

Service access and delivery

Summary

This approach to service access and delivery is developed in the context of unprecedented organisational change and a worsening financial climate which is impacting on the service demands of our customers. It outlines **interdependent tactical approaches** that whilst benefiting service access and delivery to our customers have the potential, **taken as a whole**, to create significant net cashable savings in the short-term:

Service redesign and process optimisation

- An expanded programme of service improvement, principally using the 'systems thinking' approach that will prioritise the high-volume services to maximise the delivery of cashable savings.
- Processes that are streamlined and simplified through 'systems thinking' will, where possible be enabled for electronic self-service on the web. Such services are also suitable for mediated delivery¹ by generic customer service staff.

Development of the corporate website as platform for greater self service

- The creation, and sustained promotion, of electronic self-service to encourage people to move to these cheaper but more convenient channels.

Partnership opportunities

- Working with other agencies to provide joined-up and coordinated services where this meets customer demand.

Context

This document is designed to contribute to the council's objective to provide excellent service to our customers however they choose to access the council's services, in the context of:

- the implications of becoming a strategic commissioning authority
- the accommodation strategy
- the flexible/mobile working project
- the corporate service-sourcing strategy, and
- the continuing and worsening severe financial pressures facing the council.

The downturn in the economy is also affecting the lives of the people we serve. We can expect to see greater demands placed upon our services, greater pressure on our staff and potential for greater customer dissatisfaction. Whilst we have to face the reality of balancing our budgets and tailoring our services accordingly, our services must remain focused on our customers' needs.

The council is progressing towards transforming itself to a 'commissioning authority'. With such a structure, service managers will become business managers with greater autonomy to deliver services and will operate very much as business units. The application of 'systems thinking' with its strong focus on the customer and the efficiency of processes will assist in the preparation of services for commissioning.

¹ Mediated service delivery is the opposite of automated or electronic service delivery - mediated service is what you get when you talk to a real person either face to face or on the phone.

Objectives

For the time being, a pragmatic, tactical approach is to be taken that whilst benefiting our customers also has the potential to create significant and rapid net cashable savings.

The objective of this approach is to:

- resist a loss of, and where possible to improve, **customer service**, in the context of the deteriorating financial situation, and
- realise early **cashable savings** to contribute towards bridging the budgetary gap, whilst
- maintaining **flexibility** to adapt to changing circumstances.

Accommodation strategy

The current arrangements for the face-to-face provision of council services generally depend upon the proximity of the back office to the front office reception.

The council may need to consider options for its principal accommodation in the future due to economic and regeneration pressures. Were the council to favour an option of moving to cheaper accommodation on an outlying location it may want to retain a town-centre 'shop' for the convenient delivery of services to our customers. This would necessitate a back-office/front office split and a consolidated customer service with the associated investment in process redesign and supporting technologies. **Thus the financial drivers for council office accommodation in the future may require a consolidated approach to customer service.** Although looking to minimise any IT investment at this point we will ensure that this option (front/back office split) is not precluded for the future.

Flexible working

A flexible working project is in progress to deliver the technologies that can assist home and mobile working. There is a clear relationship between this work and the improvement of customer access and service delivery. **Indeed the two are co-dependent as the integrating technology that is necessary to deliver improved electronic services is the same as that required for mobile services.**

Delivering the objectives for service access and delivery

This approach to service access and delivery is based on the following **interdependent** workteams:

Service redesign and process optimisation

The council has embarked on a rolling programme of service improvement using the 'systems thinking' approach to understand our customers' needs and redesign our services to meet these needs most efficiently.

The 'systems thinking' approach streamlines service processes to drive out those that do not contribute directly to delivering the services that the customer requires. By designing services around actual customer demand, 'systems thinking' not only increases customer satisfaction but drives down costs, increases efficiency and helps to deliver performance targets. It allows an 'outside-in' perspective and provides unique opportunities for challenge to existing custom and practice. 'Systems thinking' eliminates those processes that cause waste and failure. An important feature is that services apply 'systems thinking' themselves (although experience has demonstrated that it is helpful to have expertise on hand to support and guide the activity).

