



Community and Customer Engagement Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Wednesday, 4 February 2009
Time:	6.15 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 2 - Wallasey Town Hall

Contact Officer: Andrew Mossop
Tel: 0151 691 8501
e-mail: andrewmossop@wirral.gov.uk
Website: <http://www.wirral.gov.uk>

AGENDA

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members are asked to consider whether they have personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they are.

Members are reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they are subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

2. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 4)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December, 2008.

3. ACCESS TO SERVICES (Pages 5 - 42)

4. ACHIEVING LEVEL 3 OF THE EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ESLG) - QUARTER 3 2008 / 2009 PROGRESS REPORT (Pages 43 - 74)

5. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR

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COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 4 December 2008

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)	
	Councillors	A Pritchard S Quinn C Povall	P Gilchrist P Hayes
<u>Cabinet Member</u>	Councillor	S Kelly	
<u>Deputies</u>	Councillors	D Knowles (In place of W Smith)	

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

23 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 6 and 30 October 2008 be approved.

24 EQUALITY STANDARD

Further to minute 19 (6 October 2008), Jacqui Cross, Corporate Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator, submitted a Guide to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process. The EIA was a self assessment tool for Council departments and services to consider the impact of their work in order to be able to take appropriate action to minimise or remove negative outcomes. It was needed to ensure that the Council delivered all of its functions, services, projects, strategies and policies in a fair and equal way.

She provided members with guidance in relation to the issues which they should consider when completing the EIA template and, in response to comments from members, confirmed that she would be available to offer further assistance if it was required.

Resolved – That the completed Equality Impact Assessment forms be returned direct to the Corporate Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator as soon as possible to enable a composite document to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

25 **PROJECTED BUDGET 2009/2011**

The Director of Finance reported that at the meeting of the Cabinet on 27 November 2008 (minute 267 refers) a number of budget savings were proposed and referred to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for urgent consideration before the meeting of the Council to be held on 15 December 2008. The proposal which fell within the remit of this Committee was –

- The sum of £140,000 of increased income from Wirral Partnership Homes following the closure of their cash offices be accepted.

The Director reported that since the establishment of One Stop Shops a significant area of work had been housing related queries. After Housing Stock Transfer and the establishment of Wirral Partnership Homes (WPH), the Authority continued to provide payment facilities and the initial contact point for housing enquiries. In addition, to assist customers, particularly in the major transition from being Local Authority tenants, WPH had continued to accept payments on behalf of Wirral Council and provided initial advice mainly on Council Tax through their network of public offices. The Director commented that this collaborative work resulted in no income changing hands with the charges being deemed to be the same to both organisations.

However, WPH had now decided to change their methods of payment and contact strategy and as such, from 2009/2010 they would not take payment for Wirral Council or give advice. However, WPH had stated that they were keen to agree to the Wirral One Stop Shops network remaining a key part of their access strategy for advice and referral and for the Authority to take payments on their behalf. The Director indicated that he would be making a charge to WPH with no contra charge being made, thus there would be an increase in income to the Authority.

In response to comments from members, the Director set out how the charge was calculated and indicated that it was in line with the contra charge that had previously been made. He confirmed that a Service Level Agreement was being finalised and that the cost and service would be reviewed on an annual basis by each organisation.

Resolved – That the proposed budget saving of £140,000 in respect of an increase in income from the ongoing work on behalf of Wirral Partnership Homes from 2009/2010, be approved.

26 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR - STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW CONSULTATION**

A member referred to the special Area Forum Conference/Conferences which the Cabinet had agreed (minute 264 (27 November 2008) refers) should be convened as part of the consultation process in relation to the Strategic Asset Review. He set out his objection to joint meetings of Area Forums being held on a constituency basis on the grounds that, dependent upon where the meetings took place, many residents

would perhaps not be able to attend because of mobility issues. He commented also that there had been no consultation with Chairs of Area Forums and he referred to clashes of dates with other meetings. He expressed the view that consultation should be by way of the existing Area Forum structure.

