Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel Agenda

SCRUTINY

Epping Forest District Council

Customer Transformation Task and Finish Panel
Monday, 15th September, 2008

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Time: 7.30 pm

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry, Office of the Chief Executive
email: ahendry@eppingforestdc.gov.uk Tel. 01992 564246

Members:

Councillors B Rolfe (Chairman), J M Whitehouse (Vice-Chairman), D Bateman, A Boyce, Mrs R Brookes, J Demetriou, Ms J Hedges, Mrs J Lea, R Morgan and J Philip

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

2. **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

   (Assistant to the Chief Executive) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

   (Assistant to the Chief Executive). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

   In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

   This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

   Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

4. **MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING (Pages 5 - 10)**

To consider and agree the notes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1 July 2008.

5.   TERMS OF REFERENCE (Pages 11 - 12)

(Chairman/Lead Officer) To note the attached updated Terms of Reference. The Panel are asked at each meeting to review this documents.

6.   NATIONAL INDICATOR 14 – AVOIDABLE CONTACT (Pages 13 - 18)

NI 14 is one of the 198 indicators against which local government will be assessed within the new performance management framework agreed between the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association.

Local authorities are required to report on these indicators at different frequencies. In the case of NI 14, the reporting interval will be annual. Local authorities will first report NI 14 data in April 2009, with council's expected to have the mechanisms in place in time for data collection to begin in October 2008.

Where the partners in a Local Area Agreement choose NI 14 to be one of their key indicators, a formal target for reducing avoidable contact will be agreed (as per the LAA frameworks). The Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership has elected not to nominate NI 14 as a Key Indicator within the Essex Local Area Agreement 2.

However, the District Council will be expected to report annually on performance against NI 14 to the Department of Communities and Local Government via the Data Interchange Hub. The Audit Commission will use the national indicator set to inform its assessment of performance and improvement for Comprehensive Area Agreement.

Although NI 14 is an important measure in its own right, many authorities are already seeing the reduction of avoidable contact as a key part of their wider programmes to improve services to customers and reduce costs.

Attached at to this agenda is the full definition, calculation and reporting requirements for NI 14.

In response to the introduction of NI 14, the Department of Communities and Local Government, in conjunction with the Cabinet Office and the Improvement and Developing Agency, have published the attached joint guide to NI 14, based on work undertaken in a number of pilot authorities.

Officers will make a presentation to Members of the Task and Finish Panel on the implications of NI 14 to the authority and outline options as to how the Council may approach the collection of the Data.

7.   PROVISION OF RECEPTION SERVICES AT CIVIC OFFICES

As detailed within the scoping report considered at the Panel's initial meeting, the Council's then Customer Services Consultants, undertook a performance review from a customer's perspective and reached a number of conclusions around areas for improvement.

One of their key findings was in relation to visitors' experience at the Civic Offices, where there are five reception desks, at diverse locations throughout the complex. It

was concluded that this is confusing for customers and that the Council should look to simplify the arrangements, with an aspiration of achieving a single point of service / information.

In order to assist Members' consideration of the issue, it is proposed that the Panel tour the reception areas, where officers from the relevant Service Areas will explain the type of services provided and highlight some of the current practical difficulties for customers.

8.   VISIT TO ONE-STOP SHOPS

The Panel will receive an update on the results of investigations with other authorities regarding a visit to view a "One-Stop Shop". It is hoped that venues / dates can be confirmed.

9.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To agree a date for the next meeting of this Panel.

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EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF CUSTOMER TRANSFORMATION TASK AND FINISH
PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 1 JULY 2008
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 8.43 PM

Members Present:	B Rolfe (Chairman), , A Boyce, Mrs R Brookes, Ms J Hedges, Mrs J Lea, R Morgan and J Philip
Other members present:	
Apologies for Absence:	D Bateman
Officers Present	D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Chandler (Assistant Director - Community Services and Customer Relations), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), S Mitchell (PR Website Editor) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

1.   **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

The Panel noted there were no substitute members.

