

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL PEN-Y-BONT AR OGWR

REPORT TO CABINET EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES

6 JULY 2009

**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE
CHARTER AND THE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE CUSTOMER
SERVICE CENTRE IN THE CONTEXT OF EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY**

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Equalities Committee of the progress made by the Customer Service Centre since the approval of the Customer Service Charter and the links to the Corporate Equalities Scheme.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority: -

- 2.2 The information in this report shows how the Customer Service Charter intends to support the Corporate Equalities Scheme as does action being taken in the Customer Service Centre which ensure that the Authority is meeting its statutory duties in respect of equalities and diversity.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Customer Care Programme was endorsed by Cabinet on 27th March 2007. The stated objective of the programme is to “deliver services designed around the needs of the citizen and businesses provided through modern, coordinated means to improve the customer experience and achieve better outcomes, reduce paperwork and improve efficiency”.

The Customer Service Centre opened for business on 7th July 2008 following an intense training period for staff, who were formerly either receptionists for various services within the Civic offices and Sunnyside or new recruits. At time of opening work continued to convert the old temporary reception to accommodation for Electoral Services. The Customer Service Centre is designed to be accessible to all customers. The specific features include self serve kiosks of different heights, all desks with hearing loops, all interview rooms accessible to disabled scooters or wheelchairs along with disabled toilets and baby changing facilities. Uniformed Customer Advisors are easily recognisable and all wear name badges. There are no barriers between customers and staff

and a combination of natural light, modern lighting, pleasant décor and comfortable furniture a welcoming atmosphere for customers. Customers are not directed to various services within the building instead their needs and enquiries are dealt within the Customer Service Centre and when a Customer Advisor is not able to deal with the enquiry staff from the service areas come to customer rather than the customer having to go to the staff member.

The Customer Service Charter – see Appendix 1, was produced following consultation with our customers and staff and sets out the standards to be met by all staff of the Council for all services. The Charter outlines

- The standards we have set for ourselves
- What customers can expect from us
- How customers can get in touch with us
- Our commitment to equality of access to services, and
- Customers' right of complaint.

This is the first time that the Council has published a set of corporate customer service standards. Whilst some departments and sections continue to have standards relevant to their area of service delivery, the Customer Service Charter, has been adopted as the overriding statement of the council's corporate customer service standards. As such any 'local' customer service statement should reference the Customer Service Charter as the basis for its standards and the Charter represents the minimum service level a customer can expect when dealing with us.

An Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out in June 2008 – see Appendix 2 (as a pilot to the introduction of EIAs for the Council). The Charter was launched at the start of National Customer Service Week on the 6th October 2008 following the official opening of the Customer Service Centre on 3rd October 2008 by Simon Richardson, the Paralympic Gold Medalist at Beijing 2008.

4. Current situation / proposal:-

- 4.1 All customers are treated with respect and dignity. This is measured by customer feedback gathered via a Customer Satisfaction Survey completed by customers following their visit to the Customer Service Centre. Consistently high scores are given for staff being friendly and helpful (4.6/5 Oct 08, 4.7/5 Nov 08, 4.8/5 Dec 08).

All staff have received training for attitudes and behaviours, managing conflict, drink and drug awareness and, by the end of March 2009, all will have completed experiential equalities training. The absence of barriers and the pleasant atmosphere has created an environment whereby customers are rarely verbally abusive in any way. Customers

are offered the use of a private meeting room to discuss sensitive information or for cash transactions.

The Customer Service Centre and the Customer Service team continues to evolve and learn. Welsh speakers wear 'Cymraeg' badges and large signs at the Front Desk advertise that business can be conducted in Welsh. The Welsh speaking Customer Advisors have just begun a 10 week bespoke Welsh course developed by University of Glamorgan to understand the technical terms used in, for example, the delivery of Planning and Benefits services. This is to be used as a case study for the WAG 'Welsh in the Workplace'. Many added value services, such as weekly surgeries by a local Credit Union and Age Concern Bro Morganwng and events, such as hosting the Welsh Language Forum, Christmas carols sung by local school children and the launch of the campaign against male domestic violence have been delivered from the Centre. The Customer Service Manager is currently in discussion with *Bridgend Accessible Homes* regarding holding a regular 'surgery' in the Customer Service Centre.

The UK Government supplier of telephone interpreting – 'The Big Word' is used to talk with customers using languages other than English or Welsh and staff have access to a network of BSL interpreters for deaf customers should these services be required. Some customers have taken advantage of the hearing loops (fitted at every desk) and the portable hearing loops have been loaned to Registrars conducting weddings where family and/or guests are hearing impaired.

To meet the commitments made in the Customer Service Charter customers arriving at the Customer Service Centre are logged into a queuing system to ensure that they are seen in turn and, as far as is practicable, do not wait longer than 10 minutes to have their enquiry dealt with. A total of 5,666 customers were seen during quarter 3 08/09 (October-December) with the average waiting time at 9.93 minutes and 87% of enquiries were resolved at the first point of contact.

A total of 50,542 calls were handled during quarter 3 with an average speed of answer of 36 seconds, 80.3% of all calls were answered within 30 seconds. No calls were received via the Text Phone 643644. E-mails received via talktous@bridgend.gov.uk are monitored by the Customer Service Centre and forwarded, when necessary, to an appropriate service area for response within 1 working day of receipt.

The Customer Service Measures paper was approved by CMB on 5th January and work is on-going with service areas to ensure that commitments made in the Charter are monitored by all services.

5. **Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules**

- 5.1 The work carried out by the Customer Service Centre staff supports the implementation of the Corporate Plan and the Corporate Equalities Scheme.

6. **Legal implications**

- 6.1 This report does not identify concerns from a legal perspective

7. **Financial Implications**

- 7.1 Initiatives to improve service delivery, such as training for elementary BSL will be resourced by realigning existing Customer Service and Corporate Equalities budgets. A basic introductory BSL course costs £100 and includes the tuition fee, the BSL book, DVD, registration fee and exam registration fee, assessor fee, OCN certificate and admin costs. Current demand for BSL is low therefore it is envisaged that two staff attending such a course will be sufficient in 2009/10.

8. **Recommendation**

- 8.1 That the content of the report is noted by the Committee.

9. **Contact Officer**

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10. **Background documents**

Customer Service Charter – Appendix 1
Equality Impact Assessment for Customer Service Charter – Appendix 2