The Cabinet Member outlined the rationale for constituency-based Area Forum conferences being held and he referred specifically to the practicalities of arranging individual forums within the timescale and the difficulties faced by Chief Officers in attending forums in addition to other meetings in the Council diary. In view of the wide ranging impact of the proposals, he expressed the view that, if it was not possible to organise a Wirral-wide event, then it was appropriate for constituency Area Forum conferences to take place. However, he indicated that the Deputy Chief Executive was aware of concerns that had been expressed and he agreed to discuss with him the need to ensure that the meetings were held in appropriate and accessible venues.

On a motion by Councillor Pritchard and seconded by Councillor Hayes, it was –

Resolved – (4:3) That the Cabinet Member for Community and Customer Engagement be requested to ask officers to arrange separate Area Forum meetings in order to consult with residents on the Strategic Asset Review.

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 FEBRUARY 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

ACCESS TO SERVICES

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the Audit Commission report on Access to Services, following the inspection undertaken in September 2008.
- 1.2 The inspection assessed Wirral Council (on a scale of zero to three stars) as providing 'good, two star access to services that has promising prospects for improvement ... because of its impact on improving and providing access to services to meet the needs of the borough's diverse communities – one of the Council's aims.'

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Audit Commission undertook an inspection of Access to Services during September 2008. The inspection was led by the Finance Department which has responsibility for Customer Services. However, all departments and partners played key roles in the process.
- 2.2 The context of the inspection was that:
 - Legislation requires that Council services are:
 - Responsive to the needs of citizens
 - Of a high quality and cost effective; and
 - Fair and accessible to all who need them
 - Access to services is a cross-cutting theme applicable to all Council services. An accessible and user-focused organisation places customers at the heart of service delivery and designs joined up-services around the needs of users
 - The customer experience for both citizens and businesses when contacting their local council should be one which is responsive, timely and efficient.
- 2.3 Inspectors were on site within the Council for a week and interviewed a cross section of employees, partner representatives and user representatives from across a broad spectrum of Council services.

3 INSPECTION FINDINGS

3.1 The report, published on 8 January 2009, is appended, and is summarised below.

3.1.1 Wirral Council provides good access to services that are responsive and are based on an understanding of users' needs. It has an extensive network of one stop shops where users can receive face to face advice on public services. Partnership working with other agencies is strong and enables local people to access services at a single point of contact.

3.1.2. The inspectors found that the Council demonstrated strengths including:

- responsive services that address specific community needs
- a range of ways in which users can access services according to their individual preferences
- good engagement with local people to inform how services are delivered
- good use of partnerships to provide access to public services that are helping to improve the quality of life for local people.

3.1.3. However, the inspectors found weaknesses including:

- telephone contact with the Council is generally limited to office hours with no evening or weekend service, except for emergencies
- the number of abandoned enquiries to the Call Centre is high
- not all public buildings are accessible to, and suitable for, people with a disability.

3.1.4. To help the Council improve, inspectors recommended the Council should:

- review the means of access across all services
- strengthen the approach to accessibility and user-focus within its performance management arrangements.
- consolidate existing plans for improving access within an overall strategy.

3.2 The Council is keen to address the issues identified by the Audit Commission as follows:

1. *Telephone contact with the Council is generally limited to office hours with no evening or weekend service except for emergencies.*

The Council offers extended hours already in a number of key service areas such as Revenues and Benefits (8.00 – 6.30 and Saturday mornings) and it is planned during 2009 to extend opening hours across more services where this will be of value to service users.

2. *The number of abandoned enquiries to the Call Centre is high.*

General call abandonment levels at the Call Centre have been low and within the national parameters for local authority call centres. The Audit Commission highlighted a specific area, Streetscene, which since their visit has been addressed by improved systems and processes as well as increased staffing.

3. *Not all public buildings are accessible to, and suitable for, people with a disability.*

This was acknowledged by the Authority and is one of the issues to be addressed as part of the Strategic Asset Review.

- 3.3 The issue of access to services is an intrinsic part of the Council Change Programme approved by Cabinet on 10 December 2008. Officers are considering how best to manage the programme and ensure integration of individual projects through the Corporate Improvement Group.
- 3.4. The Audit Commission assessment of the provision of two star Access to Services with promising prospects for improvement has not been exceeded by any top tier local authority.

