network (for face to face contact).

- Service delivery should be seamless with the Customer Service Network

This approach responds to the ever-increasing expectations of residents for accessibility, personal service, and continuous improvement. It also responds to the public service reform agenda and the commitment to service improvement in the priorities of the Sunderland Partnership and the Corporate Improvement Objectives. It epitomises the council's response to national drivers and demonstrates innovation in the 'place-shaping' of its locality.

The model for customer service needs to be flexible enough to incorporate partnership models such as digital challenge, building upon our community leadership role to develop our capability for cross sector co –creation of services

National priorities

The Customer Service and Access Strategy with its emphasis on customer focused delivery will be important in meeting key Government policy and drivers and is allowing the council to respond to the transformation of local government with a programme bespoke to the local needs of Sunderland.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill sets out the Governments plans for rebalancing the relationship between central and local government and their citizens. This includes the following key proposals:

- A strengthened leadership role for local authorities to bring local services closer to communities, making them better co-ordinated and offering better value for money.

- Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and the accompanying duty to cooperate should further incentivise local agencies to work with their communities in a joined up way to improve services and the quality of life.

- Empowered citizens and greater engagement of local people in shaping public policies and services.

- Strengthened representative democracy and strong local leadership through greater freedom, capacity and more stable mandates to allow local leaders to take tough decisions to help deliver better places and services

- A stronger voice for local communities in the commissioning and provision of health and social care services, enabling people to influence the services they use.

Sir David Varney's Report – 'Service Transformation: A Better Service For Citizens and Businesses, a Better Deal for Taxpayer' made recommendations in respect of measures to reduce the need for customers to make multiple contacts with public sector bodies through the development of shared services. The report also makes a number of other recommendations around developing better service transformation as a top priority outcome for government.

The Gershon review of efficiency in the public sector resulted in the 2004 Comprehensive Spending review setting targets for efficiency savings. Sunderland City Council has embraced this agenda and the new operating model for service delivery includes delivering services in a more effective and efficient manner. The Comprehensive Spending Review for 2007 is likely to continue the requirement for efficiency savings.

By working in new ways and being more efficient, the council will be able to ensure that core delivery services can be further reviewed and improved to meet the changing needs of customers and support the national "co-production" agenda for customers needs and requirements to be at the heart of service design and delivery. Generally, the community is less concerned about who delivers the service, but on the quality of the service delivered.

3. Where are we now?

Sunderland City Council has taken considerable strides forward in the development of our customer services in recent years.

3.1 Customer Service Centres

We have made significant progress in our aim to establish a customer service centre in each area of the city together with increasing services online and by telephone. Interactive street based i+ kiosks developed in partnership with other Tyne and Wear councils are providing access to service information 24/7.

There are a number of of customer service centres now open across the city, tailored to local needs some being stand-alone such as the one at Grangetown, those which are integrated into libraries such as Shiney Row and the Extended School model recently developed at Highfield. The customer service centres are based on a common strategy of shared service delivery with Bunny Hill Customer Service Centre being recognised nationally by the IDeA as an exemplar of innovative shared service delivery.

The Bunny Hill Centre brings together business, voluntary and public sector organisations under one roof and has delivered greater accessibility, personal service, and continuous improvement in service provision. customer service centres have city branding so that they are inclusive and 'owned' by those who use them, not the individual operators or service areas.

We recognise that 'one size does not fit all' however and that what is appropriate in one area of the city isn't necessarily suitable for the particular needs of our customers in another. We will therefore continue to review our service provision and enhance this in line with customer preferences.

Digital Challenge further develops this model by the use of focussed and innovative channels of customer service (for example Community Centres with the ability to print complete and email council forms via a community based multi function printer/scanner/fax/emailer)

3.2 Contact Centre

The Customer Contact Centre has become a vital link for many as a first point of contact to handle general enquiries. The centre handles calls 24 hours a day with the majority of specialist staff being available from 8am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday to give people more choice on when they access services. Customer service representatives can book appointments or give information and advice covering a wide range of services.

These include:
- Housing Benefits
- Council Tax Enquiries and Benefits
- Children's Information Service
- Environmental Services
- Development Control
- Education
- Ask Recruitment
- Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Care Alarms Service

As well as taking local calls for replacement bins, bulky waste collections, , staff also handle 101 non emergency calls. The initial scope of the 101 service has been developed through research with the general public, and in consultation with a wide group of stakeholders. The core service covers:

- Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage.

- Noise nuisance - such as noisy neighbours or burglar alarms

- Intimidation and harassment - verbal abuse or neighbour disputes

- Vehicle related Anti Social Behaviour - abandoned vehicles or mini motos

- Rubbish and litter - fly tipping or dead animals

- Drunk and rowdy behaviour - drinking in unlicensed premises or games in inappropriate places

- Drug related anti-social behaviour - discarded needles or youths smoking cannabis.

