



Customer Service Strategy 2009 -2012

Improving customer service for all those that live and work in
Spelthorne

Introduction

Spelthorne Borough Council's aim is to provide an accessible, convenient, responsive and high quality service. Whilst we have been making improvements to our customer services and service accessibility, we are keen to do more to ensure that we consistently deliver an excellent service. The Customer Service Strategy is intended as a framework to plan how we will develop our Customer Services over the next three years, both to develop and improve the service we offer our customers. This Strategy will ensure that the whole council is able to;

- Provide a consistent level of service that is delivered to common standards, recognising customer diversity and individual requirements;
- Increase customer involvement and engagement in the design and delivery of Council services;
- Promote a "customer first" culture where customers are valued and offered a quality service;
- Make it increasingly possible for customers to self serve, and find what they want easily and quickly from the Council's website;
- Improve the ability of staff to solve problems, and empower staff to put things right at the first point of contact with the customer;
- Provide services that are efficient and accessible to all sectors of the community;
- Ensure that people understand what services Spelthorne Borough Council provides and are reliably informed about them;
- Listen and understand our customers' expectation of our services and respond by implementing improvements and managing our services accordingly.

The Council's Vision

We will provide our customers with:-

- The information they require at the first point of contact;
- A service which meets their needs and with which they are satisfied;
- A service which is affordable to the Council.

Customer Focus

The key principles in delivering this vision are clear; it means putting the customer at the forefront of our business planning, providing high levels of customer care, resolving 80% of enquiries at the initial point of contact, ensuring customers receive reliable, consistent, coherent and efficient service. It will also increase capacity for professional staff, providing economy of scale in terms of reduction in costs and increase in capacity.

Key Principles

- Accessibility and inclusiveness – making services accessible, giving customers the opportunity to make contact with us in a way, at a location and at a time convenient to them and proactively addressing issues of social exclusion, equality and diversity
- Cost-effectiveness and value for money
- Quality and consistency – providing reliable, accurate, timely and easily understandable information and efficient services
- Joined-up service delivery – treating the customer as a customer of the authority and not on a service-by-service basis
- Enabling staff – ensuring our workforce has the appropriate skills and tools to provide quality services.

A commitment to excellence in customer services must be part of the organisational culture at all levels. The Council’s ability to deliver modern and efficient customer services will depend upon good leadership and the capacity within the organisation to manage change and re-think how things are done.

National and Local Drivers

There are a number of national initiatives making customer services increasingly important, they are:

National Drivers
Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). From April 2009 the CAA will replace the CPA, Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The CAA will look at the public services in an area delivered by councils and their partners including the private and voluntary sectors.
The Local Government Reputation Project, which addresses the current poor perception of local government.
Gershon (Efficiency) Agenda, which every Council now uses to deliver improvements in service delivery.
The Choice Agenda, which advocates the need for high quality public services that are flexible, accountable and personalised.
E-enabled services, which should allow better access to services at lower costs.
The “Varney Report” which sets out the opportunities to deliver better public services through joining up service provision across the public sector, and by engaging more directly with users in the design and delivery of services.
The DCLG White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” which majors on resident consultation, increased choice, in method of communication, engagement and service delivery.
Avoidable Contact NI14 – The aim being to ensure that the customer’s experience when contacting their local council is one which is responsive, timely, efficient and cost effective.

Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

In a recent survey carried out by the DCLG into user satisfaction the following was found:-

- 76% of citizens trust local authority websites but only 12% actually use them to find information and 86% feel under informed;
- In the last twelve months alone most citizens contacting local government have done so by telephone (78%); in person (28%) and by letter (18%), with just (8%) by e-mail and (7%) using internet/website. (Indicative costs for these methods of communication are shown in section 2 of this document).

In addition to these national drivers there is a range of local drivers which seek to improve communication, access, consultation and cost effectiveness of service delivery.

Local Drivers
Customer Charter – The aim of the Charter is to set out our commitment for the service we deliver and the standards that customers can expect from us.
Communications Strategy – The aim of this strategy is that all customers, internal and external, feel well informed about the Council, its priorities and services, and can obtain information, at a time that suits them, using a variety of different methods.
Council's 12 priorities - Spelthorne Council has agreed to focus on 12 key priorities with the aim of improving the quality of life for the whole community.
Equality and Diversity Strategy - The Council is committed to providing equality of opportunity, tackling unfair discrimination and promoting good relations between groups regardless of age, gender, disability, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation or religious belief in the way we deliver services and as an employer and training provider.
Local Strategic Partnerships - Bringing together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together
Safer, Stronger Spelthorne Partnership Community Safety Strategy 2008
Technology Road Map

Delivering the Strategy – Key Principles

The following key principles will ensure that Spelthorne Borough Council will deliver excellent customer services.

