

Cumbria County Councils Customer Services Strategy – June 2006

1.1 Introduction

Our Customer Service Strategy contains the aims, objectives and principles for the delivery of our services to our customers. It outlines the development plans and strategic approach to ensure the council meets its top priority of achieving Theme A of the Council Plan 2006-2008 'Improving Council Services', as well as supporting the councils aim of 'Building pride in Cumbria'.

The Council provides a wide range of services; it works alongside and in partnership with a range of organizations including district councils, parish and town councils and the voluntary sector. Strategic partnerships have been established to help deliver the Council's services, and joint working arrangements continue to be developed.

The services provided are currently delivered through 7 Directorates which contain specific functions as follows.

The Children's Services Directorate covers Children's Services, Education, Learning Support Services, Access & Inclusion, Standards & School Improvement, Lifelong Learning and Policy & Research.

The Adult Social Care Directorate (which is subject to restructuring) currently covers Adult's Services, Disability (including mental health and learning disabilities), Cumbria Care, Departmental Management Services and Performance Management.

The Finance & Central Services Directorate covers Finance, Audit, IT Client / CIS, Scrutiny, Members Services, Legal Services (inc. Corporate Governance) & Strategic Property Functions.

The Strategy & Performance Directorate covers Policy Performance & Partnership, Equality & Human Resources, Community, Communications & Information, Community Safety and Health & Safety.

The Public Protection Directorate covers Fire, Emergency Planning & Trading Standards.

Economy Culture & Environment covers Economic Development, Invest in Cumbria, Transport Planning, Environment & the Culture Unit.

The Client Services Directorate covers Highways & Infrastructure, Waste Management, Strategic & Commercial Procurement, Premises and Cumbria Care.

Our Customer Service Strategy will benefit people who live, work, visit or study in Cumbria. (The County covers a residential population of approximately 495 000). It will also benefit businesses and other agencies. It covers our internal customers (e.g. members of staff) in addition to our external customers. This is why we have chosen to use the widest possible definition by using the term "customer".

It is important to note that the term "customer" is used throughout the strategy rather than "citizen" or "client". We have deliberately **not used** these words interchangeably because they have different meanings.

- "Citizen" implies a resident of the county and someone exercising their statutory civil rights.
- "Client" refers to professional services and a person dependent on the protection of another.
- "Customer" can be defined as a person, company or other entity which obtains goods or services from another person, company or entity.

Cumbria County Council will seek to apply the same high standards of customer service whether someone has no choice but to use our service, or whether we are encouraging people to use

optional services provided by ourselves or a co-provider of services.

1.2 Aims

The principle aim of the strategy is to ensure the delivery of the customer access vision for citizens of Cumbria as shown below. [Accredited to Agilisys CCC Customer Access Project 21st March 2006]

The Customer Access Vision states "As a citizen of Cumbria, I know I can pick up the phone, switch on my computer or visit my local council access point and find information about the services delivered by my local authorities. I don't need to know what authority or which department is responsible, the person I talk to just answers my questions or puts me straight through to the person that can. I don't need to repeat myself to each person I speak to ; in fact most of the time they have a pretty good understanding of what I'm after when I tell them who I am. If I call to discuss a query I made in the past, the person on the other end of the phone can find my query quickly and easily so I don't have to repeat it to all of them."

We also have statutory obligations and performance driven culture around customer service with the focus on the customer, their needs and demands.

This strategy also ensures that the authority meets its legislative requirements in respect of e-government targets;

- R27 Consistent customer relationship management
- R28 E-mail and web form acknowledgements to include unique reference.
- R29 100% of public e-mail enquiries responded to within one working day.
- G24 Integration of CRM systems with back office activity
- G25 Facilities to support the single notification of a change of address.
- R23 Self-service access to council services outside standard working hours.
- BVPI 157 – Customer Transaction e-enablement

The strategy will also help drive standards up, in a visible way by demonstrating an improving service to our customers via the following indicators;

BVPI 3 The % of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by the authority.