2.   **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

3.   **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Deputy Chief Executive took the Panel through the draft terms of reference. As background information the Panel noted that there was a working party some years back, set up under the then Portfolio Holder, that looked at the potential Customer Transformation Programme. The Working Party had commissioned an external company, Steria Ltd, to review customer service performance and identify areas for improvement.

The initiative was eventually held in abeyance until such times as the affordability of the project could be assessed, given the pressure on the Council's revenue budget and uncertainty around the cost of the new Waste Management Contract. Now that the Council's Medium Term Financial Forecast is clearer, there is value in revisiting the Customer Services agenda to see what improvements could be practically achieved.

The Panel then considered the terms of reference, discussing each point in turn, and agreed them, noting that under item 5 of the terms of reference they would be taking special note of using plain English and doing away with jargon in dealings with the public.

The Panel then went on to discuss what start time would be preferred by the members. They decided on 7.30pm. There was also a plea that the meetings not be held on a Tuesday.

> **RESOLVED:**
>
> 1) That the Terms of Reference for this Task and Finish Panel be agreed as set out in the agenda and submitted to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting for their endorsement.
>
> 2) That the Panel agreed a start time of 7.30pm for future panel meetings.

4.   SCOPING REPORT

The Panel considered the Scoping report which set out the background to the Council's Customer Transformation programme. This has long been an aspiration of the council dating back to 2002. In 2005 the council commissioned an external company (Steria Ltd.) to review customer service performance and identify areas for improvement. They concluded that:

1.   Opening hours are not designed around customer needs, in particular with respect to telephone enquiries.

2.   The Authority appeared to suffer from a lack of internal communication and adherence to standards.

3.   Five reception desks in the Civic Offices is too many and confusing.

4.   Telephone answering performance is poor, with a propensity to pass the customer on.

In September 2005 the council endorsed the findings of the report and commissioned an external agency (Foresight Consulting Ltd) to develop a plan for the improvement and for the implementation of a Customer Services Transformation Programme (CTP) to address the issues identified above.

A number of objectives were identified and agreed by the Cabinet for the CTP. They were:

- To transform the organisation to a position where the customer is seen at the heart of the Council's operations;

- To improve the customer experience and ensure the quality of service is consistent whenever, wherever and however customers contact the Council;

- To achieve an improvement in customer satisfaction and customer service within the first twelve months of the programme;

- To establish a front/back office organisational model and set up a Corporate Customer Services front office where a high number of enquiries are resolved first time at the first point of contact;

- To re-organise the Civic Offices to enable customers to access the majority of Council services at a single reception/customer services area on the ground floor and to improve access to Council committees and other public meetings.

- To improve back office efficiency and productivity by answering a high number of enquiries in the new customer services front office;

- To deploy and develop Customer Relationship Management software in association with the website and a new intranet to provide accurate and timely information for Members and officers on service issues, customer trends, access channels and service usage and costs.

Provision was made in the Council's finances, with a budget of over £2.2 million identified. The Capital Bid was agreed and provision still exists within the Council's current Capital Programme, but due to uncertainty around the costs of Waste Management, no provision was made in the 2007/08 Budget or in subsequent years for additional revenue. As such the programme has been held in abeyance.

Members of this Task and Finish Panel would have to consider whether they feel the objectives of the CTP are still relevant and whether they would like to focus on any particular aspect previously identified.

The Panel will revisit these reports and conclusions at its next meeting.

The Chairman asked if the money that was set aside, was ring-fenced. The Deputy Chief Executive replied that it was; it was allocated to the Customer Transformation Programme and is still there for use.

Councillor Mrs R Brookes commented that they would have to look to see if any progress had been made since the reports were made. The Deputy Chief Executive agreed and added that the Panel needed to consider if they still needed everything that was identified and, should it be re-prioritised.

Councillor Philip said that the Panel should also look at how the £2.2 million budget was allocated.

The Panel noted that Environmental Services had recently split the district up into neighbourhood areas based on the Planning Sub-committee areas. A lead officer was appointed for each area. They would have to consider if the one-stop-shops should mirror these areas. Other authorities had gone down this route and perhaps this was something the Panel should look at. Perhaps a visit could be arranged to another Council's one-stop-shop to see how they work.

