

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 19 SEPTEMBER 2006

CUSTOMER FIRST PROGRAMME UPDATE

Report by the Chief Executive

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To update the Committee on the progress that has been made in strengthening East Ayrshire Council's approach to customer service through the Customer First Programme.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** On 19 May 2005, Audit Scotland published a report entitled 'Improving Customer Service Through Better Customer Contact'. The key recommendations contained in the study are as follows:-

- a targeted programme to manage customer service improvements is good practice and an important first step for councils;
- councils should improve how they research customers' opinions of services; and
- councils should improve performance measurement including specific targets for customer satisfaction and targets for improving the effectiveness of council services.

- 2.2** At its meeting on 20 September 2005, the Policy and Resources Committee considered and agreed a report which recommended measures to further strengthen the Council's approach to customer service.

3. CUSTOMER FIRST SERVICE COMMITMENT

- 3.1** The Customer First Service Commitment poster has been distributed throughout the Council and is on display in both public and staff areas. An enlarged version of the Commitment is on display in the reception areas of the main Council offices. The Commitment clearly sets out for both customers and staff the standards of service East Ayrshire Council aims to deliver.

- 3.2** The Customer First Service Commitment has been produced in leaflet format and has been distributed to all staff through a combination of pay-slips and direct distribution.

- 3.3** The Council's web-site also has a page on our Customer First Service Commitment, linked to information on the Scottish Executive's Customer First Programme.

- 3.4 Executive Directors have delivered across their services, information sessions on the Customer First Service Commitment, the Customer Contact Gateway and the Distributed Contact Centre.
- 3.5 This roll-out has been by way of a tool-box talk on the Customer First Service Commitment which has been distributed to all departments and ensures that staff aware of the content of the Commitment and what it means in their day-to day work.
- 3.6 The Customer First Service Commitment is now included as part of the Council's Corporate Induction training for all new employees. It will also be included in induction programmes for Skillseekers, craft apprentices and other associated training schemes. Departmental induction packages have also been updated to include the Commitment.
- 3.7 The Council's Customer Care course is being rewritten to focus on the Commitment and its practical application in the workplace.

4. CUSTOMER FIRST PROGRAMME

- 4.1 A group of departmental representatives have developed a corporate programme to further strengthen our approach to customer care. This will take forward our approach to customer service over the next three years.

5. MEASURABLE TARGETS

- 5.1 Work by this group is on-going to develop a set of measurable targets for customer service. Some of these targets are drawn from our Customer Service Commitment and some are Scottish Executive targets, set out in their Customer First documents.
- 5.2 The Council has publicly stated in its Customer First Service Commitment that it is our aim to answer the telephone within five rings, whenever possible. A new Corporate Call Management System will shortly be introduced for use by departments. This new software improves the Council's ability to monitor performance against the target of answering calls in five rings. Performance reports for the key telephone numbers advertised to the public in the Phone Book will be available from the Corporate Call Management System from the start of 2007. Initially these quarterly reports will be considered by the Corporate Management Team. It is anticipated that these figures will be made public through the Council's performance reporting mechanisms once the system has bedded down. It is proposed to report on the number and percentage of calls answered, answered in five rings, unanswered and the number of callers receiving the engaged tone.

5.3 In addition, one of the areas of work being undertaken by the Improvement Service, as part of their Customer First CRM/Citizen Account workstream, is the development of a common model for the measurement of customer satisfaction. There is currently no readily available model for measuring customer satisfaction at the first point of contact which can be used by all Scottish Local Authorities. It is likely that the Improvement Service will establish a project to develop a common model early in 2007. East Ayrshire Council has indicated a willingness to participate in this development work.

6. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 In the light of discussions with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's office and consideration of available best practice, work has started on a review of all aspects of the Council's arrangements for handling comments, suggestions and complaints. The outcome of this review will be the subject of a future report to this Committee.

7. FINANCIAL / LEGAL / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None arising from this report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) note the progress that has been made on further strengthening the Council's approach to improving customer service; and
- (ii) otherwise note the content of this report.

Fiona Lees
Chief Executive
28 August 2006

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Audit Scotland report "Improving Customer Service Through Better Customer Contact" available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

Members wishing further information should contact Fiona Lees, Chief Executive, Tel. (01563) 576019 or Elizabeth Morton, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Support, Tel. (01563) 576103.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: Carol Foote, Principal Officer, Corporate Support.