4. **FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

5. **LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

6. **LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

7. **PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

8. **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. The Council, through its Customer Access Strategy, is committed to ensure that all customers can access services with ease.

9. **COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

10. **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

11. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1. Access to Services Inspection – Audit Commission January 2009.

12. **RECOMMENDATION**

12.1. That the report be noted.

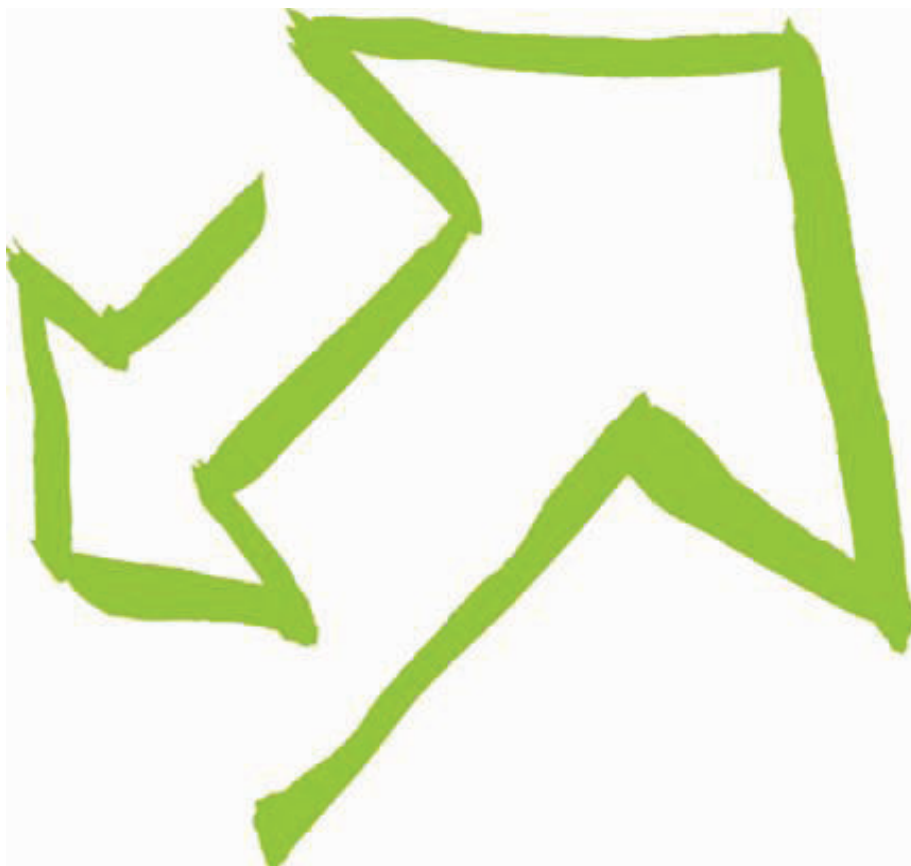
IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/17/09

Access to Services Inspection

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
January 2009

Embargoed until 00.01 hours on 8 January 2009



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Service Inspections

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003). Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater coordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

Summary

- 1 Wirral Council is good at managing access to many of its services. In particular it has a widespread network of face-to-face access points, through which it actively reaches out to its most vulnerable communities. It has brought other public services – particularly in health and employment - into them to enrich the offering.
- 2 The Council has a strategic approach that is based on a good understanding of the diverse needs of users and places them at the heart of access to services. This approach is based on a good understanding of the diverse needs of users. They are therefore able to access services that are responsive to their needs.
- 3 Good access to services takes place through a network of one stop shops, a call centre and the Council's website. Face-to-face access points are well located where they are most needed. However, telephone contact with the Council is generally limited to office hours. The Council's website provides electronic access to a good range of services but is not fully transactional.
- 4 Appropriate arrangements are in place for consulting and engaging with users. Feedback and complaints are encouraged and used to improve access to, and the quality of, services for all communities. Obtaining feedback from non-users is less developed. Generic service standards are clear and comprehensive. However, service specific standards – about speed of response, for example - are variable and local people are not routinely involved in defining them.
- 5 The Council is proactively addressing diversity and equalities in service delivery and employment policies. It works with local communities to ensure equity and fairness in service take-up. Performance in access, equalities and diversity best value performance indicators displays a positive trend but is comparatively mixed. The Council has not, for example, fully met its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act for physical access to all public buildings.
- 6 Through a wide range of activities designed to increase contact with its most disadvantaged communities, the Council has achieved good outcomes for users. Many initiatives are cutting-edge with increased take-up of the Council's and its partners' services by people who could benefit from them but who are not reached by 'normal' channels. Access in one-stop shops to partners' services for vulnerable people, such as those with mental health or alcohol problems, is used successfully to support the Council's aim to reduce health inequalities.
- 7 The Council can demonstrate improved value for money in services that have migrated to its central customer services systems, for example, streetscene and recycling services. A major aim of the Customer Access Strategy is to encourage enquirers to use the lowest cost channel for contacting the Council and make more use of electronic access via the website.

