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Customer Services Peer Review

Caerphilly County Borough Council

4 – 6 November 2008

Contents

Summary

Since the launch of the Customer First Initiative in 2003, Caerphilly County Borough Council (CBBC) has made impressive progress in its aim of delivering services to customers that are both flexible and accessible. A telephone contact centre has been launched and Customer First centres have opened in Penallta House in Ystrad Mynach, Blackwood, Pontlottyn and Risca.

The council benefits from strong cross party member and senior managerial support for the improving customer services in general and the Customer First initiative in particular. The development of Customer First centres is seen as a priority by elected members to meet the needs of the local community given the geographical and socio-economic character of the Borough. The Chief Executive displays a clear commitment to improving customer service across the council. His office deals with all complaints received by the council demonstrating the importance that improved customer service has within the organisation.

Effective partnership working is helping the council to provide a seamless service to customers and a more effective use of resources. The review team found many examples of positive partnership working with external organisations which is having a direct impact on the residents of Caerphilly. The Council should build on the success of working with partners to improve service delivery and enhance the customers' experience of council services.

A key strength for CCBC is having a Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) team in place. Each service is taken through the BPR process to identify service improvements, streamline services, identify efficiencies and identify which elements of the service are suitable to transfer into the Contact Centre. Moving suitable activities to the front office results in the removal of the burden of general frontline enquiries from back office staff and most importantly improves the customers' experience of the service. Managers from the services that have had work transferred into the Contact centre have been involved in the BPR process to ensure that their knowledge is captured and used to add value.

The council has also demonstrated its commitment to improving customer services by investing in a CRM system. This commitment is further evidenced through the planned programme of integrating back office systems with CRM which is being resourced using internal development resources.

Despite many of the pieces of the jigsaw being in place a clear overall picture of where the council is going in terms of customer service is missing. There is a Customer First Strategy Group in place and a number of reports have been presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee in recent years but there is no clear corporate Customer Service Strategy setting out the council's vision and ambitions. The benefits of such a strategy include informing members, staff and customers of where Caerphilly Customer Services aim to be in the future and how they plan to get there. The strategy should set out clearly the council's priorities which currently, given the character of the Borough in large part, reflects the desire to improve opportunities for face to face contact to promote social inclusion. The Customer First programme would also benefit from a business case, or business delivery

model, to set out the rationale for change, the risks the council faces in delivering its objectives and the resources required for implementation.

There is clear recognition of the importance of the customer albeit the council is not yet at the stage where it can assert that customer service is everyone's business. The peer review team's interviews with senior members of staff and workshop with frontline staff provided evidence that not all frontline staff are aware of the Customer First programme or of their role as the public face of the authority when delivering services at the heart of the community. Although there has been progress in breaking down "silo working" and developing a customer service culture within the council, further work is required to embed this fully. A clear objective concerning the development of a customer service culture should be included in the Customer Service Strategy. A corporate customer care training programme for staff in all council services would help to embed customer focus across the council.

There is a clear plan in place for the development of the Contact Centre stating which services will be re-engineered and transferred into it. We are aware of the work taking place to develop the council website from a communication tool to a more transactional facility, however the council would benefit from this work being clearly documented and communicated to staff and customers.

The extent to which each service can be dealt with at the first point of contact needs to be clearly defined and communicated to Customer First officers. This is particularly the case in relation to face to face contact in the Customer First Centres when dealing with the more legislative and technical services such as Housing Benefits and Council Tax. Clearly setting out and communicating to Customer First staff the point at which common face to face enquiries will need to be referred to the back office for resolution will ensure that a more seamless and efficient service is delivered to the customer.

More widespread use and analysis of customer insight is required across all council services in order to understand the socio-demographics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour of their customers. This insight will help to define who the customers of Caerphilly are, how they would prefer to access the services of the council and then inform the development of council services to meet these needs. The review team are confident that Caerphilly County BC has the will and potential to address these challenges on the next stage of its improvement journey.

Recommendations

The key recommendations of the review team are set out below, followed by more detailed consideration of strengths and areas for development, to be considered under the benchmark themes:

Leadership:

- There is a need for a clear shared vision and overarching strategy for improving customer service.

- A business case is required to set out the rationale for change, the risks and resources required for implementation of Customer First

Corporate approach to customer access and delivery:

- More communication and engagement is required to ensure there is a consistent understanding of the importance of customer care by staff across all services

- The extent to which each service can be dealt with at the first point of contact needs to be defined and communicated to staff

- A clear plan is required for developing and delivering the transactional elements of the website, linked to the plans for face to face Customer First centres and the contact centre.

Understanding and Engaging with Customers:

- The council should develop a better understanding of it's customers by analysis of the socio-demographics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour of their customers. This will help define who the customers of Caerphilly are, how they would prefer to access the services of the council and then inform the development of council services to meet these needs.

- A more consistent approach to analysing and learning from complaints needs to be applied and shared with staff and customers.

- The council should develop and implement a consistent approach to deal with and learn from compliments.

Service redesign:

- The council would benefit from reviewing out of hours service provision across the council and how this could be integrated with the contact centre

- Start to use techniques such as Customer Journey mapping and emotional journey mapping to help improve service delivery and design.

HR and organisational development

- Ensure that the plans to deliver customer care training to significant numbers of staff across the authority are realised. This will help to embed customer focus, raise customer satisfaction levels and help to build capacity across the organisation to deliver customer services.

- The council should review the management of customer facing staff, including job descriptions, so that they include the customer care responsibilities, competencies and staff management practices currently being trialled in Customer First.

