



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR'S



CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

September 2008

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Customer Service Strategy aims to improve customer service for Comhairle residents and support the Comhairle's mission statement to

“...provide excellent public services throughout the Outer Hebrides.”

The Customer Service Strategy supports the Comhairle's objective to

“...demonstrate improvement in our service performance.”

The strategy has been developed specifically to reflect the following of the Comhairle's corporate values:

“Our customers and communities are at the heart of all we do”

“We take pride in delivering quality and value for money and look constantly for improvement and efficiency”

Vision

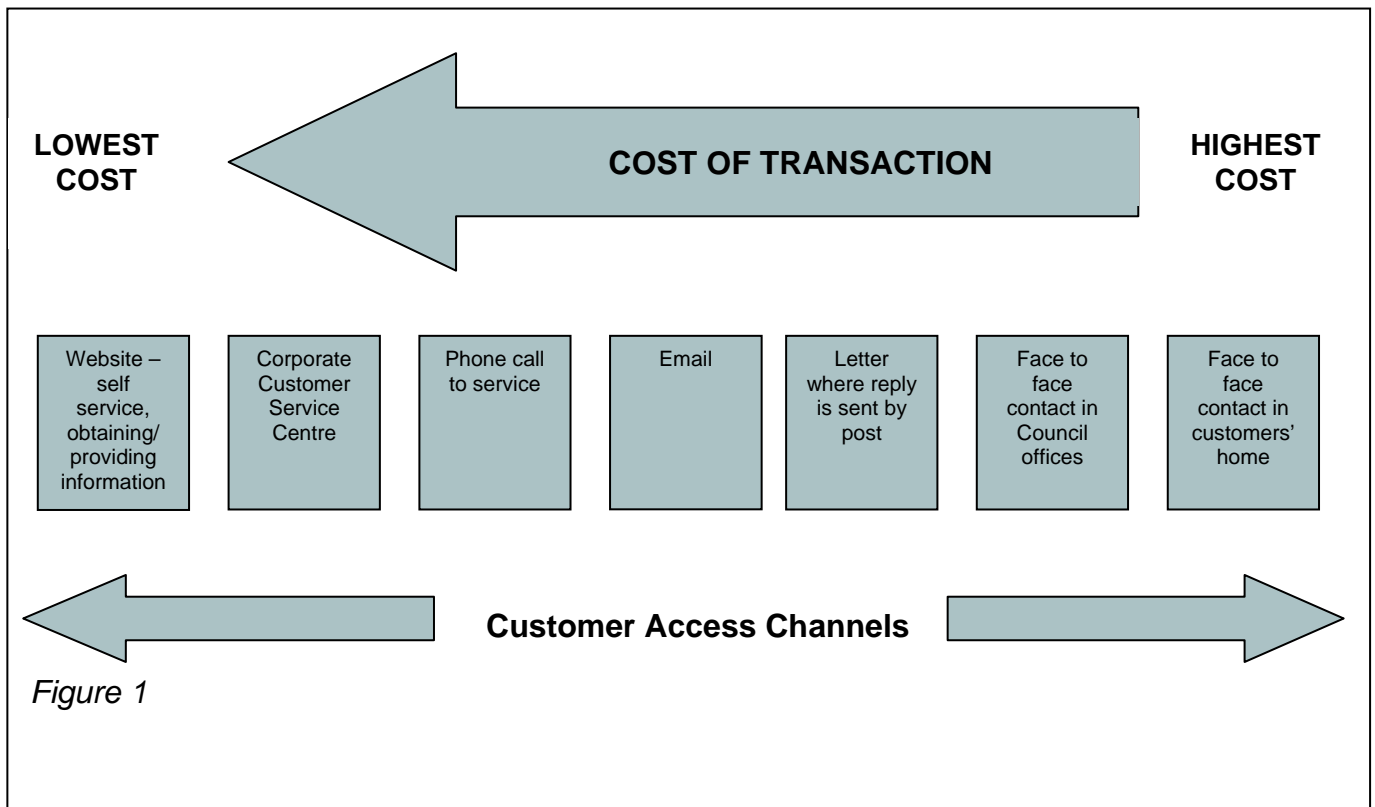
- A consistent, corporate approach to customer service delivery is implemented throughout the Comhairle.
- Service delivery is focused on the customers needs and getting it right first time.
- Customers have choices in how they access Comhairle services.
- An increasing range of services are provided through a single point of contact at times convenient to the customer.
- The Comhairle provides a positive working environment for staff presenting them with the most up-to-date information that enables them to offer excellent customer service.
- The Comhairle has the ability to measure the effectiveness of service delivery.