1. Accessibility and Inclusiveness

Customers' expectations of the organisations they deal with are rising all the time. Services should be built around the needs of our customers giving them a choice; they should be more accessible, convenient, responsive and more inclusive through a greater range of access channels. The cost of providing these channels can vary greatly depending upon the complexity of the enquiry.

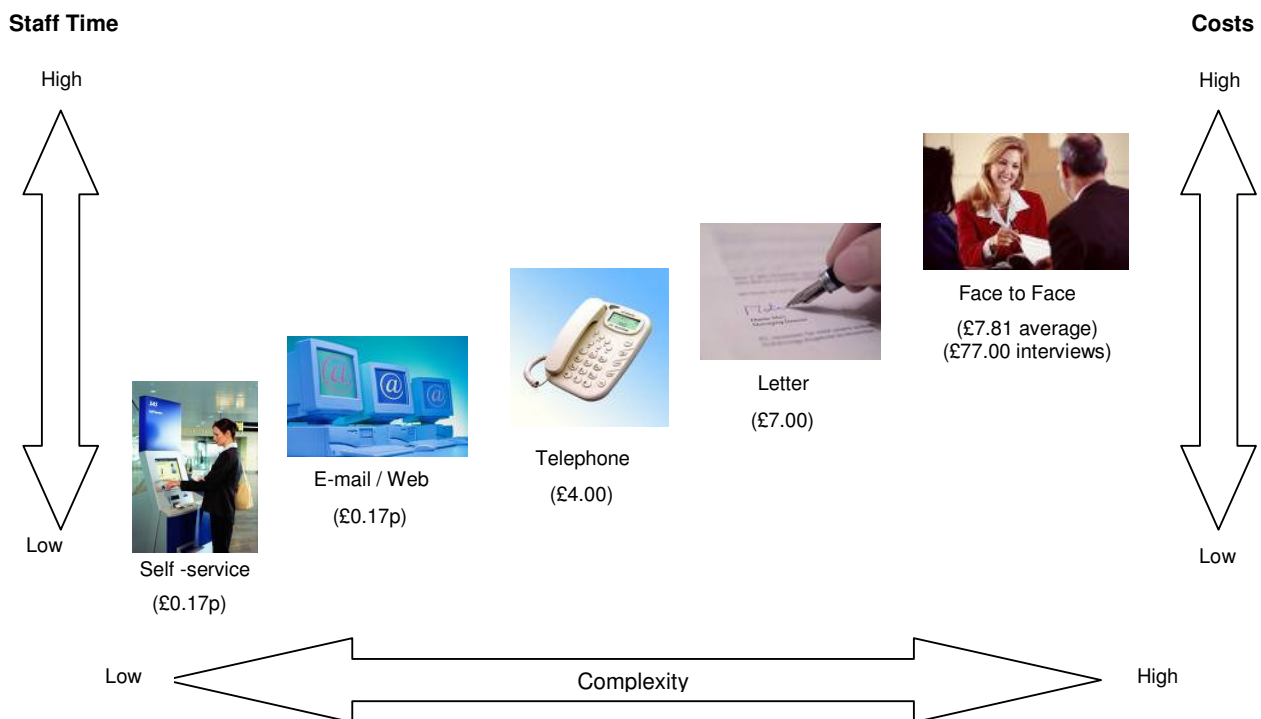
The Council is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity and access to all its services for everyone in Spelthorne. We recognise that everyone is different and that these differences are to be equally respected and reflected in what we do and how we do it.

We aim to ensure that no one is denied access or receives poorer service because of their age, race, colour, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, cultural or social background or religious belief.

2. Cost-effectiveness and value for money

Customers have increasing expectations in the services we deliver. In order to meet these expectations we need to ensure the Council delivers value for money in its service provision and use of resources. Effective customer services should encourage a proportion of customers to use alternative more cost-effective methods of contact. The Customer Service Strategy is an essential and vital component of our response to the value for money challenge for the Council.

Communications Channels



A mix of electronic and conventional channels must be available for effective and efficient service delivery. But we must be mindful of the costs associated with each access channel. As shown in the above diagram the most cost effective method is the self-service option and the most expensive being face-to-face.

3. Quality and consistency

We will build our services around the needs of our customers and not organisational structures. We must bear in mind that, the average customer, the way the Council is structured is both unknown and irrelevant,

Many aspects of the Council's organisation need to be reshaped if we are truly to deliver customer facing services. This process has already begun through the commitment to develop the Customer Service Centre.

Through the Business Improvement Programme we have embarked on a wide-ranging programme to review and re-think many of our processes. The focus is on seeing things from the customer's perspective, and looking at processes holistically including feedback to the customer.