ACTION: to make enquiries about arranging a visit for the Panel to an existing one-stop-shop.

The standard of 'Customer Communication' should also be considered. The Council utilises a number of ways to communicate information and consult with residents. These range from the website, to publications, press releases and the Forester magazine. It was important to ensure that information was provided in a form that was accessible and easily understood by the public. This was true also of committee reports which are now accessible through the Council's website. The Panel would need to consider the Council's current written communication and how/if it could be improved by the adoption of 'Plain English' standards and if so, the practicality of adopting such an approach.

Councillor Morgan asked why the Plain English 'Crystal Mark' was considered so expensive. He was told that the council had to submit each document for the plain English Campaign to comment on. That would cost about £500 per document. It

would be more prudent if we could achieve these standards without going down this externally evaluated route.

The full Government text for National Indicator 14 was tabled, this ran to six pages. This indicator was designed to gauge the District Council's Performance with respect to answering enquiries from the public. It looks at 'avoidable contact', testing whether enquiries were answered at the first point of contact and avoided subsequent need to seek further information. Many authorities collect this type of information by using a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System. Such systems record, manage and route telephone calls and enquiries. The Council currently lacks such a system. There is a need to log calls onto some sort of database, as the database is built up so repeat callers can be identified and their history of calls displayed.

Councillor Philips said that statistics show that these types of systems, set up for the first time, are doomed to failure. The Deputy Chief Executive said that he had not heard of this before, but they would look into the background. The Council does have its own smaller, stand alone systems for some of the directorates such as Environment and Street Scene. They may be able to be joined them up so that they can talk to each other.

Councillor Mrs Hedges asked how such a system would effect the 'personal touch' that was so important. She was told that the Council had to get the balance right. Customers may be happy with their first contact with the Council and need not come back again and again. Others may need more detailed information and it would be more appropriate for them to talk to an officer.

The Panel will have to consider the feasibility of acquiring a CRM system for the Council not only to comply fully with NI14 but also to improve customer services.

5.   **PRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE**

As an addition to the agenda the Head of Public Relations, Tom Carne and the Council's website editor, Steve Mitchell, were invited to give the Panel an insight into the workings and the breath of information held on the Council's website. They also gave a live, real time demonstration of the website.

Tom Carne started by making the point that the Audit Commission was after improved services and improved value for money. People cost money and are only available part of the day, and only five days a week. The Council's website however, is available 24/7, 365 days a year, and had become one of the Council's most important channels of service delivery and communication. It runs on an application called Punch, provided by Harlequin. Currently it has 1,734 pages plus over 7,000 pdfs and images attached to it.

Usage is soaring. In 2006/07 it received 664,000 visits. In 2007/08 it received over 787,000 visits.

Public Relations provide much of the content (about 735 pages of news items). The website also provides a framework for lots of service based applications, such as i-Plan, Home Option, Jobs, Coms and Public-i.

The Council has one editor for its site and that is Steve Mitchell, who is employed more or less full time to manage the web content. Technical support is provided by the Council's ICT section.

The most important page on the website is the home page (the Council's shop window), which is based on the BBC website. There is a need to keep putting new things on it to keep people interested, such as news items and press releases.

EFDC are at the forefront of webcasting, not just of meetings, but public information, Civic Events and the Chairman's and Leader's messages.

The system also has forms on line, provided by BWS and online consultation software (SNAP). Customers could also access online payments, such as paying car parking fines.

Members should appreciate that there is a massive amount of information on the website and it helps people to access services and cuts down on the need for staff resources. Because the website is so successful it puts serious challenges on the Council, the volume of new information is stretching the system and there is a very streamlined staffing structure, i.e. Steve Mitchell, compared to most other councils.

Under DDA legislation the website makes the Council's services accessible to many groups of people to whom the Council was previously inaccessible. Currently the Shaw Trust is auditing the website for accessibility. They employ people with different disabilities to test the Council's site and will then report back to us. This will mean changes to the design of the website, e.g. links, layout, use of colour and graphics. This may mean a cultural change by the people who produce web content around the Council.

A great deal has been done but the Council is now at the margins of it capacity as far as the website is concerned. There are concerns on having to rely on one or two key individuals who in other Councils would be part of a bigger team.

