

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL**24 JUNE 2009****ENHANCING CUSTOMER SERVICE****Joint Report by the Depute Director (Environment) and
the Depute Director (Education and Children's Services)**

A major priority for the Council is developing services which are accessible and serve the needs of our customers. This report presents a way forward for decision making about services' provision based on customer need and aspirations.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:-

- (i) note the progress made in enhancing a more customer focused service delivery across the Council;
- (ii) approve the principles as outlined in paragraph 13 to be used when developing further a modernised approach to supporting our communities and developing locality based services;
- (iii) agree that Community Campuses/Libraries in rural areas become the central access point for personal customer contact, where practical and appropriate, and customer telephone calls in these libraries be routed to the Customer Service Centre;
- (iv) agree that Cash collection will transfer from Council Offices to alternative options such as Direct Debit, Post Offices and Paypoints; and
- (v) instruct officers to develop on a locality basis the Business Cases for any change to service delivery.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council is committed to facing the challenge of these changes in its communities and has to respond through enhancing and modernising the services provided. Through the particular projects of Customer First and the Investment in Learning Programmes, the Council has demonstrated its commitment to the challenge.

3 CUSTOMER FIRST and INVESTMENT IN LEARNING

3.1 Investment in Learning

The six new custom built community campuses, agreed by Council on 2 July 2003 as part of the Investment in Learning programme, provided the Council with significant opportunities to improve customer service. The Education and Children's Services Committee (27 August 2003) agreed that the delivery of the community campuses should benefit the wider community through access to its facilities:

Council Meeting – 2 July 2003 – Investment in Learning

Report 03/362 stated:-

- *“However, it is anticipated that the Funding Gap could also in part be bridged through savings arising from the rationalisation of Council facilities as a result of the project proposals. A number of the proposed school developments incorporate community facilities which – as Service provision is transferred to the schools – will allow the closure of existing properties generating revenue savings and potential Capital receipts for the Council.”*

Education and Children's Services Committee – 27 August 2003 – Investment in Learning

Report 03/395 stated:-

- *“The provision of a range of appropriate community services from the campus - health, library, vocational, further and higher education, voluntary services, youth work, housing, social work – which, through integrated working between partners, will improve local service delivery for all the community.”*

School Estate Sub-Committee – 29 May 2008 - Investment in Learning Final Business Case

Report 08/319 stated:-

- *“The provision of a range of appropriate community services from the school site – health, library, vocational, further and higher education, voluntary services, youth work and adult literacy support, housing, social work, which through integrated working between partners, will improve local service delivery for the whole community including young people.”*

This was further emphasised as the new build programme began. From the outset, the Council's intention was to capitalise on this investment in order to provide services at a central point of delivery.

3.2 Customer First

3.2.1 The aims of the Customer First Programme in Perth and Kinross, as set out in Report 05/727 submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 2 November 2005 were:

- to deliver excellent customer service;
- to deliver cost-saving and labour-saving efficiencies in terms of service delivery, while maintaining quality; and
- to maintain positive employee relations

3.2.2 Following a review, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed at their meeting on 2 November 2005 to *review in detail the delivery of face-to-face enquiry services by the Council i.e. reviewing the services to be provided as well as how they are delivered, in both Perth City and rural areas.*

3.2.3 Between June and September 2006, Perth & Kinross Council undertook a series of independently facilitated scenario planning workshops with Elected Members, Senior Managers and officers drawn from different services/localities/perspectives to consider a future model for customer service in rural areas.

3.2.4 Overarching principles for face-to-face customer contact delivery were suggested at the workshops including:-

- There must be a physical Council presence in rural areas where customers can fulfil simple queries and transactions and be informed about accessing more complex services
- Local communities and customers must be engaged in the planning of service delivery including the customer contact function
- The Council must develop innovative solutions for delivering the customer contact function in order to ensure its future sustainability in rural locations

3.2.5 The key findings of a review of customer services in rural areas which included analysis of transactional and demographic information, benchmarking, customer focus groups and a telephone survey were:

- There are multiple access points for Council customers
- The number of customers using the offices has decreased year on year
- Customer Service is inconsistent
- There is a lack of awareness from local people about what services are available from Council offices
- Customers generally prefer to contact the Council by telephone
- There is a strong disposition from local people to retaining local contact