We will complement the use of technology by developing strong relationships and reporting mechanisms across our services. To ensure improvements are achieved service planning will play a key role. As and when customer needs are identified they must then be fed into individual service plans, setting measurable targets and with the necessary resources identified and recognised.

4. Joined-up service delivery

We will treat customers as customers of the authority and not on a service-by-service basis.

There are opportunities to deliver better public services through:-

- joined-up service provision across the public sector;
- engaging more directly with users in the design and delivery of services,;
- working with partners to provide seamless services across organisational boundaries and
- achieve cost-effectiveness.

It may be necessary to introduce additional skills or resources.

As joined-up services develop, there may be many instances where customer needs can be met without referral to another organisation, such as Surrey County Council.

Customer Service will be the focus of our own plans to put 'joined-up' government into practice. Both corporately and within service areas, the authority will initiate specific linkages and projects with key partners and agencies. We will learn from best practices elsewhere and look for key partners to work with us on specific initiatives.

A review of processes and procedures across the Council is underway and should result in improved joined-up working, the delivery of services appropriate to need, better information management and the integration of front and back office support.

5. Enabling staff

Service to the customer is the primary objective of this strategy. All of the Council's staff contribute towards this and it is key to ensure they have the appropriate training, tools, support and authority to take ownership of and resolve customer enquiries. This will involve a cultural change whereby the old method of passing customers from pillar to post will be replaced and we intend to adopt a 'can do' approach from whoever receives the enquiry.

We need to avoid "specialist staff" within services having to get involved in dealing with general straightforward enquiries which could be handled by staff within the Customer Service Centre.

Appendix 1 - CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Key Principles	Actions	Outcomes	Responsible Service / Officers	Timescale	How success is measured
<p>1. Accessibility and Inclusiveness</p> <p>To make services more accessible, convenient, responsive and more inclusive through a greater range of access channels.</p> <p>To make information more available to customers on the level of service they can expect when requesting services from the authority including response times.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To carry out a Customer Satisfaction / Access survey on council services to ensure improved service delivery. 	To improve access to services for all customers of the authority by providing greater choice of access channels to suit their needs,	Customer Focus Group / Head of Customer & Office Services / Heads of Service.	Jan 2010	<p>90% of visitors are seen with 5 minutes.</p> <p>Establish a base line during 2009 and seek year on year improvement.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To promote the use of self-service options. ➤ To updated all Customer Service standards for each service. ➤ To publicise the Customer Service standards in the Borough Bulletin and make information leaflets available in all council and partner sites. ➤ To promote and increase take up of web-based service. 	To make customers aware of the level of service they can expect and encourage them to make comments / suggestions.	Head of Customer & Office Services	March 2010	<p>Increased take-up of service requests by self-service option by 5% by 2011</p> <p>Publication of charter information in spring issue of Borough Bulletin 2010.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To produce a comprehensive, but compact contact directory for customers to ensure they are able to contact the correct service first time. 	Reduce the number of Avoidable Contacts.	Communications Team	Dec 2009	Launch of Contact Directory in spring edition of Borough Bulletin 2010.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To build capacity within the Customer Service Centre to enable more general enquiries to be dealt with at first point of contact via telephone, e-mail and interaction with back-office systems. ➤ Include information of Interpretation and Translation Service at all staff inductions 	<p>Will enable customers contacting the authority to take advantage of the extended opening hours available through the Customer Service Centre.</p> <p>The aim of the interpreting service is to assist non-English speakers, the sight and hearing impaired, in accessing council services, providing a better service both to ethnic minority groups within the Borough and to overseas visitors.</p>	<p>Through B.I.P. reviews. / Head of Customer & Office Services.</p> <p>Human Resources</p>	<p>On-going as per B.I.P. Programme.</p> <p>2009 - 2010</p>	<p>Increase the % of enquiries received and resolved by the Customer Service Centre from 45% to 60% by 2011.</p> <p>Monitor number of requests and instances where we could not deliver the service and identify solution.</p>
<p>2. Cost-effectiveness and value for money</p> <p>We need to ensure the Council delivers value for money in its service provision and use of resources. Effective customer service should encourage a proportion of customers to use alternative more cost-effective methods of contact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To review and redesign systems and processes to make full use of the new technology available (rather than simply automating old processes) ensuring full integration with existing systems. ➤ To re-think the processes involved in dealing with customer contacts across all access channels, service by service. ➤ Identifying general 	<p>Access channels that are cost efficient representing excellent value for money.</p> <p>To enable customer enquiries to be dealt with at the initial point of contact. Making as many services as possible available for people to self-service.</p>	<p>B.I.P. Reviews</p> <p>B.I.P. Reviews</p>	<p>2009 – 2011</p> <p>2009 – 2011</p>	<p>By quantifying processing costs during the reviews and identifying measurable efficiency saving as part of the business case.</p> <p>To demonstrate that the cost per customer contact has been reduced from its current base. (For example from £4.00 per telephone enquiry to £0.17p by using the self-service option.)</p>

