

**ANGUS COUNCIL****POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE****23 JUNE 1998****CUSTOMER CARE STRATEGY****REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ROADS:**  
**CHAIR OF THE CUSTOMER CARE WORKING GROUP****ABSTRACT**

On 6 May 1997 the Policy and Resources Committee agreed a comprehensive Report on the way forward for Angus Council's services with respect to Customer Care.

It was agreed at that time that a Report would be provided at a later date identifying progress made against the recommendations and objectives laid out in that Report.

**1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committee :

- (i) note the significant progress made by departments with respect to Customer Care initiatives
- (ii) note that in line with continuing advances in Information Technology and the introduction of E-mail the Information Technology Department are currently evaluating methods of providing communications interface between the services of the Council and external customers.

- (iii) note the impact of the Best Value process on the delivery of services and therefore its impact on Customer Care initiatives for both internal and external customers.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The Policy and Resources Committee Report of 6 May 1997 detailed a number of recommendations with respect to Customer Care. These are detailed in Appendix A for ease of reference

The progress made by all departments towards meeting these recommendations is documented, demonstrating the commitment to fulfilling the objectives set out in the key themes of the Council.

Areas where individual departments have made significant contribution towards Customer Care, as well as issues which have been identified as requiring further attention across the board, have been highlighted.

## 3 DETAILS

- (i) This Report details achievements in the development of Customer Care initiatives throughout the services provided by Angus Council.
- (ii) Clearly there is a wide range of services provided by the constituent departments of Angus Council. Accordingly, this Report seeks to reflect common areas of progress made by all departments highlighting these areas where significant contributions have been made as well as those areas where potential for improvement has been identified.
- (iii) Since the concept of introducing a "Customer Care Model" was first noted there have been significant advances in communications systems available to departments for example E-mail.

The I.T. department are currently evaluating the best method of providing the communications interface between the Council's service providers and its internal and external customers.

Although much improvement and development has taken place it must be noted that the process is continuous. The implementation of Customer Care Initiatives is therefore seen as operating in a "fluid" environment.

4 **PROGRESS MADE AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE  
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT OF 6 MAY 1997  
(APPENDIX A)**

(ia) Written Communications

Departments have embraced the guidelines laid down in the corporate Customer Care leaflet using the identified target response times as benchmarks for performance. Housing in particular have developed a "Housefacts" leaflet dedicated to customer care.

Activities with the potential to generate large amounts of incoming correspondence, for example Council Tax Demands, are issued with the maximum information possible highlighting contentious areas in order to reduce the amount of complaints received.

Initiatives such as CLARENCE, piloted by Roads and FLARE used by Environmental and Consumer Protection have been incorporated into Management Information Systems to monitor performance against corporate and departmental targets.

Where possible, all responses are completed first time. Where this proves not to be possible a date when a full reply can be expected is always stated in interim replies.

All items of outgoing correspondence bear the name of an officer who can be contacted should there be any queries and advice on how to contact that officer.

(ib) Reception Areas and Face to Face Contact with Customers

Detailed surveys of Council premises have been conducted by the Property Department to identify potential improvements to building receptions and areas where improved public access and facilities for those with disabilities can be provided.

Measures have already been adopted for St James House and Bruce House and are being provided as part of the construction of the new reception at County Buildings.

A project which will equip major headquarters buildings with fixed and portable induction loop systems, the latter being available for use by staff visiting disabled members of the public, is under consideration.

Corporate signing has been erected clearly identifying some Council Buildings and the departments housed within them. There are however a number of locations where improvements can be made.

A programme of improvements to waiting areas has commenced including improved interview facilities. These issues have been identified by several departments as being core to their Customer Care Strategy and are receiving attention by the Property Department on a priority basis.

Face to face enquiries are generally conducted by staff who have attended Customer Care training. Where this is not yet the case, the need for training has been identified and arrangements have been made for the appropriate members of staff to receive training.

(ic) Telephone Contact

Improvements have been made to several departmental telephone systems allowing incoming calls to be transferred between buildings without requiring the customer to re-dial.

Improvements to the telephone system have made call forwarding on busy or unattended extensions possible, minimising delay in answering and reducing unsuccessful attempts to contact the Council.