Customers view the Comhairle as a single organisation and expectations for better quality services continue to increase. Customers dealing with the Comhairle should have a common experience and level of service regardless of which service they are seeking or which access channel they choose to use. To meet our objectives the Comhairle will need to think of the way it delivers services entirely from the customer's perspective.

Work will continue to achieve the objectives of the strategy by expanding the capacity and range of services provided within a distinct Customer Service Team, establishing a Customer Access Point in Stornoway; and the implementation of a CRM System.

The CRM solution will entail linking up information on people and properties so that we gain an understanding of the whole range of contacts an individual has with the organisation – how they use services and what opportunities there might be to tailor or bundle services to meet their needs. Customer contact will be recorded through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System and by connectivity with back office systems so that up to date information is retained for all customers.

Phone access will be the major contact medium for the foreseeable future. Along with face-to-face contact, this is also vital to ensure social inclusion for those who are unable or wary of making use of new means of communication.



The underlying principle will be of consistency – customers should get the same level of service regardless of the channel they choose, and the same information base will support all channels. The intention of the strategy is to move customers to the most cost effective channel for the service they need. This may mean self-service over the Internet or via the Access Points for a fast response to the most common requests or services, and keeping back office contact for more complicated issues or for those customers who have specific needs.

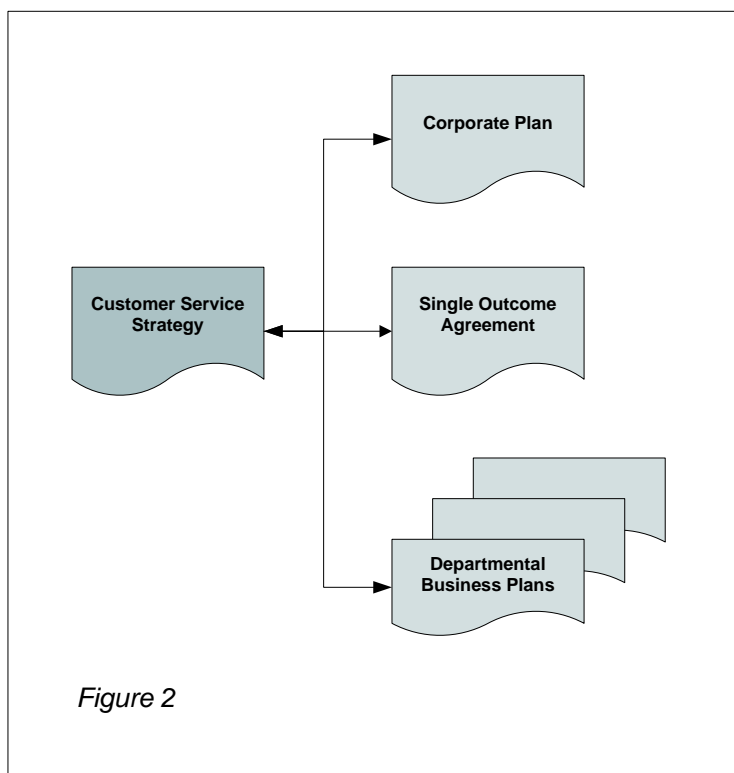
Key Outcomes for the Customer

- Proactive officers provide a consistent and informed service to customers
- Customer's can choose when and how they wish to access Comhairle services
- Customer's can access Comhairle services by telephone or On-Line
- Customers can visit a Comhairle Access Point within their own community
- Customers only need to provide information once and be kept informed on service requests

Key Outcomes for the Comhairle

- Greater focus on service delivery
- We are able to measure performance
- Information is captured once and then shared accordingly
- Processes are improved to prevent repetition or unnecessary delay
- A more cost-effective model is established with officers focussing on their core competence

The Customer Service Strategy will operate on a three year rolling basis, updated once a year to reflect changes in policy and procedure. It will be aligned with other Comhairle documents such as the Corporate Plan, Single Outcome Agreement, and Departmental Business Plans.



Ownership

All employees of the Comhairle own the Customer Service Strategy. It is the responsibility of the Customer Service Manager to maintain and develop the strategy. It will be the role of Management Team to take overall responsibility for applying and communicating the strategy to all employees, thus ensuring implementation, monitoring and compliance and also providing the opportunity for feedback in order to keep the Customer Service Strategy relevant and responsive.