LP3438 Residents' satisfaction about influencing public service delivery.

As well as setting a number of service standards specifically relating to service delivery such as;

- Dealing with 75% of calls at the first point of contact.

A full list of the proposed standards are contained as an appendix to this document.

Additional aims are to;

- establish an effective on-going consultation mechanism to ensure we are listening to our customers, being inclusive for all our customers, meeting their needs and demonstrating we have understood their demands.
- create partnership arrangements with the district councils to provide a unified approach for the delivery of all council services provided to customers.

1.3 Where are we now?

Currently the directorates have their own contact arrangements, which can sometimes confuse customers. As in most two-tier areas, customers can be uncertain where to go and puzzled when they have to go to different contact points for different services in the same town or city.

In the past, due to the wide spread customer contact arrangements in operation and lack of corporate service standards, the service offered to the public has differed depending on the circumstances and local arrangements of the various directorates. However, arrangements have been improving over the past 2 years and the actions underway and proposed in this strategy will further help to improve the customers experience.

Establishing Customer Service Standards as a basis for performance improvement.

Work is currently being undertaken by the Performance Improvement Officer in the Strategy & Performance Directorate to establish standards for key operational services which include Customer Service Standards. The standards will form the basis of performance measurement and are an important driver in continuing to improve the services to our customer.

In addition a joint approach to standard setting is being undertaken through the ACE Project involving the county and the district councils to allow for benchmarking.

Finally the national e-service delivery standards are to be adopted where appropriate to again allow for national benchmarking of service delivery.

As part of delivering continuous improvement there will be regular reports to Performance Group, CMT and Cabinet containing details of performance against targets, together with recommendations for improvement to senior management team and members.

Establishing a Customer Service Charter as part of the culture of the organisation. A charter is required so our customers are aware of what they can expect from us, as well as giving staff guidance as to what is expected of them when delivering services. The charter is to be the bond between the two elements.

A proposed draft Charter is included as an appendix to this document for information (this is subject to approval by all directorates).

The Customer Relationship Management System (CRM)

The Council's ICT Partnership Board with our technology partner Agilisys, has approved a business case for the implementation of CRM. The Council's Customer Access Steering Board are currently considering options for procuring a suitable CRM system. This will be reported to the Strategic Board in July and then Cabinet, if a major investment is required.

Development of joint working arrangements with the Districts and other partners.

There is agreement between the County and the Districts to explore the possibilities of joint working arrangements. A Customer Services Manager's Group has been created within Cumbria as a basis for joint working and sharing of good practice and a series of 'Action Learning Set Days' are to be undertaken in relation to Customer Services. This is being done as part of the ACE2 (Achieving Cumbrian Excellence) project. Work will also be undertaken to work with other key partners including parish councils, town councils etc.

Developing a culture of excellent customer services

In 2005 it was recognised that as part of the Council's commitment to improving customer service there was a need to invest in a comprehensive training programme, which would not only provide a corporate approach to customer service but respond to the different needs of staff delivering services across the organisation.

Staff remain our most important and valuable asset in terms of service delivery and as such we must continually **train, develop and support them** to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver quality services and meet the expectations of our customers. This will be
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done on a rolling programme and a budget of £20,000 is in place for the current year in respect of Customer service training for 20% of appropriate staff.

A training package is to be developed incorporating a number of factors which contribute to the establishment of a customer focused culture and excellent service delivery: The package is to incorporate:

Understanding customer demand, requirements and expectations

Corporate Service Standards

Corporate Communication Standards

Customer Charter

Tailoring our service – meeting specific needs of customers

Language Line - Interpreting Service

Listening skills

Dealing with Difficult Customers

Equality and Diversity

Implementation of signage for buildings and a new reception for the Courts

New signage guidelines have been produced, which include the corporate identity and are DDA compliant. Procedures are in place for ordering signs and preferred contractors selected, providing efficiency in costings, resources and timescales. A budget of £38,000 has been established to renew and improve signage throughout Cumbria County Councils customer contact points to raise the overall brand and image of the organisation.