- 3.2.6 In the last seven years total payment transactions through rural offices have reduced by 55%. There were 129,000 payment transactions made in 2001/2002 compared to 58,000 made in 2008/2009. This reduction is largely due to the increasing popularity of alternative methods of payment including Direct Debit, telephone contact and through Post Offices and Paypoints. The Council has been actively promoting alternatives since 2001/2002.
- 3.2.7 The cost of cash collection in rural Council premises, primarily for Council Tax and Housing Rents, averages £2.19 per transaction (2007/2008), which compares unfavourably with similar services provided by the Post Office (£0.45 per transaction) and Paypoints provided in local shops and businesses (£0.36 per transaction).
- 3.2.8 Since this work, officers have been seeking ways to develop this work on a locality basis. The Community Campus development offers the opportunity to allow better access to service and capitalises on the investment the Council has made in those communities. The remainder of the paper suggests ways in which this can be taken forward.

4 PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCING CUSTOMER SERVICE IN RURAL AREAS

- 4.1 The findings above support the development of principles which can be used in each locality.
- 4.2 The following key principles are suggested:
- a. The Community Campuses, where they exist and where appropriate, be the focus for council service delivery in that area.
 - b. Service delivery will normally be presumed to be at the first point of contact, but it is recognised that the interests of some service users are best served outwith the community campus. Where this is the case, it will be made clear to “customers” where the relevant services can be obtained.
 - c. In areas without a campus, a centralised delivery model is still relevant and, where appropriate, delivered through libraries.
 - d. Customer experience will be of the highest possible standard.
 - e. Community engagement is integral to the process of change.
 - f. Cash collection will be provided through the Community Campuses until alternative arrangements are in place.
- 4.3 Many rural towns have well established libraries already offering an excellent service to citizens and the new Community Campuses will provide opportunities to expand their remit. However, libraries are constrained by the types of services they can provide so specialist client services would not be provided from the Community Campuses.

- 4.4 It is proposed that cash collection across the Council's rural offices (Aberfeldy, Auchterarder, Blairgowrie, Coupar Angus, Crieff, Kinross and Pitlochry), in particular Housing Rents and Council Tax, will be migrated over a period to other channels including Direct Debits, Post Offices or local shops which offer the Paypoint facility. Customers would still be able to pay for services delivered through the offices/libraries such as Registration and Building Standards.
- 4.5 The Customer Service Centre will deal with initial telephone enquirers. The Customer Service Centre has been rated as 'excellent' for the majority of calls made by Mystery Shoppers and has a growing reputation for delivering an excellent service.

5 THE NEW PHASE OF ENHANCING CUSTOMER SERVICES

- 5.1 The development of the changes outlined above would, in the case of Community Campuses, change where customers access a range of services. Such changes will be implemented only after the evaluation of a Business Case for each area. This will include community aspirations, impact on community assets and implications for properties from which the Council delivers services.
- 5.2 To ensure we personalise our service to the needs of our customers services are also considering mobile working for staff in these areas which would improve service through allowing staff to go to customers rather than the customer going to them. This will also provide productivity improvements which may allow them to see more customers and deliver services more quickly.
- 5.3 Given the communities' interest in ensuring that there is still a Council presence in the area to support community and civic life, it is proposed that a Business Case for each area would be developed in consultation with the relevant stakeholders in that community. This coheres with the Council's commitment to engage with the communities it serves, being clear of the need to change services but mindful of the desire to preserve community assets and aspirations in the rural communities.
- 5.4 Any such Business Cases would be subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.