Programme management:

- Develop a clear business case to support the proposed overarching customer service and channel access strategies.

ICT and IM strategies:

- Update the ICT Strategy so that it takes full account of all aspects of the developing Customer Service Strategy, Channel Access Strategy and the "Agile Working" agenda as well as the other needs of the various departments of the council.

- A clear and agreed plan is required to build transactional functionality into the website similar to the plan which is in place for the development of the contact centre

Accommodation / property strategy:

- The Asset Management Strategy would benefit from a refresh to include an Accommodation Rationalisation plan outlining the forward plans for rationalisation and utilisation of council buildings. This will ensure that council buildings are conducive to delivering excellent customer service.

- The proposals to refurbish the reception area of the Pontllanfraith offices should be finalised.

- Improve the signage on the highways to Ty Penallta and the signage inside Pennallta House to ease customer access.

Communications strategy:

- The council should launch a corporate newsletter to convey key corporate messages, such as the importance of a customer first ethos, across the organisation.

- Ensure a more consistent look and feel to the branding and including the council name, to help to build staff and customer awareness of the Customer First programme.

Background to the Review

1. The visit to Caerphilly County Borough Council for the Customer Services Peer Review (CSPR) was requested by the council, arranged by the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) and forms part of the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) Making the Connections Programme. A peer review is designed to help the service assess its current achievements and its capacity to change.

2. The Customer Services Peer Review is a specific peer review directly modelled on the IDeA Local Government Improvement Programme (LGIP) Peer Reviews but tailored for Wales. It will help local authorities to establish how well they are meeting the needs of their customers, in terms of how they are designing and delivering services that are more customer-centric. It will also examine how they are providing access to these services via the different available channels.

3. The basis for the assessment is a specially constructed benchmark of the ideal, fully effective council. The council produced a self-assessment using the benchmark, in advance of the review; this provided key areas for the team to focus their research.

   The benchmark focuses on nine key organisational themes:

   ➢ Leadership and Governance
   ➢ Corporate approach to customer access and delivery
   ➢ Understanding and engaging with customers
   ➢ Service re-design
   ➢ Human Resources (HR) and organisational development
   ➢ Programme management
   ➢ Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Information Management (IM) strategies
   ➢ Accommodation / property strategy
   ➢ Communications strategy.

Peer review is not inspection. It is constructive challenge delivered by 'critical friends'. The aim is to recognise good practice and bring focus to areas for improvement. The technique can be important in changing the way people think and feel about issues, and in helping to build a consensus on priorities and inform improvement planning.

The members of the peer review team were:

➢ John Maitland-Evans, Chief Executive, Vale of Glamorgan County Borough

➢ Tim Rainey, Assistant Chief Executive, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council

➢ Paula Ham, Head of Resources and Performance Management, Monmouthshire County Council

➢ Rhian Gladman, Review Manager, IDeA

➢ Gill Elliot, Consultant, IDeA

4. The programme for the visit was organised in advance and included a variety of activities designed to enable members of the team to meet and talk to a spectrum of internal and external stakeholders. Examples of activities the team undertook include:

➢ Review of documentation and Self Assessment produced by the council

➢ Mystery Shopping exercises

➢ One to one meetings with senior managers and leading Members

➢ Focus group sessions with front line employees and managers of front line staff

➢ Workshops with customers and elected members

➢ Visits to the Customer Contact centre

➢ Telephone discussion with a range of external stakeholders

5. The team was appreciative of the welcome and hospitality provided by the council and would like to thank everybody that they met during the process for their time and contributions.

    The feedback given to the portfolio holder, the chief executive, members and officers of the council on the last day of the review reported on the key messages arising from the review. This report gives a more detailed written account of the findings of the review and is structured around the organisational themes mentioned above.

    To ensure anonymity of those who contributed to the review process, review findings are reported for collective groups or levels of the organisation, rather than on an individual basis.

Context

6. Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) is a unitary authority in South East Wales with a population of approximately 171,000. The population is concentrated into a number of small/medium towns including Caerphilly, Blackwood, Ystrad Mynach, Bargoed and Rhymney with the rest of the population being more sparsely spread across the large rural areas of the borough, 80% of the borough is countryside. The authority is well connected by a network of A roads, with the A469 running north to south and the M4 motorway running just south of Caerphilly.

7. CCBC has 73 councillors and Plaid Cymru have formed a minority administration with some of the independents. Currently its political make-up is as follows:

   - Plaid Cymru   32
   - Labour   32
   - Independent   9

8. Caerphilly was traditionally an area of heavy industry and mining and now has fairly deprived areas which are in need of inward investment. Although they have more welsh speakers than other councils in SE Wales it isn't as extensive as other regions in the North and West of the Country and 7.2% of the population speak, read or write Welsh and 0.7% are from ethnic minority communities.

9. The council was created in 1996 when local government was reorganised in Wales and the previous two tier system was replaced by 22 Unitary Authorities. It was formed from two former district councils and parts of two former county councils. Caerphilly county borough council is the 5th largest local authority in Wales and employs around 9,000 people making it the largest employer in the area and 10th largest in Wales.

10. A corporate management team led by the Chief Executive and four Directors undertakes day-to-day operation of the council's business. The Council operates a cabinet style of local government, led by a Leader of council who is supported by eight cabinet members. There is a customer services portfolio holder.