A new reception, to improve customer care, is being installed in the Courts Building. The reception will have Customer Information Officers to assist customers with accessing services, signposting to other service providers and dealing with the general public enquires.

Telephone Contact

Research has shown that the Telephone remains the preferred method of choice for contacting the authority. The most recent being the survey undertaken in April 2006, via the Community Voice 'What do you think' which received 1231 responses.

In response to the question "What would be your preferred method of contacting the Council with future enquiries"? the response was as follows.

Preferred contact method.	% who identified this as method of choice.
Telephone	75
Face 2 Face	11
E-mail / website	10
Letter	4

Consultation from the same survey shows reasonable levels of satisfaction on contact with the Council.

In relation to the question. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received the last time you made contact with the Council? Show the following results:

Satisfaction level	% for level
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Very satisfied	24
Fairly satisfied	46
Neither/Nor	12
Fairly dissatisfied	9
Very dissatisfied	9

However, recent mystery shopping exercises undertaken by Agilisys show there is scope for improvement (these results are available in the First Time Fix Customer Journeys Report Version 1 October 2005)

1.4 What are the next steps to achieve the aims of the Strategy

Roll out of the CRM. The CRM is to be rolled out on a phased basis across all services, with the Registration Service and Children and Young People Services acting as pathfinders. The information captured from these services in terms of knowledge, responses, documentation and actions required to deal with the service will help to shape the overall roll-out plan.

We will also need to assess the implications of joining up the CRM system with the appropriate back office systems as part of the pathfinder work and develop business cases to inform the overall roll-out plan.

Telephone Contact:

There are a number of options that have been considered for telephone contact, to improve arrangements we propose to bring together all telephone contact for the County Council into a single dedicated contact centre. This provides a joined up solution for our services to our customers, is the most cost-effective, allows for consistent application of customer standards through single management of staff, joint training, performance monitoring etc. In the short term, it is likely that contact will be rationalised into a smaller number of themed areas (eg street scene, social care etc) with a series of golden numbers. This will be determined by the pathfinder work in registration and children and young people.

A joined-up approach adds value for the customer and the council and delivers savings. For example, sharing a Customer Contact Centre means sharing the costs of building maintenance and upkeep, compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and health and safety legislation, security and facilities management and IT and telecommunications networks and equipment. It also develops a culture where behaviour is focused on the customer. A joined-up approach can also assist with issues such as data protection and social inclusion.

Whilst not exclusive to a call centre public expectation is growing as to the times when we should be providing our services.

The Community Voice survey in response to the question "If the Council opened a customer contact centre, what opening times do you think it should operate?" brought the following responses.

Proposed Opening Time	% who identified this as preferred opening hours.
9am-5pm	18
8.30am-5.30pm	11

8.00am-6.00pm	24
8.00am-8.00pm	47

Clearly opening times will need careful consideration based on likely take-up and affordability, but wider accessibility than the current core 9 - 5 is inevitable if we are to improve accessibility.

Face 2 Face - One Stop Shops for Customers

Our aim for face to face contact is a co-ordinated and joined up approach across the council and with partner organizations so benefits can be achieved from efficient resource utilisation which will deliver real benefits to our customers in the form of improved service delivery.

In the long term, the Council's aim is to have an effective, joined-up face to face customer contact point in each of the 28 key service centres (KSCs) in Cumbria. These KSC have been identified using transport accessibility guidance which balance factors such as population density and travel times: essential in a sparse rural County such as Cumbria. We will develop these facilities in tandem with our plans for reviewing our building stock to ensure improved value for money (through rationalisation wherever possible) and improved accessibility (by having one effective, joined-up solution in each KSC). A copy of the map showing details of the contact points is attached as an appendix to this report

Most KSCs have a library which is a natural information point for many people in our communities. These should help us to provide quick win improvements and we will use the review of libraries taking place this year to assess scope for improvement.