- Street lighting - broken lights

Staff at the Contact Centre are clearly playing a vital role in being the link between the customer and the services which can address their concerns.

3.3   Employee Development

We are committed to training and developing our employees to give them the skills and knowledge to deliver a customer focused service. We also understand that good customer service is strongly influenced by behaviour and developing good behaviours is an integral part of our training and development programme.

It is important that when staff cannot answer an enquiry themselves that they can sign post customers in the right direction to find it. This evolving system not only allows us to provide excellent customer service, it also helps us achieve other aims. For example:

> When customers ring the Customer Contact Centre to request a bulky waste collection or to report dog-fouling we can identify whether or not they require any other service that may help with their own particular circumstances.

3.4   Residents views

A key measure of success is that we want the people of Sunderland to be saying that the council is customer focused, listens to their views and gives good value for money. What we know from the 2006 Residents survey is:

- As with the previous year 62% of residents are satisfied with the way the council is running the city. Net satisfaction has improved on the previous year from 41% in 2005 to 45% in 2006

- The number of people satisfied with council services and those very satisfied continue to grow particularly for refuse collection, street lighting, recycling, street cleaning, road maintenance and footpath maintenance

- Residents views on whether the council gives value for money and whether it is listening and acting on their views gave conflicting messages, with 11% fewer people feeling that the council gave value for money

Whilst the council does not feel it has become less efficient the council has recognised the need to review what and how it communicates with its citizens. Further research has been undertaken around drivers of

reputation and exploring relationships between satisfaction and feeling informed and the findings of the research are being used to address the gap in perception, including strategies to improve the communication and engagement with vulnerable groups

3.5 Performance Improvement

As can be seen by the residents survey, service provision is a key driver of customer satisfaction. Delivering efficient and effective services is a core element of the customer service strategy. In addition to ensuring services are reliable and give value for money, as measured by residents views, external inspection and performance indicators are also used to improve services.

- The council maintained its 4 star overall performance and an 'improving well' rating in the annual Comprehensive Performance Assessment, placing us in the top 10% of all local authorities in the country. High performing services include Housing and Benefits and Use of Resources

- In 2006/07 56% of national indicators met their target, with 72% improving compared to 43% in 2005/06. However there was a rise in those indicators with declining performance to 28%. The council has set a target to achieve 75% of indicators meeting target in 2007/08

3.6 Assessment of Customer Services in Sunderland

Whilst the council has achieved much we have a vision to achieve far more however. As part of the work associated with the Improvement Programme and to develop this strategy an assessment has been made of the current status of customer services in Sunderland. This assessment recognised the excellent work carried out over the past four years but also highlighted a number of areas where further progress could be made by:

- Enhancing the links between our customer service and service delivery teams to provide a better customer experience

- A commitment to undertake a refresh of the council's Customer Services Strategy to provide improved end to end service delivery

- Ensuring that as many services as possible can be accessed through the Customer Contact Centre and to provide further enhancement to those services already available

- Improving and prioritising the range of services that are provided at Customer Service Centre localities in line with customer preferences

- Increasing the speed with which the Customer Contact Centre processes critical calls to ensure that appropriately skilled employees can provide assistance at the earliest possible opportunity

- Improving the ICT solutions that front-office staff need to access in order to deal with customer requests. At present information needs to be manually transferred between ICT solutions which results in longer transactions and failure to optimise the customer experience

- Reviewing and improving customer service processes

- Making better use of the information the council gets from its customers to support decision making about the provision and design of service provision

- The Customer Contact Centre improving information collection to ensure that service delivery teams have all the information they require to deliver the service right first time to optimise the customer experience

- Developing suitable ICT solutions to support the processes a to allow service tracking so that customers are kept up to date with the progress of their enquiry and when they are likely to receive service delivery.

4. What customers have told us

4.1 What consultation did we undertake?

Sunderland City Council in developing the Customer Service and Access Strategy undertook consultation with existing and potential customer stakeholder groups that were identified in the IP about their wants, needs and preferences when dealing with the council. This was undertaken through a combination of workshops and the use of questionnaires.

The council recognises that its is important to understand customer needs and drivers of satisfaction and address these issues if it is to improve perception issues

In order to determine what our customers want when dealing with the council a two way approach was used as follows:

Who are our customers?

Customers were identified as:

- Members of 'hard to reach' groups/non users
- Residents and current users
- Business customers both existing and prospective
- Strategic partners and voluntary sector representatives
- Youth Groups

What kind of dealings do customers have/want to have with the Council?