Steering Group

To ensure that staff, customers and partners are aware, are consulted and support the Customer Service Strategy, a Customer Service Steering Group will be established; to develop an approach that will ensure our customers are listened to and have the opportunity to influence future service delivery. This group will be instrumental in deciding which services will be delivered through the Customer Service Team and via the CRM system.

ORGANISATION

To demonstrate the Comhairle's commitment to Customer Service, a corporate Customer Services section has been established, initially bringing together the staff within the Comhairle's Reception, Switchboard, Cash Receipting Service and Area Offices under one management structure. The Comhairle is keen to promote the concept that any member of staff in a front office is designated as a Customer Services Officer, even if some of our staff will have specialist skills within their role. This will be supported by access to the CRM application as appropriate to enable them to provide a full range of services.

People Development

High quality training, development and support will be key to the successful implementation of this strategy. The rollout of a broad range of services to be delivered via the Access Points will require staff to learn new systems and procedures. It is proposed that all front line staff will, through time, undertake a nationally accredited customer service training programme.

A larger, more integrated Customer Service Team provides better opportunities for staff in terms of:

- More interesting and varied work
- Greater potential for career development
- A structured approach to training and development.
- Providing services from a pleasant working environment.

Service Level Agreements

The front/back office relationship will be monitored through a series of Service Level Agreements (SLAs). This will focus on ensuring that the customers' interests are always put first. The SLA defines the nature of the service, how it should be carried out (i.e. processes and procedures) and the level of service to be delivered (i.e. the service standard). Regular reviews of the SLA will ensure accountability between front and back office.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM)

The Comhairle has joined the National Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Project and will implement Lagan's Enterprise Case Management solution. The Lagan solution will improve the Comhairle's service delivery capability and provide a more efficient and effective service to residents. Front line operators will have reliable and up-to-date customer and service information at their fingertips, enabling them to respond to customers enquires and requests, quickly, efficiently and consistently. The solution will enable them to respond to a wide range of questions, drawing on specialist knowledge where necessary. This will ensure that citizens receive the same service irrespective of how they access the Comhairle.

Lagan is currently working with the Comhairle to move it from its current position to a state of readiness required to introduce a CRM system. The first step has seen a number of face to face interviews with the heads of the services identified in the original CRM Project Brief as potential components of the "Phase 1" delivery.

Services to be considered for Inclusion in Phase 1

The independent analysis from Lagan has determined which services they recommend for inclusion within CRM based on existing statistics and the current position in the respective departments. The analysis has recommended to review in detail the processes delivered by the following sections; Revenues & Benefits, Cleansing Services, Development Management and Building Warrants.

Life Events

Whilst most customer requests tend to be for a specific type of service, the strategy recognises that people go through a series of 'life events', often requiring more than one service from the Comhairle.

The Comhairle should look toward the use of "life event" driven contacts and aim for a process that allows all of the background systems and services to be updated following a single phone call from the resident. How feasible this is and how appropriate it is for the Phase 1 services and the Comhairle as a whole will be considered during the detailed process design activities of the CRM workstream.