In the short term, each of the 6 district councils in Cumbria have established, or are in the process of establishing face to face contact centres in each of the main towns/city. Rather than setting up our face to face contact points - which would only serve to confuse the public and would not be good value for money (because of the high cost of buildings, staffing etc) - we will explore partnership options to use the district council contact points.

Co-located services in convenient locations can be expected to result in a significant up-take of services (for example, increased footfall in a library co-located with a one stop shop as proven by previous experience).

The establishment of the CRM system in terms of being able to respond to service requests, the scripting of responses and required actions is key in allowing the Council to establish a co-ordinated and joined up approach.

Development of the CRM so it is available for mobile or outreach services is an area for review after the initial roll out and bedding in of the system. Mobile or outreach services can be defined as those which are taken out to customers who are unable to access our services at council centres. Mobile services may be provided in peoples' homes, in a mobile library, in a local community location such as village hall or pub (through the Pub is the Hub initiative). All these options will be considered to supplement the KSCs, especially in rural areas.

The council and partner organisations currently offer a number of mobile or outreach services which have tended to be developed in isolation. Going forward, we will seek to identify customers unable to access our services and consult with them in order to understand the range of services they need to access. We can then work as a council and with other organisations to provide appropriate groups of services.

Electronic Channels covering E-mail & Web (self service).

The Council has invested significantly in making its web site interactive: allowing for on-line applications for service, bookings, information provision etc. It has also pioneered with the district

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councils, the innovative Cumbria Information Hub which provides secure connection between authorities which will allow us to share information with our district partners and, if approved by Cabinet, allow the County Council to provide shared service desks across the county. We will continue to ensure interactive services meet all of our customer needs and are as user-friendly and accessible as possible. We will encourage greater take-up through better marketing of our web site and the information hub. We will also review the web site to ensure customers can find what they need quickly and easily and that the site is as useful, informative and welcoming as possible.

The principles and actions listed against the telephone channel apply equally here in terms of creating a series of 'golden e-mail' contact addresses which will be linked to key services, in order to simplify contact arrangements for our customers. Longer term these addresses could be routed to a centralized point for actioning.

Whilst the demand for electronic services shows only a 1% increase in Cumbria per year, it is expected that this method of delivery will become more popular as younger generations more familiar with new technology begin to access services

Post

To allow a full picture of customer transactions (4% still prefer to contact by letter) to be captured white mail traffic must also be incorporated into the CRM. Solutions such as Electronic Document Management Process allow for the scanning and capture of images which can then be shared electronically leading to speedier response times for customers and savings to the Council through more efficient storage of information.

The options as to the best use of the CRM in capturing details of white mail contacts will be established as part of the implementation roll out for the services, following the pathfinder work. This will identify the volume and extent of current systems used by directorates to hold and store information received in paper format and whether the option to consider integrating the system with the CRM is a proposition for which a cost effective business case can be made.

A consultation framework for listening to our customers and understanding what they want is to be established.

If we do not know what customers want, we cannot hope to meet their expectations. However, consultation is of little value unless we use it to inform our decision making, policies, procedures and service delivery.

It is also important to pass feedback from customers to staff at all levels. This will remind people that we are customer focused and need to constantly be thinking about and anticipating customer requirements.

Understanding our customers helps us anticipate and manage the demand for our services. A significant range of consultation is undertaken by the County Council at present. This will be brought together in a specific Customer Services Consultation Programme and will pick up on current techniques such as:

- Customer Service research using regular 'service' focus groups and surveys
- Community Focus Groups/Neighbourhood forums
- Comment Cards
- Elected Members' workshops
- Mystery customers
- Customer Service website section
- Staff focus groups

It is important to recognise throughout delivery of the Strategy that the council has wider social responsibilities and our developments need to embrace issues such as social inclusion and equalities.