Telephones have been installed at all Area Housing Offices to allow customers with any billing queries to contact the Revenues Division of the Finance Department free of charge.

Freephone telephone services have been provided and specifically advertised to highlight the availability of Council Tax Benefit and encourage the reporting of roads and lighting defects.

Further areas of potential improvement have been identified and prioritised.

(id) Consumer/Market Research

Several departments have produced and issued questionnaires to gauge the needs of customers.

Evening meetings and "road shows" have been conducted to determine public feeling for specific projects and contentious issues.

Planning and Transport have arranged to have evening sessions with agents having regular business with the department.

It is now widely considered by both customers and staff that initiatives such as those listed above are a worthwhile means of registering and assessing the needs and wants of the consumer.

Regular team meetings remain an important means of gathering information from staff who deal with customers, via the telephone, correspondence or through personal contact, as to the perceived quality of service delivered.

Services such as the Revenues Division of the Finance Department have formed a customer satisfaction working group.

Departmental Customer Care databases have been identified as a starting point for the distribution of questionnaires

(ie) Customer Complaints

The procedure outlined in the corporate Customer Care leaflet has been adopted by all departments.

Departments such as Planning and Transport have introduced internal procedures/monitoring as part of initiatives like the Development Control Customer Charter.

Social Work monitor the operation of their complaints procedure introduced in response to the statutory duty imposed by the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. This is maintained on a dedicated database.

Statutory appeals procedures are followed by finance also.

(if) Training

Frontline staff have, in the main, attended the 2 day Customer Care course developed by Personnel. Staff in posts where problems are encountered or anticipated have been encouraged to attend the “dealing with difficult customers” course.

Arrangements have been made for those staff unable to attend these courses, including any new starts, to do so.

Departments with specific needs, for example Social Work have developed customised training courses in conjunction with Personnel and Management Services.

Departments such as Housing have augmented internal courses with programmes developed by professional institutions which target the specific needs of a function.

- (ii) The Customer Care model developed by Information Technology. has been in use within the Roads Department for trial and development.
- (iii) Representatives from all other departments have visited Roads to view the Customer Care package in use to assess its suitability for application within their own areas of activity.
- (iv) The system developed by Information Technology has been adopted by a number of departments on a trial basis. Departments such as Education and Housing are conducting the trial on a limited scale within four schools and housing headquarters respectively prior to expanding the system should it prove to be successful.



- (v) Departments conducting trials will liaise with Information Technology to discuss the possibility of developing systems tailored specifically to each area of activity. The potential to use the Information Technology based system to monitor performance in terms of meeting Customer Care objectives has been welcomed by many departments.
- (vi) Departments have, using the corporate Customer Care leaflet as a template, been working towards specifying levels of Customer Care which customers can reasonably expect in the delivery of services.

Individual Departments have introduced initiatives such as the Development Control Customer Care Charter within Planning and Transport and Customer Care "Checklist for Staff" developed by Environmental and Consumer Protection. (Copy attached as Appendix B).

- (vii) Departments trailing the Information Technology based system have had insufficient time to fully assess how Information Technology can be best integrated within the Customer Care model.

Departmental Customer Care objectives and standards of service are widely reported in Development/Business plans.

- (viii) Staff training has been a priority for all departments. Frontline staff have in the main attended the 2 day Customer Care course developed by Personnel. Staff in posts where problems are encountered or anticipated have been encouraged to attend the "Dealing with Difficult Customers" course.

Arrangements have been made for those staff unable to attend these courses, including any new starts, to do so.

Departments with specific needs, for example Social Work, have developed customised training courses in conjunction with Personnel and Management Services.

- (ix) The Director of Roads has, as Project Manager (Customer Care), developed the Customer Care philosophy across all departments, co-ordinating initiatives which have lead to the production of this Report.
- (x) A master plan of activities including timings and costings has proved difficult to establish to date given the different position of each department relative to the adoption of the Information Technology based Customer Care system. Once the results of all trials are known this will be revisited.
- (xi) The Director of Personnel has delivered a programme of training modules, both standard and customised to meet the needs of individual client departments, for frontline staff and staff likely to come in contact with difficult customers.
- (xii) The Director of Property has developed a programme of improvements to building receptions with the intention that these works be implemented in 1998/99.
- (xiv) FACTBANK and Access Office continue to underpin the Councils commitment to Customer Care. The inclusion of FACTBANK and the internal telephone directory on the INTRANET allows greater access to these facilities as well as ensuring more frequent updates.