11. The council's Improvement plan for 2005-08 includes the following objectives:

    - Improve educational standards.
    - Protecting children from abuse and promoting development opportunities for children in need.
    - Maximise the safety and independence of vulnerable adults.
    - Reduce amount of waste going to landfill.
    - To enable people to feel safe in their communities.
    - To provide a high quality housing service.
    - Increased contribution of CCBC towards raising economic activity.
    - Deliver measurable efficiency savings across the authorities operations.
    - Deliver a high standard of customer care.
    - Council services and facilities that are suitable and accessible for all sections of the community.
    - Improve the sustainability of council operations.

- Improve performance management across the Authority.

12. The Customer First initiative was launched in 2003 to fulfil the council's aim of delivering services to customers that are both flexible and accessible. Since then a telephone contact centre has been launched and Customer First centres have opened in Penallta House in Ystrad Mynach, Blackwood, Pontlottyn, and Risca. Further Customer First centres are planned for Bargoed, Caerphilly, Newbridge and at Pontllanfraith council offices.

CCBC have decided to undergo this Customer Service Peer Review in order to take stock of their strengths and identify any areas for improvement in terms of Customer Service. They are also keen to contribute to "Connecting SE Wales" which is part of the WAG Making the Connections agenda.

Leadership and Governance

Strengths

- ✓ Strong cross party member commitment to Customer First
- ✓ The Chief Executive has a clear vision for improving customer services across the council and is committed to change.
- ✓ There is strong senior management commitment to improving customer services
- ✓ The Improvement Plan clearly sets out customer service improvement as a council priority

Areas for improvement

- There is a need for a clear shared vision and overarching strategy for improving customer service
- A business case is required to set out the rationale for change, the risks and resources required for implementation of Customer First
- The council would benefit from clearly setting out its core values as an organisation, this would provide a valuable context for the provision of customer services
- The Customer First Strategy Group would benefit from reviewing its role, membership and terms of reference
- The council should consider the role of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in review and development of Customer First

13. The Peer Review team were impressed with the level of cross party member support for the council's wider commitment to improve customer service and the Customer First project in particular. The portfolio holder for customer service is clear that the council exists to serve the needs of the public and as such all customer requests should be resolved in a suitable manner via the most convenient channel for them. The portfolio holder is also part of the Customer First Strategy Group which oversees the Customer First programme. The members' workshop provided evidence of the strong cross-party political commitment to face to face customer service provision. The development of Customer First centres is seen as a priority by elected members to meet the needs of the local community given the geographical and socio-economic character of the Borough.

14. The Chief Executive's vision for improving service delivery is primarily driven by the need to improve customer access particularly via face to face contact. The Chief Executive displays a clear commitment to improving customer service across the council.. He undertakes face to face briefings with managers on a quarterly basis, known as the "Management Network," in order to disseminate key corporate messages such as improving the customer first ethos across the council.

15. A new corporate management team is in place and there is a strong senior management commitment to improving customer services. Public Services follow up "Public Response forms" that come from the Call Centre. They discuss any operational issues, public response forms and complaints at their quarterly service improvement groups. In addition the Social Services Management Team formally review all stage 2

complaint reports at their team meetings to ensure that learning is shared and applied across the Directorate. This enables swift identification of recurrent complaints and any actions required to close the loop. The Environment and Planning Department keep a weekly log to monitor complaints received via elected members, MPs and the Chief Executive to ensure an appropriate speed of response. Officers attended over 300 Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings in the last twelve months. The Director ensures that his staff are kept aware of key corporate issues including customer satisfaction by regular attendance by senior staff at team meetings and the production of a Directorate newsletter. The Waste Forum affords an opportunity for the public to express views on a key environmental service that affects the community as a whole.

16. The 2005-08 Improvement Plan contains twelve objectives for improvement, one of which is to deliver a high standard of customer care. This demonstrates that the council view customer service improvement as an important priority.

17. Whilst there is a vision for customer services from the political and managerial leadership there is a need for this vision to be clarified, written down and shared with staff, members and customers. The frontline staff and customers workshops provided evidence of the vision not being cascaded down to the organisation as staff and customers were unsure as to whether a long-term vision for customer service in CCBC was even in place. The council should aim to create an excellent authority that delivers one vision which focuses on the needs of its customer and communities by ensuring that it has:
   • Services that are easily accessible by customers.
   • A culture and structure that provides excellent customer service.
   • Technologies that provide customers with flexibility to access and monitor service delivery.

18. Many of the pieces of the jigsaw are in place but a clear overall picture of where the Council is going in terms of customer service is missing. A number of reports have been presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee in recent years but there is no clear corporate Customer Service Strategy setting out the council's vision and ambitions. Customer First centres have been established in Blackwood, Pontlottyn, the new civic Offices at Ty Penallta, and we were told of future proposals at Risca, Caerphilly and Newbridge. The strategy should set out clearly the council's priorities which currently, given the character of the Borough in large part, reflects the desire to improve opportunities for face to face contact to promote social inclusion. This is as opposed to the need to maximise efficiency savings by reducing the cost of customer contact. This is a legitimate decision for the council to make to reflect local circumstances but it needs to be made explicit in the Strategy.

19. As a development of the above point the Customer First programme would benefit from a business case, or business delivery model, to set out the rationale for change, the risks the council faces in delivering its objectives and the resources required for implementation. During the workshop front-line staff were unsure as to why there was a need for the newly refurbished Customer First centres rather than the old cash offices. A clear business case would have the impact of communicating to staff and customers

the rationale behind the changes occurring and would help to get their buy-in to the programme.