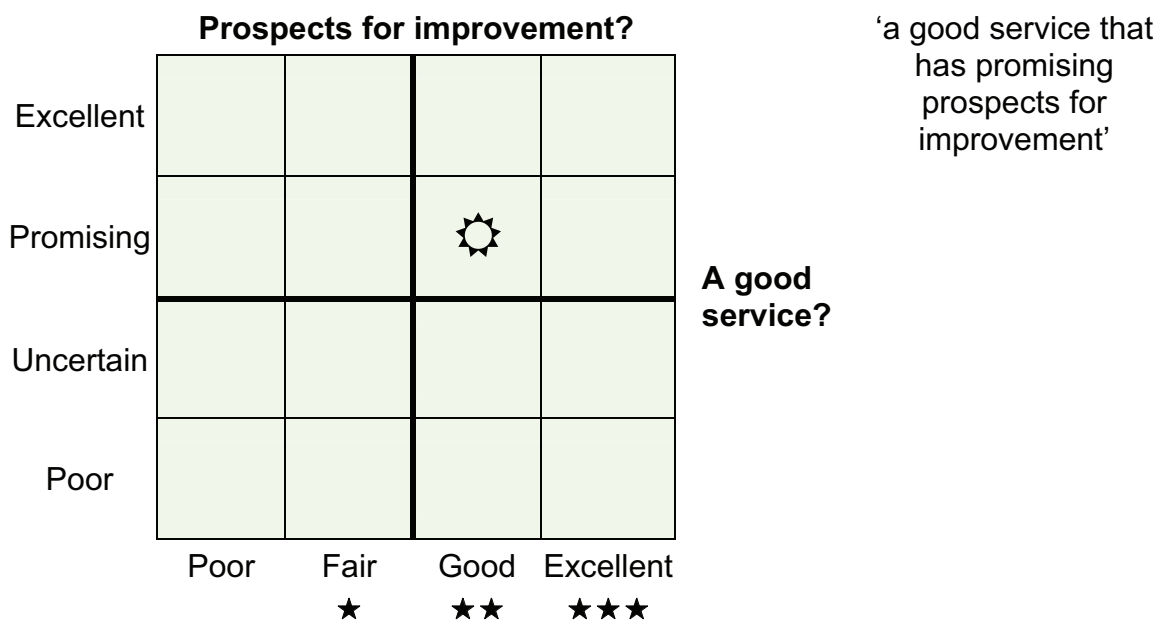
Summary

- 8 The Council has embarked on a programme of major changes in the way it works, which has a bearing on customer access. It is improving its management of diversity and equalities across services, and has unified its many brands into a single corporate identity. It is now beginning a review of its buildings, and it is exploring neighbourhood working. In addition, changes in services themselves, such as the move towards direct payments to people who need social care, are changing the nature of the relationship between the Council and its residents.
- 9 The range of plans and strategies collectively identify what the Council is seeking to achieve but they are not closely integrated with the Customer Access Strategy. An overarching strategy that consolidates all intended actions, including partners' for improving access to services is not in place. The lack of such a strategy creates a risk that collective resources are not used to best effect to achieve the intended outcomes and prioritise improvement projects.
- 10 Arrangements and an appropriate culture are in place to support continuous improvement in accessing services. Effective performance management arrangements are largely in place to drive and monitor progress and review the impact of intended actions to improve access to services. However, the Council does not routinely monitor the achievement of individual service standards. It learns from feedback and its own experiences but it is not systematic about sharing information across services to provide comprehensive profiles about users and non-users.
- 11 Overall the Council has access to the appropriate skills, finance and tools to deliver improvements. Human resource policies and practices support improving access to services and are embedding a customer-focused culture. The Council works well with community, private and voluntary sector partners to enhance its capacity and make good use of joint assets and resources. It is investing in ICT to further improve access. However, the lack of a council-wide customer relationship management system (CRM) to provide and support front-line services means that the Council is not making the best use of ICT to:
 - create detailed analyses of contacts and allow identification of trends and problem areas;
 - better understand users' needs and design and organise services to meet those needs;
 - track all service requests through to completion and contribute to further improvements in customer service;
 - maintain contact with users on a range of issues and raise their satisfaction;
 - improve consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery; and
 - communicate information about users and services internally throughout the Council.

Scoring the service

12 We have assessed Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council as providing good, two-star access to services that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

13 The Council provides good access to services because it has a number of strengths including:

- a planned and strategic approach to designing and providing access to services that are considered in service planning;
- a good understanding of the diverse needs of users;
- accessible and responsive services that address specific community needs;
- a wide range of methods to engage with local people and other stakeholders;
- a proactive focus on diversity and equalities in service delivery; and
- good use of partnerships to provide access to seamless services that are helping to improve the quality of life for local people.

¹ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

Scoring the service

14 Areas for further development include:

- telephone contact with the Council is generally limited to office hours with no evening or weekend service except for emergencies;
- the number of abandoned enquiries to the call centre is high;
- not all public buildings are accessible to, and suitable for, people with a disability;
- inconsistencies in service standards and the extent to which users are involved in defining them; and