## 5 CONSULTATION

All Chief Officers, all members of the Customer Care Working Group, and all members of the Best Value Customer Care/Valuing Staff Group have contributed to the preparation of this report.

## 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Customer Care Working Group recommends that:

- (i) the proposals put forward for Customer Care be agreed in principle as detailed in the report in the following areas:-
  - Written communications
  - Reception areas and face to face contact with customers
  - Telephone contact
  - Consumer/Market Research
  - Customer Complaints
  - Training
- (ii) the database/knowledge based Customer Care Model currently being developed by the IT Department should be adopted as the 'core' information system on which individual Department's operational needs for Customer Care can be formulated and developed in a consistent manner;
- (iii) the IT database/knowledge base Customer Care Model be introduced at the earliest opportunity into all departments in the first instance as a written communications management tool;
- (iv) in parallel to recommendation (iii) further trials be carried out in the following departments to further develop the IT database/knowledge based Customer Care Model into specific areas of service provision:-
  - (a) Roads Department - (eg CLARENCE, reporting of road/lighting defects)
  - (b) Education

- (c) Social Work
  - (d) Planning, Transport & Economic Development - (eg Planning Applications)
- (v) through effective utilisation departments will gain experience and knowledge of the IT database/knowledge based Customer Care Model in written communications and from the other 'live' trial developments which will assist in the development, collection and measurement of relevant performance indicators;
- (vi) within a six month period all departments should work towards specifying levels of Customer Care which customers can reasonably expect in the delivery of services across the full range of individual department's responsibilities;
- (vii) in line with recommendations (vi) a further report detailing the areas of service delivery in all departments which can be successfully integrated within the Customer Care Model will be provided at a later date;
- (viii) staff be given training in Customer Care to maximise the realisation of staff potential and development within the correct culture to achieve Customer Care objectives;
- (ix) the Director of Roads be nominated as the Project Manager (Customer Care) for the development and co-ordination of the Customer Care philosophy across all departments;
- (x) the Project Manager (Customer Care) prepare a master plan of activities, timings, and costings for the Council's Customer Care implementation strategy;

- (xi) the Director of Personnel design, develop and implement a series of training modules to meet the specific needs of Customer Care in line with the 'phased-in' approach for the IT Customer Care Model;
- (xii) the Director of IT consider the implications of further development depending on the results of the trials and report back in accordance with the recommendation (vii);
- (xiii) the Director of Property Services further look into the recommendations associated with Reception Areas at Council Buildings and within departments;
- (xiv) in addition to the proposed Customer Care Model approach it should be noted that the facilities provided by FACTBANK and within Access Offices will serve as key elements underpinning the Council's commitment to Customer Care.

REPORTS/ccare.valstaff  
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GS/SCP



**NOTE OF POINTS DISCUSSED AT A MEETING HELD WITH COMMUNITY COUNCILS ON THURSDAY 4 JUNE 1998 AT 7.30 PM IN THE TOWN AND COUNTY HALL, FORFAR****1. INTRODUCTION**

Councillor Ian Hudghton welcomed the representatives of the Community Councils to the meeting.

**2. MEETING OF 11 DECEMBER 1997**

The note of points arising from the meeting held on Thursday 11 December 1997, was circulated.

**3. MATTERS ARISING**

With reference to Article 9 of the note, Councillor David Selfridge indicated that 8 representatives from Community Councils had attended the "Angus Ahead Forum" on 30 January 1998. It was hoped that a number of new initiatives concerning the Angus Ahead campaign would be coming from Angus Council in the near future.

**4. MATTERS RAISED BY COMMUNITY COUNCILS****(a) Youth Disorders**

A letter from Peter Murphy, Secretary, Carnoustie Community Council, dated 11 May 1998 was submitted, expressing the Community Council's concerns regarding the disorder taking place in Carnoustie involving young people, and expressing their wish to liaise with other Community Councils, the Police and the Social Work Department on how to tackle this problem.

Mr Fred Oswald of Carnoustie Community Council expressed his thanks for the support of the Special Constable at Carnoustie, and urged those concerned to write to the Secretary of State and their local MP, expressing their concerns and seeking a review of the current legislation to deal more effectively with this problem.