6 OVERALL BENEFITS

- 6.1 The proposals clearly support the strategy for Customer First, in delivering excellent customer service and the objectives of the Investment in Learning Programme

6.2 The benefits of these proposals when considered across Perth and Kinross include:

- Improving convenience for customers with one single location for enquiries and with evening and Saturday opening hours
- Providing a more modern customer friendly environment, particularly in the Community Campuses
- Providing better and more efficient use of buildings
- Potentially increasing the use of the Library, supporting the social benefits associated with new activities
- Supporting the community use of Community Campuses through delivering customer enquiries from libraries
- The proposal is supportive of the drive from Housing and Community Care Services to deliver services to customers in their home environment.
- The model will help to sustain local businesses, including Post Offices, for the future in rural communities by transferring cash collection business
- The model can be replicated in Alyth, Birnam, Comrie and Scone, through the community libraries, providing Council enquiry services to customers where none had previously been available
- The model can also be replicated by the mobile library. The mobile service travels 50,000 miles per year reaching the most remote parts of Perth and Kinross.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Since the conception of the Investment in Learning and Customer First Programmes there has been a range of consultation taken forward including workshops, the Modernising Governance Member/Officer Working Group and papers to relevant Council Committees.

7.2 Latterly, following the successful launch of the Community Campus in November 2008 ongoing discussion has been taking place with services to review how services are delivered given the potential of the campus development.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Council is investing the equivalent of £136m over the next 30 years on custom built community campuses supporting the vision the Council and Community Planning Partners have for the people and communities of Perth and Kinross.

8.2 The transfer of cash collection will save the Council at least £85k year on year. There is recognition that redeployment of posts in rural areas is more complex than within Perth due to the relatively smaller number of posts.

- 8.3 There are costs associated in upgrading the larger libraries in Blairgowrie and Pitlochry to deliver enhanced services. The capital costs of the proposal, developed through a feasibility study by Property Services, have been approved by Corporate Resources Group (CRG), as a 'spend to save'.

9 EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 The Council's Corporate Equalities Assessment Framework requires an assessment of functions, policies, procedures or strategies in relation to race, gender and disability and other relevant equality categories. This supports the Council's legal requirement to comply with the duty to assess and consult on relevant new policies to ensure there is no adverse impact on any community group or employees.
- 9.2 This report supports Equalities implementation.

10 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The information presented in this report was considered under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the determination was made that the items summarised in this report do not require further action as they do not qualify as a plan, programme or strategy as defined by the Act.

11 CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning recognised the Council's culture of continuous improvement and the value to the Council of cross-cutting reviews such as Customer First "to challenge service delivery models and deliver further efficiencies".
- 11.2 The financial pressures on Local Government and the wider public sector are forcing Councils to be more innovative and adaptable in how they deliver services. The introduction of the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) has also given Local Government the financial flexibility to modernise in a way which suits local needs.
- 11.3 The proposals for rural face-to-face customer contact/enquiries are key to progressing the Customer First Agenda and support Council priorities such as Community Campuses and Efficient Government.

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Appendix 1: Customer First Developments

CUSTOMER FIRST DEVELOPMENTS

The proposals for the implementation of face to face service delivery in rural areas through Customer have been developed, taking into account information from the following sources;

- Census 2001 and latest demographic projections
- Viewfinder
- Council information systems
- Customer Focus Groups (including Business and Tenants representation) July/August 2007
- Customer telephone research (100 calls) August 2007
- Recording of customer transactions and service requests by Auchterarder, Crieff and Kinross office employees
- Benchmarking visits to other Local Authorities, including West Lothian and Fife

All Services have been consulted on the review.

Customers of the Blairgowrie area were consulted through five focus groups and 100 telephone surveys in order to inform the report.

Members attended Scenario Planning Workshops in June and September 2006 in relation to developing principles for rural service delivery.

Members were presented with and gave feedback on the Blairgowrie customer research findings at the Partnership Group in October 2007.

Modernising Governance Member Officer Working Group members receive regular briefings on Customer First projects.

The proposals were presented to the Corporate Management Group in October 2007 and they confirmed their support for the direction of Customer First, in relation to rural face to face service delivery from library premises. In addition, they recognise the opportunity this provides for Services to modernise and promote 'joined-up' working.

The Executive Officer Team reviewed the reports on 25 March 2008 and on 9 September 2008 gave their approval, in principle, for discussion of the reports with Members.

An initial discussion of the reports took place with the Council Leader at the end of October 2008 and this led to a presentation of the proposals at the Modernising Governance Member Officer Working Group (MOWG) on 19 November 2008.

On the recommendation of the Modernising Governance MOWG, presentations on the proposals were given to the Partnership Group, the Labour Group, the Conservative Group and Councillor Barnacle between November 2008 and February 2009.