Based on existing experience from central and local government the main types of business that customers have with local authorities are:

- Life events such as moving house or establishing a business
- Single transactions with a service such as paying Council Tax or joining a library
- On going "dependency" on a service such as housing where there will be a number of contacts over a period of time
- Fault reporting and making complaints such as reporting abandoned cars, or chasing up missed bin collections
- Political involvement and becoming involved in the local community such as neighbourhood groups

What did the results of the consultation tell us?

A number of common themes emerged across all customer groups. These are:

- Customers' preferred means of contacting the council is based on their previous experience with or perceptions of dealing with the council.
- There is a perception that coming into the Civic Centre as the first point of contact is the only way to get their enquiry dealt with

- Many customers and non-customers find council buildings intimidating and do not like visiting them

- Dealing with the council by telephone as the first point of contact is popular but customers have difficulty in identifying what number to ring

- Users, especially vulnerable service users prefer face to face dealings with council staff as the first point of contact

- Customers are mainly unaware of what services are available online but would consider using online services if more information was available as to how to access them

- Customers are confused as to what services they can access via the available channels and do not understand that there appear to be different levels of service

- Customers want the council to deliver services and keep them updated about what they can expect and when

- Customers generally have a single enquiry/request when contacting the council but would be interested in having several enquiries/requests dealt with at the same time if they were packaged appropriately. Examples could include:

> A customer that is claiming benefits as a result of being unemployed would also be interested in being informed at the same time as making their claim about available employment opportunities or business grants

> A new resident in Sunderland would like to be informed about all the services that they need to register for whilst having the ability to do so at the same time

- Customers with complex enquiries such as those in relation to social care don't expect that their request will be dealt with at the first point of contact but would want to be referred onto the most appropriate service within the council. The most important thing to them is to be kept up to date with what is happening and when

- Customers would like a dedicated member of staff within the council who stays with them for the duration of their enquiry i.e. the member of staff provides 'case management'.

- Customers do not like being passed on from one part of the council to another without being told why this is happening. Customers do not like being referred on to or to be contacted by several different Council services as a result of their initial service request

- Co-location of different services at Customer Service Centres is seen as useful but concerns exist in relation to inappropriate mixes of service e.g. housing and homelessness with library services and mental health voluntary sector organisations with council social care teams

- Sharing information amongst partner organisations about service delivery is very important though joint delivery of services is not expected

4.2   Customer insight

A key element in the design and delivery of customer focused services is increasingly the use of customer insight which can be best described as having a comprehensive understanding of your customers and their needs.

An ongoing DEMOS study has identified 4 groups which are based on customers' own perceptions of their relationship with the council, their needs and their expectations. These groups are categorised as:

- We have – they see the council as working with the community to develop it and bring about change, they tend to be part of a small network such as parents. Fairness of service is a big issue to them and they are interested in services such as libraries and green spaces. This group needs to be involved in high level strategy development and decision making about their communities

- We have not – these tend to be dependent on the council and have a very well developed sense of community because of shared hard times, they also value fairness and are interested in services such as housing and green spaces. This group need to be involved in decision making on services in their area. Typically they want to see small step by step change rather than one big change

- I have – they are unlikely to have a relationship with the council and are most likely to be interested in the billing process and the state of their local area, green spaces, cleansing etc. this is possibly the largest group, their big issue is service delivery and they like the customer focused approach of the council and are best served by traditional models of change in services e.g. greater and wider access

- I have not – these are the most vulnerable and want personalised service, they are the most enforced against and feel trapped and controlled by the council. This group require a personal level of trust.

This insight tends to support a key issue from the review of customer services in Sunderland, that the council's current approach to customer services has been access focused i.e. it concentrates on developing wider and easier access to services via its customer service infrastructure for existing customers rather than customer focused which allows and encourages the involvement of all sections of the community and individuals in the design and delivery of services.

4.3 What conclusions have we drawn from consultation?

The results of customer consultation have allowed us to gain an understanding of what our customers expect when dealing with Sunderland City Council. Key conclusions from the consultation undertaken include:

- When dealing with the council customers are most concerned about knowing:
  - What is happening to their service request
  - What they can expect the council to deliver in terms of service
  - When can they expect the service to be delivered
  - What is the progress of their request

- Customers perceive a lack of consistency both of service standards across the council and the service that is available across all of the available access channels. This will be addressed with customer service standards set out and adhered to by the council

- Customers do have preferences for how they contact the council but their experience of dealing with the council and getting their service request dealt with is more important to them than the actual process their request has to go through

- Customers don't have a clear view of which services they would like to see delivered by the different access channels available. In many cases they do not like coming into council buildings but are willing to consider making requests by telephone or online provided that they are clearly informed about what options are available and can receive advice on how to use them