Bill Robertson, Director of Social Work, in response, admitted that this was a complex issue and that any response would have to be made within an overall strategy on youth/alcohol abuse. He indicated that, at present, a framework existed to deal with this issue under the auspices of the Tayside Drug Action Team, chaired by the Chief Constable of Tayside with the Director of Education and the Director of Social Work representing Angus Council. A separate Forum existed for alcohol and drugs and he confirmed that he would raise the issue at the forthcoming meeting of the Angus Alcohol Forum. Sandy Watson, Chief Executive of Angus Council, expressed his support for these proposals and indicated that this issue would be raised within the Youth Strategy Member/Officer Group.

Councillor Alex Shand indicated that at present the police were aware of the problem and were undertaking surveillance work using unmarked police cars.

**(b) Education**

A letter from Mrs Marie Brewster, Secretary, Lundie, Muirhead & Birkhill Community Council was submitted on the issue of education. The Education Department were urged to take active steps to look at the use of the village hall, for the holding of evening classes, using the Community Education Department in a support capacity.

Jim Anderson, Director of Education, in response, indicated that a new Community Education Officer had recently been appointed and that he would raise these issues with the officer, once she had taken up post. In addition, the Council was currently supporting the provision of evening classes, by way of small grants to self-help groups.

Concern was expressed from Community Councils in general, regarding the long-term development of housing in the area and the ability of the current education provision to deal with the increase. In response, Ian Hudghton indicated that as far as he was aware, the capacity of Birkhill School, in particular, was sufficient to deal with the projected increases.

Ian Hudghton assured those present that both members and officials of Angus Council were aware of the issues that had been raised in general, regarding education in the area and he hoped that the new Community Education Officer, when in post, would be able to progress matters relating to evening provision.

**(c) Fly Tipping and A92 Traffic Measures**

A letter from Murroes and Wellbank Community Council dated 13 May 1998 was submitted raising the issue of fly tipping, which had become a major problem recently within the area and in other parts of Sidlaw and in addition requesting that Angus Council introduce traffic regulations to reduce the use of rural roads when the dualling of the A92 was completed.

Stewart Heggie, Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection in response, indicated that fly tipping was an offence, but that the enforcement agency was Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA). However, there was an obligation on local authorities to "clean-up" fly tipping, where it occurred on Council ground. In addition, he had approached Tayside Police, who had agreed to look for potential offenders. He urged the local community to provide the police with any information they had on occurrences of fly tipping.

Concerns were expressed by the Community Council that the Council should put in place measures which took into account the consequent effects of traffic on side roads, as a result of the dualling of the A92.

Bob McLellan, Director of Roads, in response, indicated that he was aware that the current road works being carried out on the A92 at Ethiebeaton had caused some delays and some drivers to use Drumsturdy Road. As part of the design criteria for the dualling of the A92, bonuses could be built into the contract to encourage use of the A92, and to require the contractor to ensure that 2-way traffic would be possible during construction. Traffic calming measures were also proposed to be introduced on Drumsturdy Road from October/November 1998.

**(e) Consultation Prior to Roadworks**

There was submitted a letter from Mrs Esme Hickson, Secretary of Inveresk Community Council dated 15 May 1998, regarding the lack of consultation by the Council, prior to roadworks being undertaken and specifically in relation to the crash barrier at Newtonhill on the B966, the closure of bridges in Inveresk, the roundabout in Southesk Street, Brechin and the proliferation of road safety signs in villages in the area. Hugh Campbell-Adamson, Chairman, Inveresk Community Council, requested that consultations take place with Community Councils prior to roadworks being undertaken or the closure of bridges.

Bob McLellan, in response indicated that it would not be feasible to undertake consultation on roadworks, given the number that were undertaken in a year and that the road safety provision would have to be undertaken by qualified staff.

In relation to the number of bridge closures, Bob McLellan referred to a new UK Directive, which required all bridges to have a weight capacity of 44 tonnes. A major amount of work had to be undertaken to bring these bridges up to standard. Where the authority had a legal obligation to give notice of works to be undertaken, letters were sent to Community Councils, along with other bodies.