- sharing of information is not systematic across all council services to provide comprehensive profiles about users and non-users.

15 Access to services has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the Council has improved access to a range of services for users to meet their diverse needs;
- progress on implementing diversity and equalities policies is positive;
- value for money has improved in terms of accessing a range of services;
- plans are in place and resourced to further improve access to services for users in accordance with their needs and preferences;
- effective arrangements and an appropriate culture are in place to support continuous improvement in accessing services;
- the Council learns from its own experiences and users' feedback; and
- overall the Council has the capacity to deliver service improvements, including working with community, private and voluntary sector partners.

16 Areas for further development include:

- integrating and consolidating action plans and other strategies to further improve access to services within the Customer Access Strategy;
- obtaining feedback from non-users and assessing satisfaction levels across communities to further inform service delivery;
- wider application of a customer relationship management system to support front-line services;
- monitoring and reporting performance against individual service standards; and
- evaluating the costs and benefits of each the Council's own access channels.

Recommendations

17 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition, we identify the approximate costs¹ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, we recommend that the Council does the following:

Recommendation

- R1** Consolidate existing plans for improving access to services within an overarching strategy that defines:
- users that are, and are not, accessing services;
 - how the Council intends to achieve its aims and targets for further improving access and reducing the gap between users and non-users;
 - the wider implementation of customer relationship management across services;
 - access channels that will be supported, including emerging technologies; and
 - timescales for implementing resourced improvements over the short-, medium- and long-term.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a more coherent, efficient and holistic approach to improving access to services and user-focus;
- improved data management and responsiveness to users to improve service quality and access;
- greater resolution of user enquiries at initial point of contact;
- improved user satisfaction; and
- greater clarity and transparency about what the Council aims to achieve.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2009.

Recommendation

- R2** Review the means of access across all services to ensure that opening times, access channels and outreach facilities meet users' needs and preferences.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved responsiveness and access to services at times that are convenient for all users;

¹ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendations

- reduction in abandoned calls; and
- improved value for money.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2009.

Recommendation

- R3** Strengthen the approach to accessibility and user-focus by ensuring that performance management frameworks include:
- analysis of the access to, and standard of services experienced by, different groups and communities; and
 - indicators that measure the speed and quality of service responses against aims, objectives, service standards and targets that are publicised to users.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved information to service users and potential users about the standards of services that they can expect and if those standards are being achieved;
- increased user satisfaction and responsiveness;
- better management of users' expectations;
- a complete overview of performance against objectives and targets relating to access to services; and
- improved targeting of resources.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2009.