- The council has an opportunity to steer their customers (where appropriate) away from face to face access to use other lower cost access channels such as the telephone and internet

- There exists an opportunity to review the current access strategy, in particular the face to face services in the Civic Centre and other council buildings such as the Customer Service Centres to help address the "double" perception that coming into council buildings is intimidating whilst it being the only way to get their request dealt with successfully

- Service offers, particularly multiple service offers, need to be packaged in a way that meets customer preferences. In the future these packages can be anticipated using information collected by the front office staff

- The management of enquiries is an important one that will require fully trained staff in the front office who have access to detailed information about services provided by the council and its partners, supported by appropriate ICT solutions

- Front office staff will also require excellent customer care skills to provide a first point "triage" process that will allow them to immediately identify first point contacts as a simple request which can be dealt with, more complex requests that need to be referred to a second point of contact, and requests that have to be referred directly to the relevant service delivery team

- Care needs to be given to which services/agencies are co-located in Customer Service Centre facilities as the mix of users may not be appropriate in all cases

5. Where do we want to be – a new operating model for customer service

Sunderland City Council as part of its overall Improvement Programme has agreed a new operating model to enable it to deliver a truly customer focused approach to service delivery.

5.1 What will Customer Service mean for Sunderland?

Our new model for customer service is about more than ensuring that customers have greater access to make service requests. The objective is to ensure that the customer has streamlined end to end service. This will mean ensuring that:

- Customer service is the responsibility of all services and staff in the council i.e. from front office, to back office through to the service delivery teams

- A cultural change takes place in the council and its partners to ensure that customer service is the responsibility of all the staff involved in the end to end delivery

- The attitude and behaviour of all staff and managers throughout the council and its partners is geared towards delivering customer focused outcomes

- There are closer working relationships between the customer service front office and service delivery teams

- Outcomes for customers will be the main drivers for designing and delivering services that are customer focused council services will be re-engineered to ensure efficient and effective customer orientated processes

- The council and its partners will engage with the many groups and individuals in the community who do not have any contact with the council and are disadvantaged in terms of information and access to ensure that they have the opportunity to be involved in the design and delivery of services

5.2 The new customer service model for delivering end to end customer service

The new model is shown in the diagram below and it reflects the increased emphasis on customer service and the new ways of working within the council required to deliver improved customer service and to respond to the issues raised from an assessment of the council's current customer services approach

The key points of the model are:

- For front-office staff a greater proportion of contacts will be handled in an extended corporate customer contact environment (whether this be a contact centre, customer service centre or a virtual contact centre)

- Front-office staff will be highly skilled and supported by ICT solutions that allow them to anticipate customer needs and more fully meet their requirements

- Front-office staff will begin to take on a co-ordination and case management role – representing the customer request to the organisation and following on delivery through case management i.e. staying with the customer from 'start to finish'

- Customers will be given a choice of access channels, however services will migrate to the most appropriate lowest cost channel and increasingly all our staff will act as service initiators.