The question was how ambitious do members want to be, what do they want done with it?

Councillor Boyce asked if it was known how many people can't use the internet. What could be done for them? Mr Carne answered that they have the Council's information centres which has the ability for face to face contact and the telephones.

Councillor Mrs Lea said that part of the answer to the problem of personal contact was the Ward Councillors; they should act as the first line of contact. Her other worry was housing tenants that do not have web access. Mr Carne replied that Housing were vey conscious of this and were contacting everyone on their list who had not made a bid and asked them what their problems were and to follow up on them.

Councillor Philip asked about tracking numbers, what is the Council doing about these? Mr Carne replied that BWS forms could help by creating a work flow through the system.

Councillor Philip then asked if the council used synthetic transactions surveys. He was told that the Council was not that sophisticated at present, but they do test any new applications that go up.

Councillor Mrs R Brookes asked what the biggest hits on the site were. She was told that it was the home page and then local democracy. After the elections in May the site received double the amount of hits it would normally get. The Chairman added that the Council still published the results on the notice boards outside the Civic Offices.

The Deputy Chief Executive asked Tom Carne where the Council was ranked compared with other local authority websites and what would be his priority if he had the money to spend. Mr Carne said we were currently near the bottom of the league table, other councils provide a lot more resources for their websites. Redbridge are a very good example of a good website. As for what we would like to do, well, other websites use more geographical personalised information. Redbridge are currently asking their residents what they would like to spend money on in their local area. There are also ways that people could customise their home page specifically to their own area, just by putting in their name and post code.

6.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was raised.

7.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was agreed for Monday 15 September 2008 at 7.30pm.

Introduction:

In order to improve access to services and improve response to enquiries, the Council has previously embarked on exploring the feasibility of a "Customer Transformation Programme". The initiative was held in abeyance until such times as the affordability of the project could be assessed, given pressure on the Council's revenue Budget and uncertainty around the cost of the new Waste Management Contract. Now that the Council's Medium Term Financial Forecast is clearer, there is value in revisiting the Customer Services Agenda, to see where improvements can be practically achieved.

Term of Reference:

1. To undertake a review of the Customer Services Programme previously explored by the Council, and to identify and prioritise these initiatives which could have the greatest impact on improving access to services and response to enquiries.

2. To review existing quality standards with respect to Customer Services and recommend change as necessary to ensure that they meet the current expectations of the Council's customers.

3. To ensure that the Council is complying with its duty under Equalities Legislation to provide access to all sections of the Community to Council Services.

4. To assess the most appropriate and cost effective method of enabling the Council to meet the requirements of the New Statutory National Indicator N14, with respect to "avoidable contact".

5. To identify areas for improvement in how the Council communicates its "key messages" to our community, ensuring that public information is clearly understood and accessible.

Aims and Objectives/Methodology:

To gather evidence and information in relation to the topics through the receipt of data, presentations and by participation in fact finding visits;

To consult with Partners, Agencies, Stakeholders and Users of the services under review, to establish key issues and future need;

To evaluate all relevant facts in relation to the topics under review in an objective way and to produce recommendations for future action accordingly;

To establish whether there are any resource implications arising out of the topics under review and advise Cabinet for inclusion in the Budget Process 2009/10; and

To report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at appropriate intervals and to submit any final reports in the proposed Corporate Format for consideration by O & S, the Cabinet and Council.

TIMESCALE	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL
Commencement	June 2008	
Finish **1.** Interim report to include any budgetary items for the next budget round.	By October 2008	
Reports.		
Chairman: Councillor B Rolfe		

NI 14: Reducing avoidable contact: Minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer			
Is data provided by the LA or a local partner?	**Y**	**Is this an existing indicator?**	**N**