20. The core values of the council are currently not set out and publicised to staff, members and customers. The council has published a Customer Charter detailing the ways in which the council will treat customers but the council would benefit from clearly setting out its core values more generally not just for customer services. It was apparent from the frontline managers/supervisors workshop that whilst they identified strongly with their services they had less of an appreciation of what the council as a whole expected from them. Core values define an organisation's culture which is about people's ideas, beliefs, values, behaviour and ways of working. These factors determine how things are done within the organisation. Values are fundamental to how customers are treated, how councils work with their external partners and how, as individuals, and within groups council staff work together to achieve the organisation's aims and objectives. A clear statement of core values sends a consistent message to all internal and external stakeholders as to what organisation they are working for or dealing with.

21. In terms of governance the council has set up a Customer First Strategy Group which has met twice since the May 2008 elections. It comprises senior members, the Director of Corporate Services and several Heads of Service and is attended by the Chief Executive when considered appropriate. The Customer First Strategy Group has been in existence for 5 years and it would benefit from a review of its' role, membership and terms of reference to reflect how the action plan arising from this peer review will be taken forward. Once the Customer Service Strategy is in place the group's key role will be to lead the implementation of this strategy across the council. The group would also benefit from the Chief Executive being a core member attending all meetings rather than those in which key decisions are made. The frequency of the meetings and its relationship to Cabinet and Scrutiny should also be reconsidered. These changes will enable the Customer First Strategy Group to drive the Customer First programme with renewed purpose and vigour. We particularly considered that there was an important role for Scrutiny (Policy and Resources Committee) in monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and Business Case we have recommended.

Corporate approach to customer access and delivery

Strengths

✓ An appropriately resourced Contact Centre has been put in place with a clear initial plan for moving contact from the back office to front office
✓ There are many examples of effective joint working with partners
✓ The council benefits from a corporate CRM system providing a platform for future development
✓ Good examples of out reach services being delivered in outlying areas.

Areas for improvement

• More communication and engagement is required to ensure there is a consistent understanding and appreciation of customer care by staff across all services
• Customer Service Charter and Customer Care Standards would benefit from being sharpened up and their profile raised with staff and the general public
• The extent to which each service can be dealt with at the first point of contact needs to be clearly defined and communicated to staff
• A clear plan is required for developing and delivering the transactional elements of the website, linked to the plans for face to face and the contact centre.
• A more co-ordinated approach is required for outreach and home services

22. Effective partnership working is helping the council to provide a seamless service to customers and a more effective use of resources. The examples of effective joint working with partners include:
   • the joint health and social care facility to be opened in the north of the County in 2010
   • a fully integrated mental health team is being developed which will have one point of contact
   • a joint adult social services duty and information team is in place again with one point of access
   • Shelter delivers services from the Customer First centres
   • the award winning CANDO programme between the police and the council.

23. The council has demonstrated its commitment to improving customer services by investing in a CRM system. This commitment is further evidenced through the planned programme of integrating back office systems with CRM which is being resourced using internal development resources.

24. In terms of out reach services, examples included the five rent collectors providing a mobile point of contact for tenants with general council enquiries as well as the service provided from the Pontlottyn office to the village of Fochriw every Tuesday by a member of staff using her laptop to take payments such as rent collections and council tax.

25. There is clear recognition of the importance of the customer albeit the council is not yet at the stage where it can assert that customer service is everyone's business. The peer review team's interviews with senior members of staff and workshop with frontline staff provided evidence that not all frontline staff are aware of the Customer First programme or of their role as the public face of the authority when delivering services at the heart of the community.

26. Staff and management suggested that silo working was still prevalent in the council, though perhaps not as ingrained as it has been in previous years. The Customer First programme has not concentrated on the cultural issues within the organisation that prevent effective customer service, such as breaking down silo working. There are pockets of good practice, specifically in Social Services and Refuse Collection in terms of customer engagement and analysing customer satisfaction to improve services. This practice should be disseminated across the organisation and this report suggests ways to do this in the Communication Strategy section later on. The staff workshop showed that staff were keen to work together to improve services and understand what each other does. Cross functional meetings have only taken place at Service Head/Manager level and not at staff level.

27. The Customer Service Charter and Customer Care Standards are rather long and would benefit from being sharpened up. For example Monmouthshire County Council's customer service standards for letters, e-mails, telephone, face to face and complaints are summarised onto one side of A4, laminated and then displayed prominently in all council offices. The profile of the customer care standards and charter are also low with the customers in the workshop unaware that they existed. Staff buy-in to the standards would be raised by displaying the Customer Charter, and when finalised the Customer Care standards, on the council's website and also prominently in the reception areas of all council offices.

28. The extent to which each service can be dealt with at the first point of contact needs to be clearly defined and communicated to Customer First officers. This is particularly the case in relation to face to face contact in the Customer First Centres when dealing with the more legislative and technical services such as Housing Benefits and Council Tax. The peer review team found lots of evidence of three way conversations ensuing between the customer, the Customer First officer at the counter and the back office service specialist on the other end of the phone as the Customer First officer became aware that they could not continue to deal with the customer's enquiry without further technical knowledge. Rather than the customer relaying their details and enquiry to the Customer First officer who then repeats them to the back office specialist the phone should be passed straight to the customer so that they can resolve their enquiry directly with the back office. Clearly setting out and communicating to Customer First staff the point at which common face to face enquiries will need to be referred to the back office for resolution will ensure that a more seamless and efficient service is delivered to the customer. However, this must not detract from the advocacy role that Advisors sometimes take on for customers.

29. There is a clear plan in place for the development of the Contact Centre stating which services will be re-engineered and transferred into it. However the review team were unable to find a similar plan to ensure the development of the council website from a communication tool to a more transactional website.