Each application of systems thinking to a service may benefit from the support of an experienced 'system-thinker' to scope, mentor, assist and, where appropriate to, challenge the work unless there are adequate skills already within the service. These support officers will be assigned part-time as required to the business transformation manager as a pool of expertise that may be invited in by services to collaborate in the application of the 'systems thinking' approach. If the officers were to be resourced entirely from within CAST it would impact on the programme/project management and ICT resource.

Web services

The council has created a website and platform that enables a range of electronic transactions and features interactive content linked to social networking sites to encourage more public interaction.

Electronic transactions through webforms integrated with a basic enquiry management system and appropriate back office systems provide the best option for convenient self-service 24/7 by our customers. The same technology can be used in mediated service delivery by generic customer service officers and will provide the means of integration with mobile devices used by field officers (see *Flexible working* above).

Efficiency savings will be made when customers choose to use the web as their preferred way of doing business with the council. **It is through the 'systems thinking' of services that these efficiencies can be harvested as cashable savings.**

Promotion of electronic services is required to encourage people to shift to this cheaper and potentially more convenient means of service delivery. This can be done cost-effectively through sustained email promotion campaigning supported with further user-testing to hone the usability of the webforms.

Procurement and installation of electronic forms system

The web-based forms will provide a common interface to all service transactions on the corporate website. The forms will integrate with back office systems and a basic enquiry management system.

Procurement of software to manage self-service requests and integrate them with back office systems

A basic enquiry management system, and a software toolkit to provide a flexible, cost-effective means of integration of the forms with the enquiry system and back office systems.

Adequate staffing resources, anticipated to be 0.5 FTE will be seconded to the business transformation manager from the ICT team to develop the integrations using the toolkit that will enable the new electronic transaction services.

Web-based marketing campaign to promote self-service

Governance

The implementation of this work will be governed through the Service Sourcing Programme Board.

Return on investment

Systems thinking has a proven track record in the achievement of cashable savings. In 2009/10, it achieved savings totalling in excess of £72,000. The systems thinking approach was also applied to the design of the new chargeable planning advice and improved trade waste services that creates incomes of £24,500 and £40,000 respectively in that year. Substantial savings are expected from the 'systems thinking' of the revenues and benefits services. Further work is being planned in the food protection and parking services.

Based on experience to date, it is reasonable to expect that the council can sustain the delivery of a maximum of four concurrent 'system thinking' service improvements a year affecting an estimated total of 100 staff. It can be expected that this work would create efficiency gains equivalent to a 4% to 5% reduction in staffing. This reduction would be achieved through normal turnover and deletion of vacant posts. Assuming an average salary (including on-costs) of £25,000 then the **gross** saving would equate to a minimum of 4FTE (equating approximately to £100,000 per year).

To achieve this gross figure will ideally require each service that is system thinking its processes to dedicate at least two members of its staff fulltime to the work for a period of around six months. If this level of commitment is not feasible then the work, and hence the achievement of cashable savings, will take proportionally longer.

The development of electronic self-service on the web will require further investment in technology to create the service interfaces, integrate them with back office system and manage the service requests that are received. **The resources for this investment will come from the savings achieved from systems thinking.** In the first year a sum not exceeding the expected gross savings from 'systems thinking' will be invested in the information technology that is essential to the development of electronic services (see above). This investment will also require an appropriate budgetary allocation for maintenance agreements in future years.

Partnership in service access and delivery

It is the council's objective to build on current partnership arrangements through the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership and the Gloucestershire Conference with the aim of providing joined-up and coordinated services where this meets customer demand. We will look for opportunities to bring together related services delivered by different agencies in the interest of the customer.

Risks

See statement of risk.