- Access to services will also be enabled through kiosks digital television, and mobile technologies
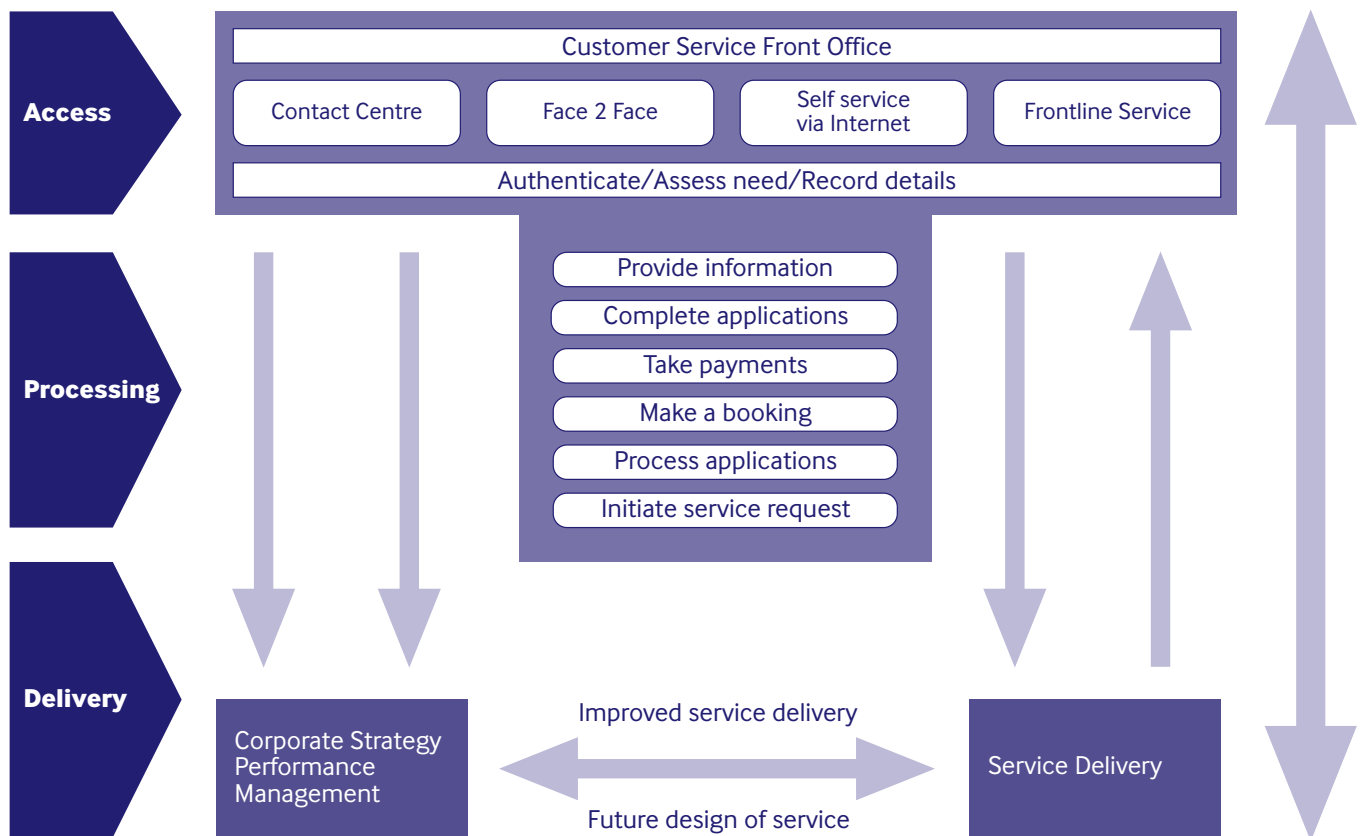
## 5.3   Sunderland City Council's approach to delivering end to end service

In order to ensure that the new model supports the improvement of customer service the council has adopted an approach that will govern how it can determine the depth of the transactions that are shown in the downward stroke of the green "T" shape in the model above.

This approach recognises that not all services will be capable or suitable for migration to the same depth into the customer services front end. It is therefore based on a unified customer service front end across all services within the council and recognises that the depth of transaction handled within the customer service front will vary by service.

The decision as to the depth of transaction will be taken on a service by service basis, recognising the benefits from standardisation and centralisation but also the need for specialist skills and service specific knowledge to deal with the more complex queries or transactions. This approach has been considered in the IP against other possible options and has been agreed as the way forward.

This variable depth approach is shown in the diagram on page 19.

Option 3: Variable depth

Variable depth and breadth of coverage 'Unified customer service'
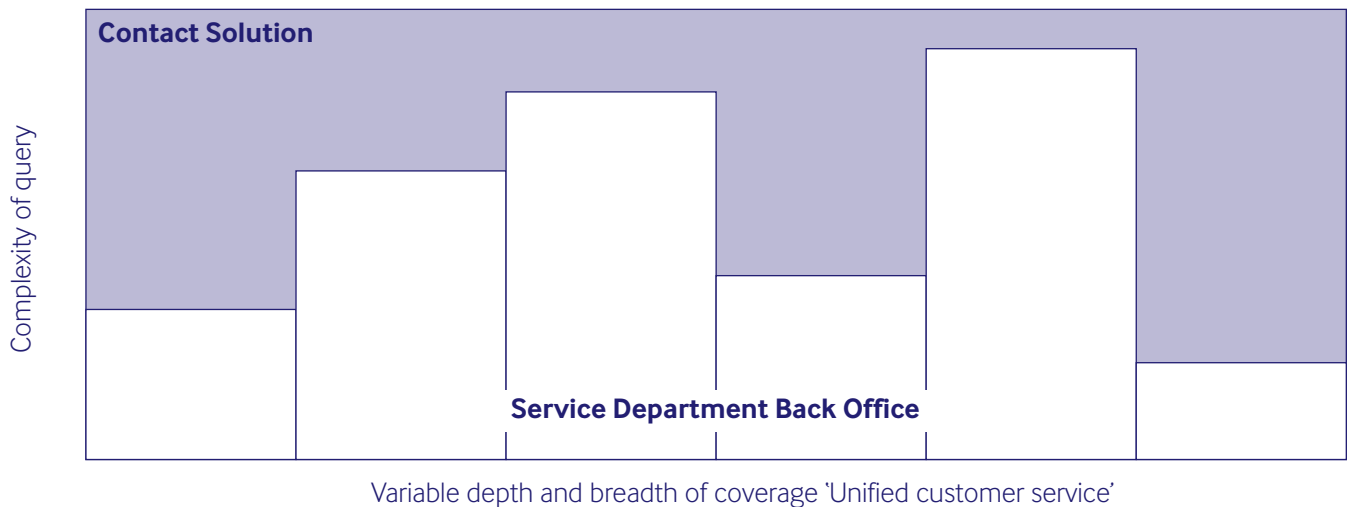
An Example of how this could work in practice is:

> Front end staff will deal with the majority of customer enquiries about library services from simple enquiries about opening hours to carrying out the transaction to join the library. On the other hand, for social care issues, they could deal with information requests and standard forms but would hand over complex enquiries straight to the relevant service team

This approach supports the decision that a focus on end to end redesign, service by service is most likely to succeed in Sunderland's specific case. It will be very much dependent on close working between the customer service front end and the service delivery teams to jointly identify which services and transactions can be migrated to the front office.

A key action for Sunderland City Council will be the development of its Migration Plan which will set out clearly which services and processes are to be considered for migration to the front office.

5.4 Design principles for the new customer service model

The new customer service model is based on a number of design principles that support delivery of the guiding principles. These principles are in three sections and reflect the Access, Processing and Delivery elements of the model in 5.2

Access design principles

- All initial contacts received by the council, regardless of access channel will be handled by front office staff

- Information about the customer contact will be recorded at the first point of contact. It will then be processed e.g. through workflow or used for analysis. The customer information collected by front office staff provides evidence for the future design and provision of services

- Customer needs will be resolved at a location closest to the customer

- The front-office role will be enhanced to act as a broker as well as initiating service

- Services are to be designed around customer requirements, irrespective of traditional internal service/partner boundaries

- Customers will be given a choice of access channels, but services will migrate to the channel that provides lowest cost (where appropriate)

- The front office will be capable of being extended to other council and partner facilities

Processing design principles

- There is to be a single view of the customer – available (based on need) to front-office employees and service delivery partners

- Ownership of customer need will be at this point and the customer will not be referred beyond this point unless it is essential and they are told why and kept informed

- The service offer to customers will be end to end resolving their needs irrespective of internal organisational boundaries. The process will be tracked from initiation to closure

- Transaction processing will be moved from the back office to the front office

- The depth of service migration will be determined at the point that migration takes place on a service by service basis

Delivery design principles

- The relationship between the front office and service delivery teams is clearly established via service level agreements and will be characterised by the sharing and exchanging of information and working together to deliver the end to end service demanded by customers

- The responsibility for service delivery will remain with directorate service delivery teams with customer services acting as a broker on behalf of the customer

- There will be increases in productive time within service delivery, with clearer separation of process elements and improvements in scheduling and routing from the deployment of mobile technology

6.   Implementing the Strategy

Four high level activities have been identified that will address the issues discussed in this Customer Service and Access Strategy. These activity themes have been identified via the assessment of the current customer service function, the outcomes of consultation with customer groups and an assessment of the gaps between the existing customer access focus of the council and the new model based on end to end customer service. These key activity themes are:

1.   Review and Improving the Current Service

2.   Plan to implement the new customer service model

3.   Implement the design principles of the new customer service model

4.   Determine longer term opportunities for improvement

A high level plan has been developed to implement the strategy with the aim of achieving the following:

- Delivering an immediate and perceptible difference in the way in which the council deals with its customers. This will deliver an external benefit through increased customer satisfaction when dealing with the council and an internal benefit in terms of demonstrating to council staff that many improvements based on changing current working can be effectively delivered in the short term

- To start the process of detailed planning which will underpin implementation of the new operating model, engage council services and lead to a better developed business case

The plan is shown on pages 22 – 31.

6.1 Key Activity Theme 1 – Review and Improve Current Service Provision

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
6.1.1 Review the management and structure of customer services within the council	Determine the most appropriate location for the strategic management of the Customer Service function	Submit a report to Executive Management Team detailing the options for the strategic location of the Customer Service function	Implementation of agreed recommendations			Head of P&SD
	Establish protocols for the relationship between the Customer Services function and customer service teams in council directorates	Role out and embed agreed protocols	Undertake a review of agreed protocol			Head of P&SD
6.1.2 Improve the interaction between the Customer Services function and service delivery teams	Strengthen the arrangements for those services already transferred to Customer Services	Service Level Agreements in place for all Services provided by Customer Services Service delivery teams review information available on the Sunderland City Council website to ensure that Customer Services can answer Frequently Asked Questions Customer Services to promote access to and help increase the usage of e-channels	Ongoing review of information	Ongoing review of information	Ongoing review of information	Service Delivery Teams CRM