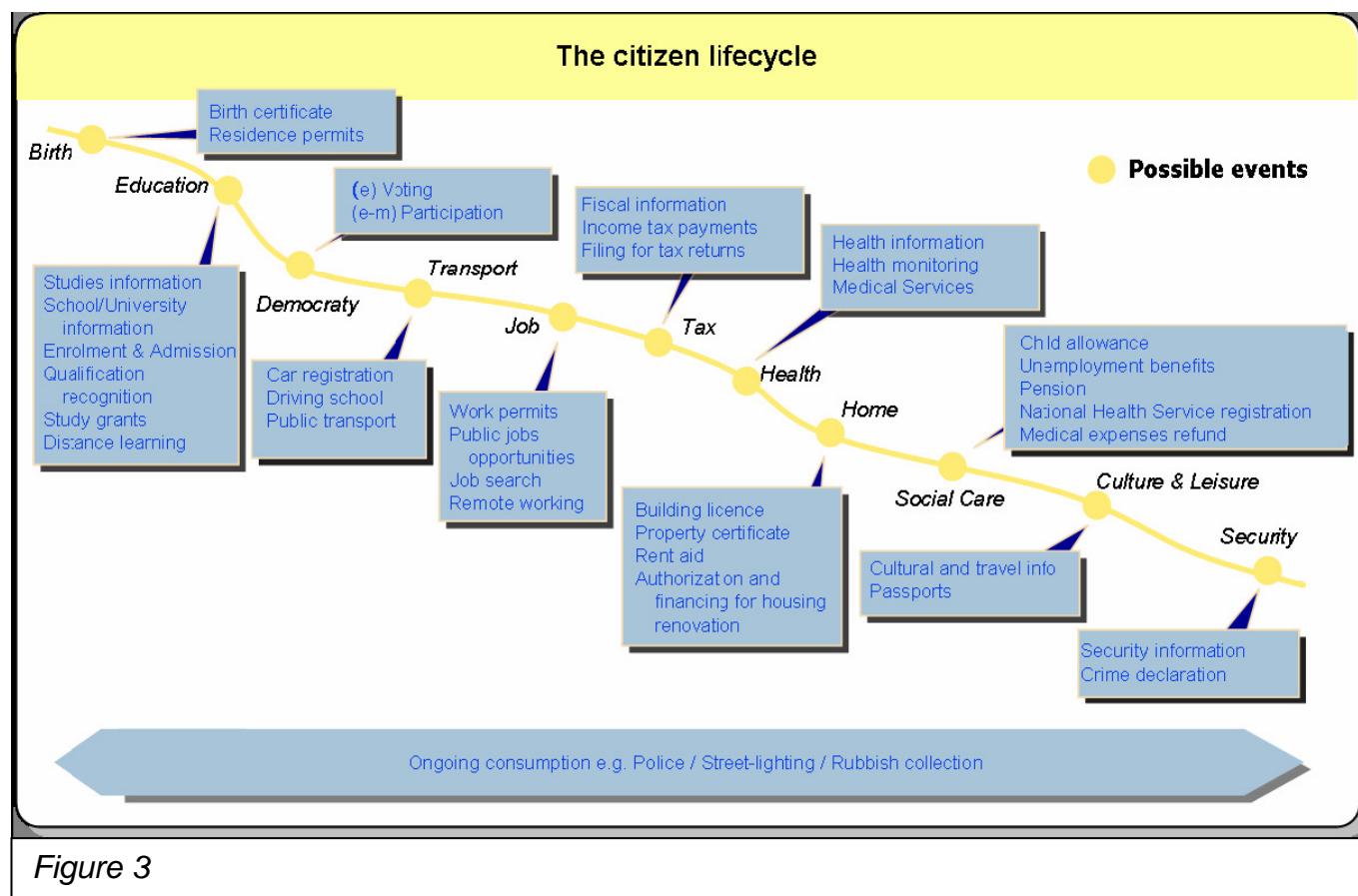


Figure 3

In such circumstances, people should not be required to understand the complexities of the Comhairle's internal workings and departmental structures. The Comhairle therefore needs to organise itself and share data across departments to respond to such scenarios and to have consistent up to date information.

Our customer service staff should have the capacity and capability to deal with all these enquiry types, and not have to hand-off simple enquiries to back office staff, undermining the objective of getting it right first time.

Customer Service Knowledge Base

Providing an effective knowledge base will enable staff to resolve routine enquiries at the first point of contact and improve efficiency by removing the need to hand-off a simple request to someone else in the organisation.

The Customer Service Team will have the following tools to respond to customer enquiries quickly and accurately:

- A-Z of Council services, with search engine enabling key words to be searched through self service and by front line staff.
- Answers to all the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as part of a relaunched Website.

It will be the responsibility of each Comhairle service to ensure that the information in the FAQ System and their part of the Comhairle's web content is accurate, sufficient and up to date by working with the IT Unit to establish a Content Management Process.

ACCESS CHANNELS

Customers want to contact the Comhairle through their preferred access channel, at a time and location of their choice. A key challenge for the Comhairle is to make sure that responses to enquiries are consistent, irrespective of access channel used.

Face-to-Face Contact

The strategy reflects the fact that many people still prefer face-to-face contact in accessing Comhairle services.

Face-to-face customer contact will be through the Town Hall Access Point, Area Offices and, *subject to funding*, Community Access Points. The objective is to offer a one-stop shop approach in each location with geography being no barrier to the range and consistency of services being delivered.

Town Hall

Stornoway Town Hall will be the main access point in Lewis for frontline enquiries, the intention being that, over time, it will resolve the majority of service requirements involving the provision of basic service and advice.

The purpose of the Stornoway Access Point is to provide a single, face to face, point of access to a range of Comhairle services. Customers will be able to visit the Access Point, contact a member of staff and access a range of services. One third of the population of the Western Isles live in the Stornoway area and the Town Hall will also serve a significant number of people who visit or work in Stornoway.