The council must lead the drive to social inclusion and equality. This means ensuring that services are available through delivery channels where lack of skills or confidence and cost are not impediments to their use. In addition to the skills to be delivered as part of the customer service training package to ensure our services are inclusive we will link closely with the work of the Equalities Team to ensure that service delivery meets good practice guidance and the requirements required to assist with the Authority aim of achieving Level 3 of the Equality Standard.

UNDERPINNING TECHNOLOGY

A portfolio of delivery channels will be required into the medium term. The channel mix will change over time with increased acceptance of electronic channels and it is important to anticipate future tactical shifts within the Customer Service Strategy to reflect this. E.g. The demand for an SMS Text Service has grown in popularity over recent surveys. As a result a business case is to be established as to the implementation of such a scheme. The service could incorporate messages being broadcast in respect of road closures or school closure for those signed up to the service.

6. Action plan

The action plan extracts the **key** actions and provides details of who is responsible for progress and the timescales.

6.1 Annual review of Customer Service Strategy

We are also proposing that this Customer Service Strategy will be reviewed annually and reported back to CMT & Cabinet. A brief report will be produced summarising:

- Our performance
- Significant achievements
- Areas to address
- Dynamic analysis
- Changes (e.g. in policies, customer preferences, technology)
- New opportunities
- Revised strategy recommendations
- Updated action plan

6.2 The Action Plan

Ref.	Item	Action	Outcomes / timescales	Responsibility
1.3.	Where we are now.	Ensure that we have in place the underpinning principles, people and processes to enable us to deliver excellent services.	Improved customer and community relationships, increased customer satisfaction, efficiencies, staff satisfaction and retention.	The County Council's Customer Services managers (all directorates), communications, IT, Agilisys
1A.	Performance Management	Development of reporting systems to track service delivery being achieved against defined Customer Service Standards.	System in place to allow service standards to be measured, analyzed and reported on. March 2007.	The County Councils customer services managers (all directorates)
1B.	Liaison	Establish appropriate liaison mechanisms to facilitate continued strategic alignment.	Mechanisms in place. Ongoing.	The County Councils customer services managers (all directorates)
1C.	Review	Ensure that the Annual Review of the Customer Service Strategy is scheduled to fit in with the budgetary and planning process	Ongoing	The County Councils customer services managers (all directorates)
2.	Customer Service Charter	Creation of Charter.	Customers and staff aware of what to expect and what is required of them. 2006.	The County Councils customer services managers (all directorates)

Ref.	Item	Action	Outcomes / timescales	Responsibility
3A.	Customer Relationship Management System	Introduce the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to the pathfinder directorates as suggested in the strategy	By December 2006	The County Council's Customer Services managers pathfinder directorates, IT, Agilisys
3B.	Knowledge	Ensure that best practice is disseminated (e.g. through creating a repository of business cases).	Establishment of Knowledge repository. March 2007.	All County Directorates
4.	Partnership working on CRM system and Customer Service One Stop Shops.	Explore partnership possibilities and deliver on projects established as part of the ACE2 project.	Partnership working arrangements established and in operation. Ongoing.	IT / County Council Customer Services Managers (all directorates)/ Agilisys / Partners.
5A.	Training and Development	Development of a corporate Customer Service training programme to be finalized and embedded into Service Plans, mandatory training tied to posts.	Training programme finalized during 2006. Reviewed annually.	Customer Services Managers (all directorates) / Corporate Training & Development
5B.	Staff training and development	Rolling programme of training to be established for relevant staff.	20% of appropriate staff trained annually. Ongoing.	Customer Services Managers (all directorates) / Corporate Training & Development
1.4.	Next Steps to Achieve Aims	Take a co-ordinated joined up approach to developing delivery channels built around customer needs.	Synergies, savings, integrated joined up services, best use of new and existing investments and assets.	The county councils customer services managers (all directorates) District Councils + partners, Agilisys
1.	Telephone Service	Migrate directorates to a single, dedicated customer service centre.	Develop a proposal for the creation of a customer service centre, including the reduction of advertised telephone numbers by December 2006.	The County Council's Customer Services managers (all directorates)
2A.	Develop One stop shops	Initially the county, working in partnership with the districts, will identify and develop six Customer Service One Stop Shops - one in each district.	Creation of a county wide network of one stop shops – as per Strategy vision. The first six One Stop Shops will be identified and created by December 2007.	The county councils customer services managers (all directorates) District Councils + partners