30. A more coordinated approach to out reach and home services is needed. Delivering Customer Services through the face to face channel does not just mean delivering services from one stop shops. It also covers all methods of service delivery that involve two or more people meeting and speaking face to face. This means that services delivered directly into people homes, for example where people are housebound, or out reach work into outlying communities also needs to be coordinated to make more effective and efficient use of resources, and to ensure the customer gets a joined up service.

Understanding and Engaging with Customers

Strengths

- ✓ Evidence of effective examples of consultation and engagement with local people
- ✓ Some examples of services seeking customer feedback and using it as a tool for service improvement
- ✓ Service improvements in Health and Social Care have been achieved through engaging with service users.
- ✓ Some use of customer insight and management information to improve services

Areas for improvement

- More widespread use or analysis of customer insight to help plan and personalise services is required.
- Greater use of life events to help sign post customers to related services delivered by the council or other public sector agencies
- Evidence suggests that complaints are not consistently analysed and learning applied and shared
- Consistent approach required to deal with compliments

31. The peer review team found many examples of good consultation activity and engagement with local people. Examples include the doorstep visits to inform residents of changes to the recycling service, the Viewpoint panel, Biannual Household survey, Waste Forum and Youth Forum. The council benefits from a well-resourced consultation team and thorough consultation strategy.

32. Some services are actively seeking service feedback and using it to inform service improvement. Public Services regularly call back customers to gain feedback and have set up service improvement groups to review complaints and customer follow-up sheets. Responses to the recent Public Services household survey highlighted customer confusion regarding the fortnightly recycling schedule as a result the service will now be delivered on a weekly basis. Social services actively promote feedback and complaints as opportunities for service improvement. Social Services assessment forms contain a section on the back for service users to comment on their experience of the service received. All stage two complaints are reported to the Social Services management team to enable shared learning.

33. Service improvements in Health and Social Care have been achieved through engaging with service users. Care Assessment documentation used by Social Services includes a section for service users to provide feedback on their experience of the service received during the assessment process. Social Services also contact service users by telephone to seek feedback on their experience of the service they have received. This enables recurring issues to be identified and addressed through modifying services.

34. Customer insight and management information is beginning to be used in some council services. Public services have monitored participation in recycling rates on a street by street basis and used this information to identify poor performing streets and target their education and sanctioning efforts in these areas. Community groups and schools are visited in poorly performing areas in order to help improve the recycling rates.

35. More widespread use and analysis of customer insight is required across all council services. The council should consider options to better understand the socio-demographics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour of their customers. Greater use should also be made of complaints, compliments, community engagement and customer satisfaction data.. More widespread use of the above sources of data will help define who the customers of Caerphilly are, how they would prefer to access the services of the council and then inform the development of council services to meet these needs.

36. Clustering services around key life events is a good way of ensuring that customers can be effectively sign posted to information and services that they might find useful. Examples of using "life events", and a variant on this theme, "circles of need" can be seen on the following websites, http://www.tameside.gov.uk/lifeevents http://www.chorley.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3011 but this principle is not restricted to websites. The same principles can be applied to mediated services where customer service officers, or call centre agents can use life events to add value to a customers call or visit.

37. The existing complaints system is based on an access database and as such is limited in terms of how many services can use it. The council should consider either redeveloping the system into a web enabled product accessible by all managers through the Intranet, or purchasing an off the shelf system. This would help to encourage the take-up and use of the system as well as improve the ownership of complaints as it could become a manager's responsibility to update the system as and when required. The council would also benefit from better corporate reporting on complaints performance and nature of complaints, and individual services would benefit from a more consistent approach to analysing and learning from complaints. The council could consider introducing a regular complaints journal that covers performance across all services and makes comparisons easy to make. The council should also consider publishing its performance in dealing with complaints on the council website.

38. In addition to the corporate approach to complaints recommended in the above paragraph the council would benefit from a structured corporate approach to dealing with compliments. Compliments are an opportunity to acknowledge and reward excellent staff performance, increase morale and identify where best practice is located within the council. The compliments policy could then be promoted to staff and customers through the website and Customer First centres.

Service re-design

Strengths

- ✓ Well planned and tidy initial transition of services into the contact centre
- ✓ A BPR team is in place and each service is subject to BPR prior to transfer to the contact centre
- ✓ Where BPR has been carried out services have been involved in the re-design ensuring that their knowledge is captured and used to add value.
- ✓ A corporate agile working group has been set up

Areas for improvement

- The council would benefit from reviewing out of hours services across the Council and how they could integrate with the contact centre
- Use of techniques such as Customer Journey mapping and emotional journey mapping could help improve service delivery and design.
- The council should carefully consider how it will increase the resource devoted to BPR
- A decision is required as to the corporate BPR methodology to adopt
- Consider a single phone number

39. The initial programme of transition of services into the Contact Centre was well planned with agreed timescales. Contact Centre staff had the opportunity to shadow officers from the back office of the initial services transferred and so they were fully trained to competently deal with the frontline service enquiries. Positive feedback was received from the senior management and frontline staff regarding the first two phases of the transition, namely Highways and the customer care service for Refuse and Street Cleansing.

40. A key strength for CCBC is having a Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) team in place. Each service is taken through the BPR process to identify service improvements, streamline services, identify efficiencies and identify which elements of the service are suitable to transfer into the Contact Centre. Rather than shoehorning the whole service straight into the Contact Centre this approach results in the removal of the burden of general frontline enquiries from back office staff, peaks and troughs of calls, e.g. during holidays, do not have to be resourced by the back office and most importantly improves the customers' experience of the service.

