

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 15 January 2009
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Health & Community
SUBJECT: Customer Service Excellence
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To outline progress to consider and develop the Government's Customer Service Excellence Standards.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

That the Executive Board:

- i) Support the process to achieve accreditation as outlined in the report;**
- ii) Approve the Customer Services Strategy.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Earlier this year the Cabinet Office launched its approach to improving standards within Customer Services. The aim of Government is for "public services to be efficient, effective, excellent, equitable and empower - with the citizen always and everywhere at the heart of public service provision". Standards and a toolkit therefore have been prepared and Local Authorities expected to achieve accreditation through a Nationally recognised process in some ways replacing the Charter Mark.

3.2 As a first stage the Government expects all Public and Private Sector Contact Centres to adopt the standards and achieve accreditation. All organisations must fully adopt and achieve accreditation for Contact Centres during 2009 or demonstrate progress to achieve accreditation. Thereafter it expects that all services with a customer focus should be accredited. Potentially this could mean a significant number of teams and services within the Council.

3.3 The Corporate Services PPB Working Group had already addressed a range of issues surrounding Customer Care and complaints and tasked the Strategic Director, Health & Community with producing a plan to address the standards.

3.4 A small officer working group was therefore established to examine the issues.

4.0 **PROGRESS TO DATE**

4.1 **Customer Service Excellence**

4.1.1 To start the process, the group have undertaken a piece of work which worked through each one of the criteria sections within the toolkit and apart from the time the work took to complete it also highlighted the signification work that was required to achieve full accreditation across all Directorates. Therefore it was concluded that undertaking a full accreditation across all Directorates would be extremely resource intensive, both from a staffing perspective and a financial perspective. The danger being that significant resources could be committed to this area without fully understanding the systems and business case.

4.1.2 The assessment system accredits on a service/team basis rather than on a wider Directorate basis so should the Council decide to assess itself it will need to prioritise and be confident that it meets the criteria. There are 5 criteria with 57 elements of which Council's need to achieve an 80% compliance. The compliance outcome ranges from Compliance Plus through to remedial action for non-compliance.

4.1.3 The group therefore have focused their efforts and attention on working towards developing our customer services within the HDL and Revenue/Benefits and assessing our progress at a Corporate Level.

4.1.4 The group have considered working with one of the assessing organisations and meetings with CSE Assessment Services have taken place to better understand the process. CSE use a web-based assessment tool, as well as site visits to assess against the Cabinet Office criteria. Officers are more familiar with such systems being similar to the CPA and Equality Systems.

4.1.5 Subject to Standing Orders, the group wish to procure an organisation to assess the Council's Customer Services against HDL and Revenue/Benefits as a combined assessment and separately a corporate assessment. The latter would provide the foundation for a wider assessment of the other services within the Council. If successful, this would mean HDL and Revenue/Benefits being accredited under the Cabinet Offices Standards. This learning could then be applied across the Council and assist with a wider accreditation within other Directorates.

4.2 **Customer Services Strategy**

- 4.2.1 Having a Council Customer Services Strategy is essential so that customers can be confident of the service standards we provide. It is also a pre-requisite of the accreditation process.
- 4.2.2 Work on producing a Council Customer Services Strategy has been undertaken and attached is the final draft for comment.
- 4.2.3 The Corporate Services PPB Working Group support both the processes outlined in this report and the Strategy.

5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Failure to progress this agenda will impact upon our CAA assessment but more importantly the standards of service we provide to our customers.
- 5.2 Assessing progress at a Corporate level is not a service that needs to be accredited, however, it underpins all the standards of service we apply and we must be confident that we have all the necessary policies and procedures in place.

6.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There will be a cost for undertaking the initial assessments and these will be contained within existing budgets.
- 6.2 Future accreditation will need to be considered within budget allocations.

7.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

7.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

To improve access to high quality services for children & young people in Halton.

7.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

To improve access to information about employment, learning and skills opportunities in Halton.

7.3 **A Healthy Halton**

To improve and enhance access to services and facilities in Halton to maintain existing good health and well-being.

7.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

7.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

8.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

8.1 Failure to examine the way people currently access Council services could result in people who are hard to reach failing to access services they want and need.

8.2 Accrediting all teams and services at the same time could cost the Council significant sums of money, it is therefore proposed that we test our approach first within the HDL and Revenue/Benefits Service and use the learning to plan future areas of accreditation.

9.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

9.1 To ensure that information about all Council services is easily accessible and available to all customers.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None identified.