Ref.	Item	Action	Outcomes / timescales	Responsibility
2B.	Satellite Customer Service Centres	Develop a network of Satellite Customer Service Centres to support and complement the One stop shops	Provide a range of public services as close as possible to where people live. Ongoing.	County Council, District Councils and other partners
2C.	Mobile services	Identify opportunities for partnership working in relation to mobile and outreach services.	Opportunities identified to be explored and implemented. Ongoing.	The County Council's Customer Services managers (all directorates), communications, IT, Agilisys
3.	Self Service	Improve the quality and accessibility of our internet / intranet services to customers.	Increased activity in service delivery through the web, also ensuring that the council meets e-gov targets. Ongoing.	The County Council's Customer Services managers (all directorates), communications, IT, Agilisys.
4.	Post	Develop a corporate consistent approach for dealing with incoming mail. This system will need to be linked to the CRM system for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.	This will ensure the efficient tracking, and dealing with, of service requests. To be developed by December 2007.	The County Council's Customer Services managers (all directorates)
5A.	Consultation programme	Development of a consultation programme specific to Customer Services.	Rolling consultation programme established and implemented by March 2007.	Customer Services / Communications.
5B	Publicity & Communication Framework	Development of communication framework and action plan.	Framework and action plan implemented by March 2007.	Customer Services/Communications.
6.	Implementation of relevant technology.	Continuous review of technology and delivery systems to respond to customer demands. E.g. Geographical Information System.	Design and implementation of new systems to improve service delivery when appropriate. Ongoing.	IT / Customer Services / Agilisys / Appropriate Directorate

This table cross references existing strategy's and initiatives to show cross over and where there is the need for alignment.

BUILDING PRIDE IN CUMBRIA	Alignment / synergies / opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving council services 	<p>Increase resident and staff satisfaction. Implement a Customer Contact strategy and Customer Service Standards. Improve performance management arrangements and establish an Information Hub.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the health and well-being of adults 	<p>Partnership working with health authorities to provide joined up services.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating safe and secure communities 	<p>Ability to target information or initiatives to specific communities or groups as well as providing a safe environment for staff and customers.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the life chances & well being of children and young people 	<p>Increase engagement with the community. Partnership working with libraries, and learning providers.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making Cumbria more prosperous 	<p>Increase participation in cultural events and the number of people who borrow from libraries.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating and protecting a high quality environment for all 	<p>Increase resident satisfaction with their area as a place to live. Customer Service Centres designed to support environmental sustainability, and neighbourhood locations reduce pollution from travel.</p>
Strategy / project / initiative	Alignment / synergies / opportunities
Social inclusion	<p>Wide ranging consultation strategy. Delivery channels and enabling technology designed to maximise opportunities for access for all customers.</p>
Information Strategy	<p>Corporate knowledge engine will facilitate enquiries.</p>
Freedom of Information	<p>Consistent approach to dealing with enquiries required.</p>
Data Protection Act	<p>Consistent approach to dealing with enquiries required.</p>
Disability Discrimination Act	<p>Customer Service Centres and other services designed to comply with DDA and best practice standards.</p>
E-government Priority Services & Transformation Outcomes	<p>Customer Service Strategy relevant to many items – e.g. contact centre, portal, customer satisfaction targets, payments, multiple delivery channels etc.</p>
Equality & Diversity	<p>Service uptake to be tracked and monitored to provide information on BME users of services.</p>
Neighbourhood initiatives	<p>Satellite Customer Service Centres provide services where customers need them, and make best use of council assets and investments.</p>
Community Consultation	<p>Building on current framework and providing examples of best practice.</p>