Rationale	Local authorities are fundamental points of contact for the citizen when seeking access to public services. They provide key services for their local communities that greatly affect the quality of life for individual citizens and the overall community. In accord with the vision of the Local Government Delivery Council and the principles of the Service Transformation Agreement (www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/B/9/pbr_csr07_service.pdf), the customer experience for both citizens and businesses when contacting their local council should be one which is responsive, timely and efficient. By identifying customer contact that is 'avoidable', the local authority and its partners are better placed to redesign the way services and information are made more accessible for their customers, so they do not have to make unnecessary, valueless contacts which are both frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the provider.
Definition	**The proportion of customer contact that is avoidable.** The indicator is calculated in aggregate across all service channels, across selected key service areas. The assessment of whether a contact is avoidable relates only to what <u>caused</u> the customer to make contact (as opposed to evaluating the customer satisfaction with the contact or whether follow-up contacts will subsequently be needed). <u>Customer contact:</u> an external customer (citizen or business) contacting the council across any channel (telephone, e-mail, post, website or face-to-face) with regard to the specified services. It includes customer requests for a service or information, reports of failure to deliver a service, and responses to council requests. Website contact is assessed as the number of transactions rather than the number of hits. <u>Avoidable Contact:</u> to promote a clear and focussed definition in line with the issues raised in the rationale above, avoidable contact should be assessed by the adviser for a given contact if *one or more* of the following occurs or has occurred for the service areas defined for the appropriate tier of council. ● A. Unnecessary clarification by the customer: Any query received as a result of a previous contact during which the council was not able to provide the necessary information or service, for example: – phone call resulting from online service being unavailable or inadequate information on the website; – email asking for clarification of a council letter or other communications material which is poorly worded or presented; incomplete, inaccurate or out of date;

NI 14: Reducing avoidable contact: Minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer *(continued)*	
Definition *(continued)*	B. Avoidable contact caused by poor signposting, or poor call transfer to council services – for example, customer rings wrong number because contact points not clearly advertised, or customer is passed to planning services when their query relates to parking; C. Repeat contact with the customer having to pass on the same notification of information to carry out transactions with the council and its partners – for example, customers being asked to provide information about a change of address to multiple parts of the council; D. Customers are progress chasing, asking for reassurance or making other unnecessary service delivery follow-up: any contact which results from council/partner inability to deliver a service as expected or promised (for example, missed appointment to collect sofa for disposal or faulty boiler in council house not properly fixed). This holds force regardless of whether or not customer expectations exceeds service standards, and whether or not the problem is the responsibility of the council or service delivery partners; E. Repeat contact after premature closure of a previous contact (for example, customer returns to one-stop shop at a later time when the queues are much shorter than previously). Ideally the assessor should be the agent handling the contact. Sampling The primary way of collecting data for this indicator will be through the use of a contact management or Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Where councils do not currently have this in place, they will need to undertake surveys of a sample of contacts. Guidance to be issued by June 2008 will include advice in respect of sampling methodology. Further detail and advice on assessing avoidable contact will be provided to local councils before the end of June 2008. Service areas Councils will record the proportion of avoidable contacts in respect of contacts relating to selected key service areas, which cover high volume citizen and business transactions, across a number of typical council departments. These are: ***District Councils:*** - Planning services (local planning issues); - Building control; - General council tax enquiries, billing and recovery process for payment of council tax & national non-domestic rates; - Environmental Health services (licensing, food safety, pollution and pest control); - Street scene – waste collection and street cleaning, including recycling, street furniture and fly-tipping; - Housing (benefit claims, council tax benefit, repairs, allocations and lettings process for social housing); - Electoral register (including registration and enquiries on electoral services); - Parking permits and Parking Control Notices.

NI 14: Reducing avoidable contact: Minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer *(continued)*