Report

Context

The locality

- 18 The Wirral peninsula is in northwest England, bordered by the River Dee, River Mersey, Irish Sea and Cheshire. The area is diverse and has a mix of agricultural, industrial, maritime and residential areas. The population is 314,000 living in 143,000 households; 1.7 per cent of the population is from ethnic minority communities. Following a period of decline the population has stabilised and is forecast to increase. Over 23 per cent are aged 60 and over which is above the national and regional averages.
- 19 Wirral is ranked 60 out of 354 in the indices of deprivation for local authority areas in England (with 1 being the most disadvantaged). Whilst 68 out of the borough's 207 super output areas are amongst the 20 per cent most disadvantaged (including 11 within the 1 per cent most disadvantaged), 26 are amongst the 20 per cent least disadvantaged. Many of Wirral's citizens enjoy a good quality of life, with good housing, schools, employment opportunities and living environment. For others, the quality of life is worse, with pockets of high unemployment, low skill levels and poorer quality housing.
- 20 The general health of the population is overall worse than the national and regional averages with a stark mortality gap of over ten years between people living in the most affluent and deprived areas. Over 30 per cent of households have no car - again higher than the averages – which affects how local people can access services and employment. Unemployment is also higher than the averages.
- 21 The Wirral Local Strategic Partnership, comprising community, private, public and voluntary agencies, has produced a community strategy 'Getting Better Together'. The strategy sets out a ten year vision to 'make Wirral a better place in which to live, work and invest'. It identifies eight themes for action that reflect local priorities and are intended to improve the economic, environmental and social well-being of local people.

The Council

- 22 Wirral Council has 66 councillors. The Conservative Group is the largest party with 24 seats; Labour have 21 and the Liberal Democrats have 20, with 1 Independent councillor. A Leader and Cabinet of Labour and Liberal Democrat Councillors govern the Council. One Cabinet portfolio holder is responsible for community and customer engagement. Ten Overview and Scrutiny Committees complement the governance arrangements. One committee is responsible for community and customer engagement.

Report

- 23 The Council's net revenue budget (2008/09) is £298.7 million. Services are delivered by seven departments: Adult Social Services; Children and Young People; Corporate Services; Finance; Law, Human Resources and Asset Management; Regeneration; and Technical Services. The Finance Department is responsible for the management of the Council's call centre and one stop shops.
- 24 The Council's vision is 'of a more prosperous and equal Wirral, enabling all communities and people to thrive and achieve their full potential'. In order to make and monitor progress the Council has set out five objectives to:
- create more jobs, achieve a prosperous economy and regenerate Wirral;
 - create a clean, pleasant, safe and sustainable environment;
 - improve health and well being for all, ensuring people who require support are full participants in mainstream society;
 - raise the aspirations of young people; and
 - create an excellent council.
- 25 Each objective is broken down further into aims for the next five years and immediate priorities for improvement. One aim - linked to the objective to create an excellent council - is to 'improve accountability, accessibility and openness and involve those who use our services in their design and delivery'.

Access to services

- 26 We inspected the Council's access to services.
- 27 Developing a user-focused approach is a legislative obligation, in terms of its links with diversity, equality and human rights. Part I of the Local Government Act 1999 requires that councils' services are:
- responsive to the needs of citizens;
 - of a high quality and cost-effective; and
 - fair and accessible to all who need them.
- 28 Access to services is a cross-cutting theme applicable to all councils and all council services. An accessible and user-focused organisation places customers at the heart of service delivery. It knows what local people want and has organised itself to deliver services to meet their needs. In 2005 a national reportⁱ considered how councils could conduct their business via new and more cost-effective access channels. A further reportⁱⁱ highlighted the opportunities to provide joined-up services that are designed around the needs of users.

ⁱ Transformational Government, Cabinet Office, 2005

ⁱⁱ Service Transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer, Sir David Varney, December 2006.