41. Managers from the services that have been transferred into the Contact centre have been involved in the BPR process to ensure that their knowledge is captured and used to add value. For example service managers involved in the transfer of Blue Badges from Adult Services to the Contact Centre have worked together to ensure that as many permutations as possible in terms of customer requests have been identified and can be responded to by the contact centre, as well as identifying opportunities to streamline the process.

42. A corporate agile working group has been set up and the Peer Review Team agreed that it was a step in the right direction for the council to start to consider important issues such as home and mobile working as a means of reducing costs and overheads to improve efficiency. Development of the document imaging system facilitates more efficient use of space and potentially agile working. The document imaging system has been introduced into Finance, Council Tax and Benefits services. The benefits were particularly evident in the Council Tax and Benefits teams where all supporting documentation is scanned and viewed electronically. Through using two VDU's the staff are able to view an application on one screen and all supporting documentation on the second screen whilst talking to the customer. This approach not only reduces the amount of office space required, it also accelerates response times by eliminating the need to retrieve hard copy documentation.

43. Out of hours services are very expensive to provide and the council would benefit from mapping and analysing these services to identify where they could be rationalised. Reference was made at the member and staff sessions to out of hour services in housing and social services and whilst these comments were not particularly negative it did raise the issue of how effective and co-coordinated such services were. There is also potential to provide the first point of contact via the contact centre at some stage in the future.

44. Alongside the more traditional BPR techniques the use of customer journey mapping and emotional journey mapping can help to provide the council with a view on how a service is delivered from a customer point of view, and what it feels like when accessing the service. Viewing things from a customer perspective or walking in their shoes can often highlight difficulties with the way organisations deliver services which are often designed around organisational silos and not customer needs. Further information can be found at:
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/public_service_reform/delivery_council/cjm.aspx

45. The council should consider how to build its BPR capacity. Options include further investment of resources into the corporate BPR team or training managers across all council services to ensure that the tools for service transformation are spread across the organisation.

46. There are many approaches to BPR, each has its own merits and many can help organisations be more efficient and effective if applied correctly and used consistently. Whether the council decides to use Lean, Continual Improvement, Balanced score card or any other flavour to meet its BPR needs is not important. What is important is that it is used across all services and across service boundaries. In time through consistent training and application the council will build a common understanding and vocabulary that managers and staff alike will understand and buy into. In many cases it is better to train staff and managers in the tools and techniques of service improvement as this will both grow the organisations improvement capacity and grow staff skills and knowledge. It is also often true that improvement to services is more readily accepted when it is managed from within the service as opposed to improvement being done to a service by a team of specialists. The specialist role is important in supporting and helping service improvement and in training staff but unless the team is very large it could become a real bottle neck because of the numbers relying on them for all BPR work.

47. The council should consider progressing towards a single phone number for telephone contact. This would fulfill two objectives – give the council a clear branding and identity and facilitate a consistent first point of contact for most telephone enquiries. It would have to be done as part of a phased programme, initially by transferring existing numbers to the Contact Centre (as has already been done for a number of services). To some extent it will represent an initial "leap of faith" because until transferred services are re-engineered through BPR the extent of resolution of queries at the point of first contact will be limited.

HR and Organisational Development

Strengths

- ✓ The council actively encourages suggestions for improvement through its Bright Ideas scheme
- ✓ Customer service competencies have been developed
- ✓ Service Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out and targets for improvement are built into service development plans.
- ✓ A PDR system has been introduced

Areas for improvement

- There is a lack of a corporate approach to customer care training, evidenced by the fact that the customer service training trialed in Customer First has not been adopted widely across the organisation
- The induction process would benefit from a refresh to include a greater emphasis on customer care
- Progress in implementing the PDR system needs to be accelerated and embedded
- Job descriptions should be reviewed to include customer care responsibilities

48. The Bright Ideas staff suggestion scheme is welcomed by staff and members as a way to improve services and encourage greater engagement of staff at all levels. The scheme has a high level of recognition from staff across all services as evidenced by the workshops and interviews undertaken by the peer review team.

49. All services have carried out Equality Impact Assessments and targets for improvement have been built into service development plans. This was evidenced in the service plan for Customer Services and also in the performance plan. Service managers are held to account for performance on equality targets as confirmed in our interviews with senior managers. A key strength of the council is that it is particularly disciplined and structured in terms of its approach to monitoring service performance.

50. The council has introduced a Performance Development Review system for all staff and published clear guidance for managers completing PDRs with their staff as well as for employees receiving a PDR.

51. Although Customer First has its own customer focussed training and development programme, it is vital that the plans to deliver customer care training to significant numbers of staff across the authority are realised. This will help to embed customer focus, raise customer satisfaction levels and help to build capacity across the organisation to deliver customer services. The workshops with frontline staff provided evidence that staff do not recognise the concept of the internal customer. The wider roll-out of generic customer care training to all council services, using the lessons learnt in Customer First, would help to embed customer focus in all services, raise customer

satisfaction levels and help to build capacity across the organisation to deliver customer services.

52. The induction process for new council employees would benefit from a greater focus upon customer service. The induction does not currently cover customer care standards or the complaints process. This contributes to a lack of a customer first ethos across the council.

53. The PDR system has been introduced but the review team found little evidence of staff receiving their PDR. There are no timescales in place to ensure that managers complete the first round of PDRs and no plan to monitor the compliance with PDRs across the council. The peer review team would recommend that all staff are provided with a set deadline to complete and send their PDRs to HR, this deadline should be at a convenient time to feed into the council's service planning cycle.