Definition *(continued)*	**Unitary Council, Metropolitan Borough Councils, London Borough Councils and City of London:** • Children's services (school admissions, free school meals, youth services); • Highways (condition of roads, street lighting); • Housing (benefit claims, council tax benefit, repairs, allocations and lettings process for social housing); • Environmental Health services (licensing, food safety, pollution and pest control); • Street scene – waste collection and street cleaning, including recycling, street furniture and fly-tipping; • General council tax enquiries, billing and recovery process for payment of council tax and national non-domestic rates; • Planning services (local planning issues); • Building control; • Trading standards; • Adult Social Services (care packages, dial-a-ride, home helps, meals on wheels); • Electoral register (including registration and enquiries on electoral services); • Parking permits and Parking Control Notices. *County Councils:* • Children's services (school admissions, free school meals, youth services); • Highways (condition of roads, street lighting); • Trading standards; • Adult Social Services (care packages, dial-a-ride, home helps, meals on wheels).		
Formula	(x/y) * 100 = z% x = the number of customer contacts that are assessed as avoidable; y = the total number of customer contacts within the relevant services; z = percentage of customer contacts that are assessed as avoidable.		
Worked example	If 600 contacts are assessed as avoidable out of a total of 1,000 contacts, the proportion of avoidable contacts is 60.0%	**Good performance**	Improved performance is typified by a lower percentage.
Collection	Annual (Financial	**Data Source**	Varied: Local authorities and/or councils through Customer

interval	year)		Relationship Management Systems and/or other forms such as emails, call centres and websites
Return Format	Percentage	**Decimal Places**	One
Reporting organisation	Local authority		
Spatial level	Single tier, county and district council		
Further Guidance	*a) Sources of advice* Local Authorities will be expected to have effective processes in place to underpin their assessment. To ensure that effective processes are in place in Local Authorities, the requirement to assess NI 14 will take hold as of October 2008. Training and guidance packs will be worked up in consultation with the sector, and issued before the end of June 2008 on the IDeA website (www.idea.gov.uk) and Business Improvement Package (www.bip.rcoe.gov.uk). These will also set out any refinements to the definition of the indicator (such as the wording of the services covered) in the light of lessons learned through piloting of the indicator. *b) Collecting data* The primary way of collecting data for this indicator will be through the use of a contact management or CRM system. Where councils do not currently have this in place, they will need to undertake surveys – adding up the number of contacts assessed as avoidable within the sample number of contacts, divided by the sample number of contacts. The guidance to be issued by June 2008 will include advice in respect of sampling methodology. *c) Supplementary data for use on voluntary basis* To enhance local understanding of customer needs, councils may wish to consider **voluntary** use of: ● Disaggregation by service and channel (with a particular focus on priority areas) for use as an internal service audit and improvement tool; ● Disaggregation with respect to equalities where appropriate (gender, age, ethnic background etc); ● The Contact Council's Performance Management Framework (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/public_service_reform/contact_council/workplan.aspx); Where the council carries out customer satisfaction surveys on these services, feedback can be used to assess the robustness of the processes in place to measure the indicator, as well as being a valuable management information tool in its own right to improve the way that customers access information and services from the council.

Further Guidance *(continued)*	*d) Other elements of good practice*

d) Other elements of good practice

The indicator does not measure all aspects of behaviour to reduce time spent in contact that is of low or no value to them. Councils may therefore also wish to consider other elements of good practice, including reducing the need to repeat information when passed from agent to agent; and the ability of customers to get through to call centres.

e) Background – redesigning services for greater customer satisfaction, increased staff engagement and enhanced efficiency

The vision of the Local Government Delivery Council and Service Transformation Agreement is for local government and its partners to deliver services that are "better for customers, better for staff and better for the taxpayer".

These services will be organised in ways that make sense to their users, rather than being convenient for the organisations that are delivering them; handled by staff who have the appropriate training, skills and access to information to be able to assist the citizen effectively; and delivered both effectively and efficiently through all channels which are designed for the user so that they are simpler, clearer and more accessible.

Effective action requires councils to:

- Understand their local customers and their needs;
- Recognise the extent and causes of customer contact;
- Understand the stages of the delivery chain from end to end in terms of the value each adds to the customer experience;
- Assess the capability that exists compared to what is needed to deliver that value, and the barriers that prevent enhanced customer service;
- Engage customers to help shape how services are designed and delivered;
- Monitor changes over time including an analysis of the factors that lie behind changes in performance as measured by the indicator;
- Take a multi-channel approach, both enabling customers to self serve and empowering staff and intermediaries to assist effectively those who need help through which ever channel they choose to approach their council; and
- Work with local and central government partners through LSP and LAA arrangements to find better ways to deliver joined up customer focussed services.

By understanding the causes of 'avoidable contact' in this way, councils can then work to address key barriers to efficient and effective service delivery.

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