The rationale for the Town Hall location included:

- Greater likelihood of joint working and co-location with community partners in a multi-function civic building.
- Consistency with the Community Plan - the Town Hall compliments the aspirations for the building and town centre as outlined by the Town Hall MOWG and the regeneration of Stornoway town centre.
- A consultation exercise, relating to the Stornoway Community Access Point, was carried out in May 2005. All groups questioned favoured a town centre location (overall 66%) compared with the existing council offices (28%).

Aims of the Stornoway Access Point

- Provide a warm and welcoming environment and be located in an area of high customer demand where people go as part of their daily lives.
- Centrally located, accessible, easy to use, comfortable and welcoming.
- Specially trained staff more able to help with enquiries on a wide range of services.
- Staff having access to the tools and systems to process a job request, provide updates on the progress of that job and assist with enquiries about any other Council service.
- Opportunities to deliver other public services from the same building on a permanent or surgery basis
- Enables the rationalisation of Council buildings by bringing together access to all services into one location.

Community Planning Partners

Opportunities will be explored to make best use of the Town Hall. This may take the form of partnerships with Community Planning Partners either to simply share the building or at a deeper level of integration provide a better joined-up service to customers, and help reduce operating costs. Consideration will be given to offer use of it to other organisations above basic information and signposting.

Impact on principal Comhairle offices, Sandwich Road

All public visits to the Comhairle could initially be handled in the Town Hall and a booking system established for Sandwich Road for specialist advice. This would reduce the requirement for the existing department-specific receptions within Sandwich Road, free up office space, reduce unplanned meetings and provide a consistent and measurable approach to handling customer enquires through a corporate reception facility.

Area Offices

Area offices already provide a face-to-face enquiry service to customers and to a large extent already provide a one stop shop service to customers. Therefore the focus will be on ensuring that officers have the information to hand to resolve enquiries; are able to measure the volume of traffic their experiencing; are able to track the progress of service requests; and for each office to offer the same range and level of service. The intention is to implement the CRM system into each Area Office with a distinct customer service team dealing with all front line enquiries.

Community Access Points

The Comhairle agreed in December 2006 to consider extending the availability of Comhairle services by establishing Community Access Points (CAPs) in other areas of the Comhairle.

The purpose of the (CAPs) is to provide a single point of contact for a range of Comhairle and other public services. It is proposed that residents help determine the optimum location based on the criteria required to make the access point sustainable and introduce the agreed CAPs through a phased implementation. Their establishment is very much dependent on the funding being available which will only be known after work on the Stornoway Access Point and Area Offices is complete. Nevertheless the development of the community shop and facilities in Timsgarry, Uig presents an opportunity to assess the value of the CAP. The location is already established as a community hub, there is an existing office within the building and the location meets the necessary selection criteria. The existing staff would monitor the occupancy of the CAP, who was using it and for what purpose and collect feedback on what the community would like to see available locally. This feedback would help determine the future development of CAPs.

Selection Criteria

The location of each Community Access Point will take into account the following criteria:

- Proximity to nearest alternative CAP and/or local office in terms of distance and traveling time;
- Available accommodation in terms of a functional community building serving as a community focal point with some existing staffing presence;
- Co-location/proximity to community partner premises - e.g. health centre, tourist information, community centre;
- Refurbishment costs;
- Infrastructure - technology, broadband links, power, maintenance;
- Accessibility to all customers (disabled, elderly, with children, etc.);
- Ease of parking;
- Bus Routes and distance from public transport;
- Road Safety.

Telephone Contact

The telephone is the primary means by which customers currently contact the Comhairle. Subject to the upgrade of the existing Comhairle telephony system, the Stornoway Access Point will act as the principal access point for all telephone enquiries with the switchboard operating from within the Town Hall. Enquiries will be routed to employees who are appropriately trained to deal with them, so that the caller can receive a fast, professional and informed response.

The Comhairle does not propose to introduce a typical call centre, as it does not serve the needs of our customers nor realise any significant efficiency savings for our particular council. Rather the intention is to focus on reducing the transfer of calls and by initially integrating the existing switchboard service and customer service telephone enquiries (25% of all enquiries relate to Council Tax).

A relaunched Website will give access to a knowledge base of FAQs that will allow officers to deal with enquiries for other Comhairle departments freeing up officers to focus on the core competence of their job.

The intention is to implement a call logging system to gather data on the volume and nature of customer enquiries.

The introduction of a CRM system will allow officers to log customer contact and raise requests for service. Certain service requests can then be monitored for progress once they have been transferred to the back office council services.

