



AUDIT COMMITTEE- 6TH NOVEMBER 2013

SUBJECT: WALES AUDIT OFFICE CUSTOMER SERVICES REVIEW

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES & SECTION 151 OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Wales Audit Office conducted a review of the Council's Customer Service function during 2011/12. The review was conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers and was issued in August 2013. This report summarises the conclusions of the review and also makes recommendations for future monitoring of delivery of proposals for improvement contained within the review.
- 1.2 Members have a critical role to play in evaluating Regulator reviews and in particular understanding what difference such reviews make to improvement of services for our citizens. They also have a clear role in monitoring progress in achieving report recommendations from the wide range of reviews undertaken.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The review concluded that the "Council provides citizens with a range of channels to access its services but its strategic approach to customer services is fragmented and in need of updating, and it does not effectively evaluate its customer service provision".
- 2.2 The main headlines of the report are as follows:
 - The Council has accessible customer service arrangements but there is a need to understand and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these arrangements.
 - There is a significant amount of operational customer service activity but the council's strategic approach to customer services is fragmented and its customer care strategic framework has not been updated since 2005.
 - Although the Council monitors and reports a limited number of performance measures, it is not able to fully evaluate the effectiveness of its customer services.
- 2.3 The review makes two proposals for improvement:-

P1: Develop a more co-ordinated strategic approach to customer services, including:-

 - Developing and implementing a customer service strategy that supports the Council's strategic vision and improvement priorities;
 - Establishing clear links between the customer service strategy document, Improvement Objectives and departmental service improvement plans;
 - Ensuring the customer service strategy clearly sets out appropriate performance measures that enable the Council to manage, monitor, report and evaluate its strategy and

- other related strategies including its customer charter;
- Including customer services' performance measures in the Council's corporate performance reporting arrangements and ensuring they are subject to effective self-evaluation, challenge and scrutiny;
- Ensuring that the Council's equalities and Welsh language objectives are being delivered and reflected in the customer service strategy;
- Ensuring that the lead Cabinet Member for customer services has clearly documented responsibilities and is provided with regular performance information; and
- Ensuring business cases are developed for service improvements that clearly set out and analyses the costs and benefits of the service improvement, and the expected improvements and the outcomes to be delivered.

P2: Strengthen the approach to evaluating and improving customer services in a proactive way, including:

- Collecting customer views and satisfaction for e-mail and telephone contacts
- Corporately collating and analysing complaints and compliments and regularly reporting findings to members
- Consider re-instating the Viewpoint Panel.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Delivery of the council's Improvement Objectives together with all other service priorities is fundamental. Equally important is communicating with citizens on the council's performance in a way that is understandable and accurate.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Although the WAO review appeared a little harsh in light of positive customer service evidence, and there are areas in the review that we "agree to disagree" on, it is clear that there is a need to take actions to respond to the WAO proposals, including the development of a new Customer Services Strategy.
- 4.2 To balance some of the comments in the report members may recall that the Customer Service Strategy was the subject of an in-depth IDEA Peer Review in 2008 and a SOCITM Benchmarking review in 2011. Members also reviewed the provision of customer services as part of the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan and made recommendations that modified the strategy in 2010 and 2011.
- 4.3 During the last few years progress has been made in generating efficiencies within customer services which has resulted in CCBC Customer Services winning an award at the Welsh Contact Centre Awards in 2012 and was a finalist in the UK Contact Centre Planning Forum's Innovation Awards in 2013. These improvements and efficiencies have meant that the Customer Service Centres in Hanbury Chapel and Risca Palace were opened with no additional staff resource. Call handling work for Licensing, Registrars and Blue Badge Applications have also been absorbed by the Contact Centre, again with no additional staff resource being required, allowing efficiencies and service improvements to be made in the relevant service areas.
- 4.4 A new Customer Services Strategy will need to be developed, that supports the Council's strategic vision and improvement priorities with clear links to Improvement Objectives, Departmental Service Improvement plans and the Council's Equalities and Welsh Language objectives. The strategy will have to address issues relating to fragmentation of service delivery and further improve efficiency and effectiveness, whilst it also sets out appropriate performance measures and documents the responsibilities of the lead Cabinet Member for customer services. However, the new strategy will also need to be very much aligned to the budget reductions expected in the coming years.

- 4.5 A review of the business case process for service improvements is underway.
- 4.6 The reporting of customer service performance measures will be reviewed and included in the Council's corporate performance monitoring arrangements.
- 4.7 The Corporate Complaints Policy has been updated and information on complaints is being collated, analysed and reported to the Audit Committee on a regular basis by the Council's Interim Monitoring Officer who currently has overall responsibility for Corporate Complaints. In addition an Unreasonable/ Persistent complainant's policy has been drafted and is currently out for consultation.
- 4.8 Work on collating customer views and satisfaction with phone and e-mail contact is underway and a programme of Viewpoint Panel meetings has already been developed.
- 4.9 The proposals and any subsequently agreed Action Plan should be monitored by the following route:-

	For Decision	For Monitoring	Final Sign Off on completion
Cabinet		P1	March 2014
Scrutiny		P & R P1 & P2	March 2014
Council	P1		April 2014

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equalities implications directly associated with this report, however, equalities and access will constitute a significant part of any new Customer Service Strategy.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications directly associated with this report

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications directly associated with this report

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The views of the listed consultees are reflected within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 It is recommended that Audit Committee approves the programme of monitoring detailed in paragraph 4.9 of this report to ensure that the WAO proposals for improvement are satisfactorily implemented.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To ensure that there is an appropriate response to the Regulator's review and that the response is appropriately managed and monitored.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Measure 2009, Wales Programme for Improvement 2010

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Welsh Audit Office Customer Service Review, August 2013