54. The peer review team found evidence from the workshops, interviews with managers and members that many frontline staff outside of Customer First do not fully understand their responsibilities in terms of customer care. This is compounded by the lack of a corporate approach to customer care training and the current induction process which does not focus enough on customer care. One way to start to build a customer first ethos across the council would be to review job descriptions so that they include customer care responsibilities and the customer care competencies currently being trialled in Customer First.

55. Capacity is an issue in terms of delivering customer services across the council. The peer review team found evidence of staff feeling under pressure due to their workloads. The council's current recruitment freeze and the policy of not filling vacancies is having an adverse impact on both customers and staff in terms of extra workload, quality of service delivery, efficiency, morale and sickness.

Programme management

Strengths

- ✓ The development and delivery of Ty Penallta evidenced good project management delivering a "flagship" project to budget and deadline.
- ✓ The programme of customer first centres have been delivered in Blackwood, Pontlottyn and Ty Penallta
- ✓ The Customer contact centre has been established
- ✓ The council has a clear model for project management

Areas for improvement

- A clear business case needs to be developed to support the proposed overarching customer service and channel access strategies

56. The council has a clear model for project management based on Prince2. Project management is included in the Senior Management Development programme to ensure that the council builds its capacity and skills in this area.

57. A clear business case needs to be developed to support the proposed overarching customer service and channel access strategies. This should provide an analysis of capital and revenue costs including:

- Internal programme and project staff resources – new posts or the costs of back-filling existing posts that are seconded onto the programme. Most of the supporting roles should not however incur additional costs as functions such as ICT and Communications for example can be accommodated through the reprioritisation of existing workloads.
- Any external support required.
- Technology infrastructure - an analysis of potential revenue savings resulting from Technology such as potential consolidation of hardware through investment in advanced server infrastructure, the decommissioning of any legacy applications no longer required and staffing through the adoption of more efficient business process and the consolidation of roles.
- Software costs
- Property costs
- Operational staff costs – the Contact Centre, and Customer First

ICT and IM strategies

Strengths

- ✓ Good investment in ICT infrastructure,
- ✓ Investment in corporate CRM system solution
- ✓ New website launched based on CMS system.
- ✓ Intranet well designed and easy to use.
- ✓ Good levels of ICT literacy and buy in from elected members.
- ✓ Good levels of ICT technical skill with in house team delivering CRM integration

Areas for improvement

- The ICT strategy is over four years old and requires a review
- Need to improve the dedicated or personalised information for elected members on the website
- Website content is mainly information focused rather than transactional
- Consider a policy of Web First to ensure that this channel is promoted to deliver efficiency savings
- Responsibilities for web content should be reviewed to ensure ownership from all service areas so that service information is up to date and accurate
- Consider a data warehousing facility to improve value and use of customer insight.
- Explore ways to accelerate CRM integration

58. The council has invested appropriately in its ICT infrastructure by building a new Data Centre and installing new ICT equipment and servers. The council has demonstrated it's commitment to improving customer services by investing in a Northgate CRM. 32 staff from services across the council were involved in the CRM system procurement process. This is a good example of the council empowering and engaging staff to ensure that new technology meets the needs of the business rather than vice versa.

59. The new website was launched in September 2008 based on the CMS system. In preparation for the peer review the review team conducted some mystery shopping on the council website. They found the system easy to navigate, information accessible, the links to forms and external websites worked, there was a clear process to submit complaints online and service failures such as missed bin collections could be easily reported online.

60. The Intranet is well designed and easy to use, but a programme of development to make the site more transactional would be useful. Integration into systems like payroll and HR so that staff can keep their own details up to date might be helpful, on-line payslips and staff forums would also encourage staff to regularly revisit the site.

61. Elected members are very complimentary about the ICT training and support offered to them by the council. They understand how ICT can assist them in carrying out their role, particularly in terms of progressing and monitoring customer complaints and queries. Using their laptops they were also able to access the council intranet and website thereby keeping abreast of what was current across the council and in the community.

62. The council would benefit from a review of the ICT strategy as it is currently over four years old. The new strategy should reflect the current business need and support the overarching strategy for improving customer service.

63. The council could consider developing a Members Portal (dedicated members intranet site) where information based on their wards, local areas, or portfolios can be pushed to them. Information relating to complaints received from people in their wards, with the ability to track progress would help them when dealing with local people. Details of planned road works, or council events could also be useful, as would information relating to council meetings and appropriate paperwork.

64. The council website is currently a vehicle for communicating information rather than delivering transactions. A clear and agreed plan is required to build transactional functionality into the website similar to the plan which is in place for the development of the contact centre. We are aware of the work taking place to develop the council website from a communication tool to a more transactional facility, however the council would benefit from this work being clearly documented and communicated to staff and customers. A detailed and appropriately resourced plan should be developed to ensure that the website transactional capability keeps pace with the services being delivered through the mediated channels. Generally speaking any service being redesigned so that it can be delivered through the contact centre should also be considered for delivery through the website. In most cases any development work for the website can be quickly re-purposed for the contact centre giving a quick win for the website.

65. The council should consider a policy of Web First to ensure that this channel is promoted to deliver efficiency savings. However, this must take in to consideration the Council's commitment to face to face services as part of its commitment to social inclusion and the local delivery of services. The impact is that the council are not taking advantage of the reduced costs that dealing with more transactions on-line brings. Research from the Contact Council has shown that transactional costs are much cheaper via the website e.g. an average face to face enquiry costs a council £30, telephone enquiries cost £1.50 and web-site transactions just a few pence. The council would benefit from a corporate approach around the use of intelligent E-forms to enable web-site users to transmit data and requests direct to systems or customer service staff.