<p>3. Quality and Consistency</p> <p>We will build the services around the needs of our Customers and not organisational structures, providing significant enhancements to the service.</p> <p>Many aspects of the Council's organisation need to be reshaped if we are truly to deliver customer- facing services.</p> <p>The focus is on seeing things from the customer's perspective, and looking at processes as an entirety from the start to the end including feedback to the customer.</p> <p>We will compliment the use of technology by developing strong relationships and reporting mechanisms across our services.</p>	<p>enquiries which should be channelled through the Customer Service Centre, if helpful for the customer.</p>		<p>B.I.P. and Heads of Service & ICT</p>	<p>2009 – 2011</p>	<p>To demonstrate that the cost per customer contact has been reduced from its current base. (For example from £4.00 per telephone enquiry to £0.17p by using the self-service option.)</p>
	<p>Develop supporting technology to improve service delivery - through improved web site / content management.</p>	<p>Quick and easy access to systems / up-to-date information resulting in faster enquiry service resolution.</p>	<p>B.I.P. Board / MAT / Heads of Service and ICT</p>	<p>2009 - 2010</p>	
	<p>Obtain a single view of the customer through the use of a Customer Relationship Management System (CRM)</p> <p>Introduce and maintain clear records and tracking processes.</p>	<p>Customers will receive improved service delivery by enabling staff to have access to their recent transactions in one central area.</p>	<p>Heads of Service</p>	<p>2009 - 2011</p>	<p>Increase the numbers of customer contact details logged on the Contact Management System by 20% by 2011.</p>
	<p>Encourage individual Services Plans to include measurable targets in relation to customer service delivery for improving responsiveness, quality and cost effectiveness.</p> <p>We will review our Complaints procedure to ensure it is fit for purpose.</p>	<p>Improved customer service delivery.</p> <p>Identify priorities and resource implications.</p> <p>To improve what we do, therefore improving customer service delivery by listening and responding to customer suggestions / complaints.</p>	<p>Customer Focus Group / Management Team</p> <p>B.I.P. / ICT and Head of Customer & Office Services.</p>	<p>March 2010</p> <p>As per B.I.P.Programme</p>	<p>Publish achievements against targets.(For example processing of applications, telephone handling statistics.)</p> <p>To report to Standards Committee on a quarterly basis on number of complaints received by service, response times and changes</p>

<p>4. Joined-up Service Delivery</p> <p>Customer Service will be the focus of our own plans to put 'joined-up' government into practise. Both corporately and within service areas, the authority will initiate specific linkages and projects with key partners and agencies. We will learn from best practices elsewhere and look for key partners who will work with us on specific initiatives.</p>	<p>To encourage services, where appropriate, to consider gaining the Customer Services Excellence accreditation.</p>	<p>To improve overall customer service delivery.</p>	<p>Customer Focus Group</p>	<p>2009-2012</p>	<p>implemented as a result of feedback from customers.</p>
	<p>To develop integration between the CRM system within the Customer Service Centre and relevant back office systems where appropriate.</p>	<p>Will facilitate quicker resolution of customer enquiries and will make processes more efficient by reducing the need for double entry of information.</p>	<p>B.I.P. / ICT</p>	<p>As per B.I.P.Programme</p>	<p>To assist with Increasing the % of enquiries received and resolved by the Customer Service Centre from 45% to 60% by 2010. Providing more efficient back-office processes.</p>
	<p>To improve joined up working, the delivery of services appropriate to need, better information management and the integration of front and back office support.</p>	<p>To treat customers as customers of the authority and not on a service-by-service basis.</p> <p>As joined-up services develop, we should be able to resolve a significant number of customer enquires without the need to refer them on to other organisations, such as Surrey County Council.</p>	<p>B.I.P. / ICT</p>	<p>As per B.I.P.Programme</p>	<p>As above</p>

<p>5. Enabling Staff</p> <p>To promote the customer focused culture throughout the authority.</p>	<p>Re-launch customer service awareness into all appropriate training courses e.g. managing diversity, corporate induction.</p> <p>To establish a Corporate Customer Focus Group, with representatives from all front-line services.</p>	<p>This should provide higher quality of services which will result in more satisfied customers.</p>	<p>Human Resources / Head of Customer & Office Services.</p> <p>Head of Customer & Office Services</p>	<p>On-going as from Nov 2009</p> <p>Nov 2009</p>	<p>Will help to improve customer satisfaction levels.</p> <p>Achievements against targets as identified in Action Plan of group.</p>