



# Customer Service Challenge

## Does reality match up to the vision?

All councils aspire to provide the best customer service. Yet though local government has traditionally prided itself on its public service ethos, this doesn't necessarily lead to excellent, efficient customer service. Too often, customers are on the receiving end of services whose design is based on the assumptions of the professionals running them, rather than on the needs of the people using them. The challenge of customer service excellence is to turn the organisation inside out, putting the customer at the centre of the business, listening to their needs and expectations. This means new roles for the staff and their managers, new leadership challenges for members and the top team, breaking down traditional silos and redesigning the way the council operates.

Achieving this is the ultimate challenge for council leaders because, quite simply, it means re-thinking everything you do. Bringing together the technology as well as the cultural, organisational, financial and people management issues requires both visionary leadership and a strong grip on the operational challenges ahead. Some of the questions you will need to consider are: Do you have a clear customer contact strategy in place backed up by a comprehensive implementation plan? Are staff committed, enthusiastic and confident about the new vision? How will customers experience the difference? How will success be measured?

Based on our practical experiences of working with a wide range of councils, we can help you develop the business case for change and project-manage the change process. Key elements include:

- A customer contact health check
- Organisational and service reviews
- Service centre expertise
- Technology know-how

Whether it's working through the practicalities of getting it right, or helping you to articulate the vision more clearly, our three stage process will help you find the answers.

## Our customer contact health check

Councils are at different points along the way to achieving excellence in customer service. No matter where you start from, or where you aim to be, our health check is designed to give you:

- Independent advice on current best practice
- A critique of your customer service strategy – what are its strengths, and where are the gaps
- Analysis of your performance – are you making the best use of all the channels of communication?
- Procurement advice

At the end of the health check we provide you with a report on our findings and recommendations, including the order you need to tackle them in. The report will help you to:

- Create a new vision and clarify your goals
- Design new systems and processes
- Review and reorganise your services
- Assess the use of technology and develop a specification
- Evaluate the tenders
- Project-manage the change process

Whether you use our Flexible Resourcing service to provide you with long term support, or our consultancy expertise to provide timely and challenging input, we offer the expertise you need.

## Some recent examples of our work

We were asked us to act as a critical friend to a customer services best value review. Our report included details of visits to four similar authorities, analysis of procurement options, advice on what a customer service strategy might include, detailed operational analysis of current and planned provision and advice about technology and the service/corporate issues that need to be considered. Our consultants emphasised the need to focus on customer contacts and preferences, across all channels – face to face, telephone and the internet.

A high-performing district council wanted to fulfil its ambition to be 'leading for tomorrow'. In particular, it wanted to improve its overall efficiency and increase levels of customer satisfaction. Working in collaboration with the council, we developed a new organisational structure with customer relationship management sitting at the heart of the new organisation. We are now providing project management support to implement the new structure and build the organisational culture and systems needed to deliver the vision.

One council appointed us to review their performance as an employer. One of the findings was that the HR function needed to move away from its traditional role and develop itself both as a strategic advisor to the council's management team and as a coach to the council's managers. An e-HR strategy was required: we helped the council to develop the business case for a new HR service including investment in new software.

For further information please contact the Resource Centre.

You can either phone on **0845 601 0649** or email **resource.centre@solaceenterprises.com**

To find out more about SOLACE Enterprises and our full range of consultancy services see

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