

Report of: Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

To: City Executive Board

Date: 14th October 2009

Item No: 11

Title of Report: Scrutiny Panel response to the Customer Contact Strategy Report

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present to the City Executive Board the findings of the Customer Contact Strategy Scrutiny Panel on the Customer Contact Strategy proposal

Board Member: Cllr. Van Nooijen

Approved by:

Finance: Sarah Fogden

Legal: Lindsay Cane

Recommendations

For the City Executive Board to consider the Panel's findings and recommendations and say if it:-

- a) Agrees – if so, what is the timescale for implementation**
- b) Disagrees – the reason for this**
- c) Has any other comments to offer**

1. Introduction

1.1. The Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee set up a panel to consider the Customer Contact Strategy in the context of value for money and management of service improvements. The members of the panel are Councillors Armitage, Campbell and Morton.

2. Scope of the Enquiry

2.1. The panel decided it wanted to look at and test the following elements in relation to a Customer Contact Strategy:-

- a) Whether a soundly drawn up strategy, written from the perspective of the customer, showed a clear and understandable path from the current position to new outcomes.
- b) Whether a clear and robust rationale for that strategy based on the best outcomes for the customers and the organisation was being proposed.
- c) Whether a robustly detailed action plan showing the milestones and interdependencies within this long term project ,and the SMART actions supporting these, existed.
- d) Whether a financial model for the project that set costs, savings and improved outcomes alongside each other demonstrated value for money.

3. Panel Meeting

3.1. The panel met on 5th October. Councillors Armitage and Morton were present. The panel had the benefit of receiving advice throughout the meeting from Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services), Tim Sadler (Executive Director, City Services) and Helen Rowlands (Project Manager, Business Transformation). The panel also had before it the draft customer contact strategy and Helen Bishop's covering report.

4. Panel Conclusions

4.1. The panel was generally happy with the project outcome. In relation to the elements it wanted to look at, the panel felt that the strategy was soundly drawn up and that there was a clear and robust rationale for it. However, the panel did not consider that there was a sufficiently detailed action plan, nor was there a financial model set out in the strategy or the covering report.

4.2. The panel had four principal observations and these form the panel recommendations to the City Executive Board. The observations (set out in the order discussed at the panel meeting) are:-

- a) That there may be a case for pursuing more than two one-stop shops (i.e. City centre and Cowley Centre service centres). Helen Bishop said that the evidence available (from exit interviews) indicated that customers did not by and large (apart from Headington) travel out of area to the one-stop shops. Nevertheless, the panel felt that notwithstanding the development of the strategy and the need to minimise "avoidable contact" the Council should not close its mind to the development of multi-agency shops or service centres in other parts of the City

- b) That short, medium and long term objectives were not sufficiently distinguished. Although in paragraph 5.5 of the strategy, key targets by date and objectives were listed, and Section 8 contained key milestones, neither represented the detailed action plan that the panel at the outset had indicated it wished to see.

Tim Sadler acknowledged the remarks made as having some substance and he and Helen Bishop explained that for each key milestone of significance, a business case or project plan would be developed.

- c) That neither the report nor the strategy contained financial modelling that set costs, savings and improved outcomes alongside each other to demonstrate value for money. Whilst the panel understood that a business case had been prepared (and councillor Armitage referred to and displayed it at the meeting) in terms of monitoring, this would be frustrated without these further details.
- d) That the panel would want to monitor the success (or otherwise) the strategy over time. To do that it needed to develop or have developed indicators of success and would want, among other things, to see sound business cases for each key significant milestone. The panel decided that it would meet some time after the Quarter four (Section 8) milestones had been passed.

5. Panel Recommendations

- a) That the council should not close its mind to the worth and development of multi-agency shops or service centres.
- b) That by the time the panel next met, short, medium and long term objectives should be clearly set down and an action plan of substance developed.
- c) That in order to effect meaningful monitoring, the panel would need to develop or have developed indicators of success that would include costs, savings and improved outcomes in order to demonstrate value for money.

6. Board Member Comments

6.1 The Board Member comments as follows:-

“I am grateful for the panel’s work on the pre-scrutiny of the Customer Contact Strategy. The City Executive Board will give due consideration to recommendation (a) when it takes its decision on the Strategy, noting however the evidence-based conclusions of the Strategy as it stands in respect of one-stop shops, and the comments provided to the panel by the

Head of Customer Services. On recommendations (b) and (c), I welcome the panel's intention to continue its work by monitoring the success (or otherwise) of the strategy over time, and I am sure that officers will be happy to provide in due course the necessary detailed information to allow this work to be carried out

7. Executive Director Comments

7.1 The Executive Director, City Services comments as follows:-

"This was a useful Scrutiny Panel discussion particularly about the need to sharpen up longer term objectives. The Strategy pulls together existing work streams and sets an overall direction. The Action Planning and Business Case stage will clarify objectives which will enable us to track and report progress. Comments specifically on the recommendations are as follows in italics:-

- a) That the council should not close its mind to the worth and development of multi-agency shops or service centres.

Officers will keep an open mind about this matter as the implementation unfolds and will continue to seek to find opportunities to provide cost effective services locally particularly through using existing facilities provided by others such as libraries and advice centres.

- b) That by the time the panel next met, short, medium and long term objectives should be clearly set down and an action plan of substance developed.

We will have this in mind when drafting Business Cases and the Action Plan and will develop and clarify these issues.

- c) That in order to effect meaningful monitoring, the panel would need to develop or have developed indicators of success that would include costs, savings and improved outcomes in order to demonstrate value for money.

We welcome the continued involvement of the Panel in the implementation phase."

William Reed on behalf of the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee
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