The intention is to establish an appointment scheduling and booking system, which is used across the Comhairle to co-ordinate field service delivery with the facility to take payment for requests for certain services.

Numbering Strategy

The Comhairle's use and advertising of telephone numbers will be reviewed. The current extensive list of advertised phone numbers will be rationalised down to a series of prime numbers.

This will need to be communicated to customers effectively. All Comhairle literature and directory listings need to be presented in an easy to use format so that both internal and external users of the Comhairle's services get access to the services they need quickly and effectively, thus reducing misdirected calls.

Website

Encouraging greater use of online services is a key element of the Customer Service Strategy. A greater shift towards self-service transactions should free up Comhairle resources for redistribution into other areas or, alternatively, be taken as an efficiency saving.

The website will allow customers to access our information and services when they choose and from where they choose. Officers will be trained to use the website to provide assisted access to customers in person or on the telephone.

To be consistent with the other channels, electronic service requests will be logged in the CRM system to capture management information on customer demand and contact history.

The service requests will be passed, ideally through workflow, to back office systems for processing.

Services delivered online will be influenced by the Scottish Government's list of 46 ESD Services and increased promotion of online services will be required to encourage take-up.

CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS

The Customer Service Strategy proposes the implementation of Customer Care Standards that provide a minimum set of standards to be implemented. The objective is to ensure the public receive a consistent approach to customer care across the Comhairle.

Service managers will have the responsibility for ensuring that Customer Care Standards are met within their service areas.

Letter

- When writing to us you can expect a full reply to your letter within 10 working days or a progress report with timescales.
- To be provided with the name and contact details of the staff member responsible for dealing with your query.

Face to Face

When you visit our Area Offices you can expect our reception staff to:

- Wear name badges and be welcoming, polite and helpful.
- Attend to your query within 10 minutes or provide an explanation for any delay.
- Keep to pre-arranged appointment times and let you know in good time if appointments are running late or have to be rearranged.
- Provide you with accurate up to date information.

You can expect our Access Points to:

- Be accessible, clean, tidy and welcoming with clearly displayed opening hours.
- Provide consistent, up to date information on council services.
- Provide public access to the internet in where possible.

When we visit you at home you can expect:

- Visiting staff to identify themselves with their staff badge.
- To be informed where an appointment is running late or has to be cancelled.
- To be advised of the actions resulting from the visit and timescales.
- A clear explanation of the nature of a visit made without a prior appointment.

Telephone

- We will answer your calls within 10 rings.
- We will greet and give our name and service area.
- When we pass your enquiry to a specialist, we will pass on your personal details and the nature of your query so that you do not have to repeat it to another person.

Complaints

If we fail you on any of the previous standards and you wish to make a complaint, you can expect:

- Respect for your opinions and empathy for your views.
- An acknowledgement receipt within 3 working days.
- A full reply in 10 working days, or details of progress and timescales for a further response.

PERFORMANCE & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Customer Service operating plan will outline the key objectives and targets for the section and will take cognisance of the Single Outcome Agreement and detail outcomes based upon the identified local indicators.

Management information will be collated for the customer service section to enable effective monitoring and control.

There will be increased focus on performance management within the Customer Service Team section and better measurement will drive the setting of realistic targets for service improvement. Staff Development and Appraisals will be put in place for each member of staff. Performance will be monitored on a regular basis to help highlight areas where staff require further support, coaching or training.

The Improvement Service is currently exploring the potential of standardising the approach to measuring customer satisfaction within local government and the Comhairle intends to participate in this process.

Volume and nature of enquiries

In order to support both Comhairle and customer service management decisions there is a clear requirement to record volumes and types of enquiry. Capturing of this information is paramount and the deployment of the CRM system can support this requirement.

In order for the Comhairle to demonstrate that it is delivering against the objectives of the Customer Service Strategy there needs to be in place a consistent performance monitoring system across the Comhairle that provides the information needed on a timely and high quality basis to measure progress against an agreed baseline.

The minimum core things to be monitored against each service are:

- Volume of transactions.
- Percentage of enquiries resolved at first point of contact.
- Level of customer satisfaction.
- Number of complaints and compliments, including details of those upheld.

To help us monitor progress we will:

- Report regularly to the Customer Service Project Board, and Policy & Resources Committee;
- Use the Customer Services Steering Group to provide a decision making and assurance structure for key proposals;
- Maintain close dialogue with the Scottish Government with regard to national initiatives and statistical returns.