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
6.1.3 Deliver a consistent standard of customer care across the council	By ensuring that all council staff adhere to the agreed set of customer service standards	Customer Care Standards reviewed and re-launched via EMT to demonstrate high level support.		Review customer care standards in line with changes in customer preferences		CRM
		Customer care training to be made available to non customer service staff	Provide ongoing customer care training as appropriate	Provide ongoing customer care training as appropriate	Provide ongoing customer care training as appropriate	CRM
			Undertake Mystery Shopping exercises to measure the success of service improvements and make recommendations for further improvement available to all the relevant service staff	Continue with programme of Mystery Shopping exercises to inform continual service improvement	Continue with programme of Mystery Shopping exercises to inform continual service improvement	CRM

6.2 Key Activity Theme 2 – Plan to implement the new customer service model

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**	
6.2.1 Ensuring that aims and objectives of the new customer service model and its design principles are widely understood across the council	The Customer Service and Access Strategy needs to be communicated to all service delivery teams and staff via: • Workshops • Briefings • Team meetings • Service improvement planning cycle	Development of a communications strategy in conjunction with the council's Improvement Programme	Review and communicate action plan for Customer Service & Access Strategy			CRM
6.2.2 Determine the scope of services and processes to be part of Customer Services	Development of a clearly defined service map for identifying services and processes to be delivered by Customer Services Determine recommendations for the best access channel from a customer perspective	Develop a migration plan and a capacity plan that will be determined through a detailed analysis of all customer contact services Determine the detailed design for each service migration Produce an outline implementation plan, based on a service by service approach to inform preparation of the high level business case				H of P&SD H of P&SD

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
6.2.3 Build capacity and skills within Sunderland City Council to enable the re-engineering of services to facilitate end to end service delivery	Implement a number of "proof of concept" pilots Identify customer champions within directorates	Identify services for inclusion in the pilots from the mapping exercise in 6.2.2	Undertake the re-engineering of services			H of P&SD
6.2.4 Ensuring that service design and delivery is based around customer requirements	Develop a defined business intelligence framework		Develop a customer insight strategy linked with corporate consultation initiatives and DEMOS and Mori research			CRM

6.3 Key Activity Theme 3 – Implement the design principles of the new customer service model

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
6.3.1 Access design principles	Re-engineer customer access to meet the needs of all customers whilst providing effective and efficient service delivery		All customer contacts being handled by front-office staff where appropriate. All customer information being recorded at the first point of contact Customer need being resolved at a locality closest to the customer	Customer data being used as an evidence base for future provision and design of services Front office staff role enhanced to act as a broker and advocate as well as initiating service	Services designed around customer needs, irrespective of traditional boundaries (internally and partners) Customers provided with a choice of access channels although services will migrate to the lowest cost delivery channel (where appropriate) The front office function capable of being extended to other Council and partners' facilities Develop new and innovative channels in line with technology and customer demand	CRM

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
6.3.2 Processing design principles	Re-engineer service delivery processes in line with customer need	Customer need to be met at the first point of contact and will not be referred beyond this point unless essential Service offer to be end to end irrespective of organisational boundaries. The process will be tracked from initiation to closure The depth of service offer to be determined at the point of migration on a service by service basis		Customers to be kept fully informed of the progress of their enquiry Transaction processing to be moved from the back office to the front office		CRM
6.3.3 Delivery design principles	Re-engineer the relationship between the front office and service delivery teams to optimise the customer experience	Establish service level agreements between the front office and service delivery teams Customer Services will provide a brokering role whilst the responsibility for service delivery remains with service directorates		Achieve increases in productive time within service delivery through clearer separation of process elements and improvements in scheduling and routing from the deployment of mobile technology		CRM

6.4 Key Activity Theme 4 – Determine longer term opportunities for improvement

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**	
6.4.1 Undertake a review of current usage of Customer Service Centres	Review and evaluate usage of each Customer Service Centre to determine which service offers will improve customer use and support the shift to other channels where appropriate Ensure that a consistent level of service offer is provided across all Customer Service Centres	Undertake a resource analysis of the Customer Service Centre Network Establish a common menu of services that is available in all Customer Service centres Formalise the management arrangements for those Customer Service Centres which are co-located with libraries	Review the range and depth of service that is available in each Customer Service Centre using customer information collected at source Link with the service review of information available on the Sunderland City Council website (see 6.1.2) to allow Customer Service Centres to encourage customers to self serve	Identify services that are specifically required by communities in their locality		CRM
6.4.2 Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Customer Contact Centre	Ensure that the Customer Contact Centre is managed to best practice standards that includes: • resource planning • skill set management • collection of customer information	Undertake a resource analysis of the Customer Contact Centre operations to include: • technologies • staffing levels • benchmarking against best practice within the public and private sectors				CRM