**(f) Circulation of Agendas**

Ian Hudghton indicated that he had received some late correspondence from Arbroath Community Council, expressing their concerns regarding the apparent late notification of the meeting. A number of other Community Councils shared their concerns. Sandy Watson indicated that requests for agenda items had been issued some time in advance of the meeting. A decision had been taken to leave off the circulation of the agenda until as late a date as possible, in order to allow Community Councils to submit items and raise issues that were topical.

Ian Hudghton noted the concerns and indicated that the matter would be given consideration.

**5. (a) Community Council Scheme - Review**

There was submitted Report No 186/98 by the Chief Executive which detailed the Council's progress in achieving the single Angus Community Council administrative scheme and setting out suggestions for the commencement of a gradual review process which would lead to a new Community Council administrative scheme being introduced to meet the changing circumstances of the Council and Community Councils.

The Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 10 February 1998, had agreed:-

- (i) to approve consultation with Community Councils, with a view to a further review of the Angus Council Community Councils Scheme; and
- (ii) to recommend to Community Councils the formation of a Working Group of representatives of the Council, Community Councils and officials to consider improvement of the existing administrative scheme, changes in the constitutions of Community Councils and updated methods of operation and financial matters.

This was noted.

**(b) Representation on Working Groups**

A suggested representation on the Working Group of Community Councils was circulated at the meeting as follows:-

<b>Area</b>	<b>Community Council Areas</b>
Monifieth	Monifieth, Murroes and Wellbank, and Newbigging and Monikie
Montrose	Montrose, Farnell, Hillside, Dun and Logie Pert, and Ferryden and Craig
Carnoustie	Carnoustie
Arbroath	Arbroath, Carmyllie, Colliston and Arbirlot, Friockheim and Inverkeilor
Forfar	Forfar, Letham, Lunanhead, Kingsmuir and Inverarity
Kirriemuir	Kirriemuir, Kirriemuir Landward East, Glamis and Kirriemuir Landward West
Brechin	Brechin, Inveresk and Aberlmenio
Sidlaw/Newtyle	Newtyle and Eassie, Auchterhouse, Lundie, Muirhead and Birkhill, Fowlis, Liff and Benvie, Tealing and Strathmartine

It was agreed that Mr Peter Murphy should represent Carnoustie and Mrs Anne Mitchell should represent Brechin, Inveresk and Aberlemno. The Community Councils should confirm their representatives on the Working Group and notify Ian Robertson, Policy Officer, as soon as possible.

Ian Robertson indicated that it was envisaged that the Working Group would hold 3 meetings, with the first meeting scheduled for August.

## **6. BEST VALUE**

Sandy Watson, Chief Executive, gave a presentation on the Council's progress in adopting a Best Value regime and indicated that the Council's submission on Best Value had been accepted by the Scottish Office. The Council was committed to achieving Best Value in the provision of services and would keep Community Councils informed of progress.

Dr Cohen, Aberlemno Community Council enquired regarding the possibility of local authorities entering into 3 year service agreements with the voluntary sector.

Sandy Watson, in response, indicated that central government were still unwilling to undertake budgetary cycles of 3 years. David Sawers, Director of Finance, in addition, indicated that local authorities would wish to move to 3 year financial planning, however, at present, no progress was being made on this by central government.

## **7. ANGUS COUNCIL REPORT ON ACCOUNTS 1996/97#**

A copy of the Annual Report and Accounts for the first year of the Council's operation were made available to representatives of the Community Councils.

David Sawers indicated that Angus Council was one of the first new unitary authorities to produce its annual accounts with an Audit Certificate.

## **8. CALOR GAS SCOTTISH COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR 1998**

A letter from the PR Partnership, Public and Media Relations, dated 24 April 1998 was submitted indicating that Calor Gas were preparing to launch a Scottish Community of the Year scheme in association with the ASCC (Association of Scottish Community Councils) and APRS (Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland). Calor Gas had committed a prize fund of £6,000 to the Scottish Community of the Year 1998 Awards and were currently in the process of finalising the categories and criteria. To enter, Community Councils were being asked to complete a written submission.

Ian Robertson indicated that details of the launch would be forwarded to all Community Councils in the near future.

Ian Hudghton expressed his thanks to the representatives of the Community Councils that had attended the meeting, along with the officials of the Council and hoped that the meeting had been of benefit to all concerned.