66. All web content is currently produced within the Communications Unit and not devolved into each service. This can lead to lack of ownership from service areas, and the risk that the website becomes difficult to keep up to date and accurate. The frontline managers' workshop provided evidence of inaccurate and sometimes illegal service information being posted on the website. Responsibilities for web content should be reviewed to ensure ownership from all service areas and accuracy of information.

67. Consider a data warehousing facility to improve the value and use of customer insight. The lack of data warehousing facility which in turn restricts value and use of customer insight.

Accommodation / property strategy

Strengths

- ✓ The council benefits from modern customer first centres that are pleasant for customers to visit and for staff to work in.
- ✓ Excellent new flag-ship offices at Penallta House funded from in-house resources.

Areas for improvement

- The Asset management plan is out of date and requires a refresh.
- Once agreed the customer service standards should be displayed prominently in the reception area of all council offices.
- The proposals to refurbish the reception area of the Pontllanfraith offices should be finalised.
- Public facilities and signage to Ty Penallta could be improved.

68. The peer review team was impressed by the modern and welcoming Customer First Centres that they visited. They are largely DDA compliant. This view was corroborated by the local access group who stated that the council was very effective at making the adjustments required to ensure that its buildings are DDA compliant.

69. Penallta House provides an excellent working environment and has been a catalyst for increased joined up working between the services located there. Feedback from members, senior managers and staff confirmed that the housing of many services in one building has brought people together resulting in more chance meetings which improve the informal flow of knowledge across the council. The open plan nature of the building has improved communication as managers are more accessible to staff than when they had their own individual offices.

70. The Peer Review Team were provided with the 2004/05 Asset Management plan. The plan would benefit from a refresh to include an Accommodation Rationalisation plan outlining the forward plans for rationalisation and utilisation of council buildings. It should also link into the overarching strategy for improving customer services.

71. The customer service standards are not actively communicated to customers therefore they are unaware of the level of service that they should expect as evidenced in the customer workshop. This could be countered by displaying the new service standards, once assembled, in visible places such as on the wall behind reception areas. The peer

review team was unable to find evidence of public display of the customer charter or service standards at any of the Customer First Centres visited. The display of service standards would provide customer with realistic expectations as to the level of service that they will receive as well as the added benefit of service standards awareness amongst staff.

72. The council offices at Pontllanfraith house a number of key environmental services that attract a significant number of visitors and customers. From discussions with staff at a variety of levels it is clear that the current reception area is inadequate to meet the needs of visitors and customers. The council should finalise its proposals and consider when they should be implemented.

73. Given the scale of investment in Penallta House the council should consider how to improve facilities for the public within the offices. The ground floor refreshment facilities for staff are excellent and the council should consider whether these could be made available to visitors or at the very least provide some vending facilities in the foyer. Improved signage is also required to direct visitors along the main highways and within the complex of the buildings of which it forms part. Within the building public directional signs could also be improved particularly for toilet facilities. It is important that the community identify with the building as the hub for local services and the above suggestions would help in this respect.

Communications strategy

Strengths

- ✓ The Council's external monthly publication, "Newsline", is well-regarded by members, staff and customers
- ✓ Website successfully redesigned and re-launched
- ✓ Silver award in the CIPR Pride Awards 2008 for "Penallta House – A new way of working" for the internal communications programme
- ✓ The departmental internal staff newsletters are valued by staff

Areas for improvement

- The current branding for Customer First should be redesigned to include the councils name
- The inconsistency of the branding for all customer access channels should be addressed
- Internal communications require improvement to ensure that staff feel more informed of what is happening both within the Customer First programme and the council more widely.
- There is an opportunity with the re-writing of the communications strategy to improve internal and external communications

74. The authority produces a monthly resident's newsletter, "Newsline", which goes to every household and according to the customers, staff and members interviewed this is well received. Service managers appreciate that they are given the opportunity to feed any news or changes in service into each edition. "Newsline" is used to keep residents up to date in terms of council news and also to and celebrate council achievements.

75. The council received a silver award in the 2008 CIPR Pride awards for its extensive internal communications programme for staff moving to Penallta House. The programme set out how the building would work and how employees and management would effectively ensure the smooth transition into Penallta House and maintain business continuity.

76. Each directorate receives its own newsletter, for example Environment Matters for the Directorate of the Environment. The newsletters are valued by staff as a key tool for keeping them up to date, introducing news starters to the Directorate and celebrating colleagues' professional success.

77. Currently the Customer First branding does not contain reference to the council. This causes confusion for customers and does embed the Customer First programme into the rest of the organisation. The council should consider changing the brand to include the council name, for example "One Caerphilly" or "Service Caerphilly."

78. The consistency of the branding across all channels, namely face to face, call centre and website, requires improvement. For example, the face to face Customer First centre at Pontlottyn has a green background and the Customer First branding but the Customer First Centre at Ty Penallta is different with a white background and the Customer First branding not prominently displayed. In addition the website does not mention the Customer First programme, display the branding or the main call centre numbers. A more consistent look and feel to the branding will help to build staff and customer awareness of the Customer First programme and help to build an ethos of customer service across the council.

79. There is awareness amongst officers and members that internal communications require improvement to help to address the deficiency of cross service learning and sharing of information. Internal communication would be enhanced by launching a corporate newsletter to convey key corporate messages, such as the importance of a customer first ethos, across the organisation. Greater use could also be made of the intranet to improve internal communication.