Review and Improve Current Service Provision	What do we need to do	How are we going to do it				Responsibility
		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
6.4.3 Develop and implement revised performance management arrangements	Implement Performance Management arrangements to allow monitoring of the effectiveness and efficiency of the new customer service model	Develop a Performance Management Framework to include a suite of performance indicators Establish baseline for all performance indicators				CRM

7. Key Performance Information

Sir David Varney's report to the Chancellor, 'Service Transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer', made a number of recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government's contact centres. The Citizen and Business Contact Council, established after the Varney report, has oversight of public sector contact centres and government's response to Varney recommendations, including performance management. Sir David Varney recommended 'the establishment of best practice performance indicators and benchmarks to assist centres to perform to the level of best peer performance in the public sector'.

This recommendation has two delivery implications. That a common framework of measurement is established across public sector and that work practices, techniques and methods are shared in a meaningful way by public sector contact professionals. The Varney report also recommended that all taxpayer funded contact centres undergo accreditation to an established set of standards and levels of practice by December 2008.

Public sector accreditation will require implementation of a performance management framework (PMF). The framework comprises performance indicators gathered from those currently used in public sector contact centres. By consulting with departments, external organisations and representative groups such as the Local Government Benchmarking Group, the PMF establishes a set of best practice indicators of contact centre performance. The PMF performance indicators are designed to test 4 primary competencies in publicly funded contact centres; measurement, insight, delivery and planning. Many indicators are commonly used by both public and private sector contact centres.

To ensure that the council delivers the improvements associated with its Customer Service and Access Strategy it is important that we are able to measure our success in providing excellent services in an efficient and effective manner to our customers. This will be measured using a number of PMF performance indicators.

Indicator	Description	Measure	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
INSIGHT performance indicators						
IN01	First Contact Resolution	% of transactions successfully completed during first contact	90%+			
IN02	Customer Satisfaction Rating	% of customers who rate the service provided by the contact centre within a desired range of satisfaction and level of advocacy	Establish baseline			
IN03	Avoidable Contact	% of resource minutes per channel which are spent dealing with avoidable contact (i.e. contact largely caused by failure within some process) Also expressed as a cost.	n/a	Establish baseline		
IN04	Customer Consultation Impact	No. of customer consultations that lead to tangible service improvement actions that positively impact the outcome of the contact centre's performance.	n/a	Establish baseline		
IN05	Industry recognised awards	Awards to public sector staff or contact centres in the last 3 years recognising excellence achieved in a particular area of service delivery and/or management	Establish baseline			

Indicator	Description	Measure	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
MEASUREMENT performance indicators						
ME01	Contact types classified	Breakdown of all fulfilled contact centre demand in contact minutes segmented by contact channel and known contact types.	n/a	Establish baseline		

Indicator	Description	Measure	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
PLANNING Performance Indicators						
PL01	Staff attrition	Total number of FTE agents that leave the contact centre as a percentage of total FTE agents employed by the contact centre.	Establish baseline			
PL02	Investment in staff	Average investment in developing contact centre staff.	Establish baseline			
PL03	Staff satisfaction and engagement	Measures staff satisfaction and their level of engagement, sense of ownership, loyalty, and pride they have in their work.	Establish baseline			
PL04	Cost per contact minute	Cost of delivering a minute of average contact activity to contact centre customers.	Establish baseline			

Indicator	Description	Measure	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
DELIVERY Performance Indicators						
DE01	Contact handling quality	Overall quality of the contact handling service provided by agents assessed using a structured quality reviewing process undertaken regularly.	Establish baseline			
DE02	Unmet demand	Calls that receive a Busy Message, Engaged Tone, or any other not answered category and calls abandoned while queuing to be answered.	n/a	Establish baseline		
DE03	Average speed of answer	Average time taken to answer a call by agents from the point of arrival at the agent queue	Establish baseline			
DE04	% calls answered	% of calls answered as a proportion of total caller demand.	Establish baseline			
DE05	Complaints handled	Volume of complaints requiring a formal response (received during contact with the customer) or through a formal complaints process (where the customer writes in after the contact) and how well the contact centre handles these negative comments.	n/a	Establish baseline		

Indicator	Description	Measure	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
DELIVERY Performance Indicators						
DE06	Utilisation and availablility	% of total paid agent time spent actively working on customer contact activity % of total paid agent time spent logged on available to work or working on calls.	n/a	Establish baseline		
DE07	Absence	Days lost through sickness or other unplanned absence each year	Establish baseline			