- 29 Councils are fundamental points of contact for the citizen when seeking access to public services. The customer experience for both citizens and businesses when contacting their local council should be one which is responsive, timely and efficient. By identifying customer contact that is 'avoidable', a council and its partners are better placed to redesign the way services are made more accessible for their customers so they do not have to make unnecessary, valueless contacts. The Government has introduced, from 2008/09, national indicator 14 (the average number, of customer contacts per received customer request) relating to avoidable contact.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 30** The Council's Corporate Plan 2008-2010 sets out the aim to 'improve accountability, accessibility and openness and involve those who use our services in their design and delivery'. The aim is supported by key actions and indicators. The Council will measure progress in achieving its aim by indicators relating to service complaints, level of equality standard achieved, public media standards, percentage of calls answered by call centre/abandonment rate, number of hits on website and avoidable contact.
- 31** A Customer Access Strategy supports the Corporate Plan. The strategy sets out the Council's commitment to ensure that all of its customers can access its services with ease. A pledge states that the Council wants to make it as easy as possible for customers to make contact and deal with customer enquiries as quickly as possible. It aims to resolve enquiries first time - wherever and however customers get in touch (although some issues need to be referred to specialist staff) - and to provide a consistent and high quality service. It seeks to develop services from the perspective of customers by understanding what they need.
- 32** The Council states that it shall make its services available at times and places and in ways which are convenient to the customer. It expects that customers may want to contact by a variety of means. It aims to make it easy for customers to:
- talk directly by providing one stop shops in places to which people can easily travel;
 - telephone the Council; and
 - deal electronically with the Council by providing as many of its services as possible via the internet.
- The Council will also encourage customers to use the cheapest, most efficient access channel appropriate to their enquiry.
- 33** A Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) included a target for 95 per cent of residential properties to be within one mile of a one stop shop or an information point by 2006/07.
- 34** The aims for access to services link explicitly to all the Council's objectives by promoting and improving ease of contact. Improving services by making them more accessible and efficient makes Wirral a better place to live and work which leads to better prosperity. An accessible and responsive service helps to create a clean, pleasant, safe and sustainable environment. Access to, and assisting the delivery of health initiatives, helps to sustain an overall well-being. The Council seeks to engage with young people and encourage take-up of services through SMS text messaging.
- 35** The aims support the community strategy themes, for example, by helping local people to access opportunities that have the most impact on life-chances, such as learning, healthcare and work.

Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

Customer and community focus

- 36** The needs of citizens and users are at the heart and design of access to services now and in the future. The Council is taking a strategic approach to designing and planning services, reflected in community, corporate and service planning and by working with partners. Improving accountability, accessibility and openness and involving those who use council services in their design and delivery links to the objective to create an excellent council. These strategies are a good foundation for improving access to services and ensuring that they meet the needs of users throughout Wirral.
- 37** Decisions about access to services are based on a good understanding of the needs of users. Intelligence is drawn from a wide range of sources, including a Citizens Panel, 11 area forums, user surveys and an Equality and Diversity Stakeholder Event. Liaison with a wide range of user groups helps to establish access preferences and ensure that services are responsive to the needs of local communities. Their views have influenced the location and provision of services. The Council has, for example, expanded opportunities for personal contact by extending face-to-face contact points. Greater diversity across the range of groups consulted means that the Council can gather more information to help influence its decisions and developments more appropriately.
- 38** The Council and specific services make good use of available information on the disability, ethnicity and vulnerability of users to plan, prioritise and deliver access to services but actions are limited by the lack of comprehensive user and non-user profiles. The Council recognises the importance of understanding its customers, their diverse needs and the specific needs of particular sectors of the community. Demographic and survey information is collected around the six equality strands and across a number of service areas, including Wirral Partnership Homes. However, as yet, user profiles are not comprehensive and consistent across all services. Without profiles of which members of the community are or are not using services, including those delivered by partners, the Council will not have a comprehensive understanding of the access needs of all elements of the community to ensure that all services are provided in a non-discriminatory way.
- 39** Access methods are reviewed and improved in direct response to consultation, engagement, and feedback from local people, particularly those from marginalised or minority communities. The Equality and Diversity Stakeholder Event invited comments on 'which services are working well in terms of access and availability', 'which services are difficult to access and do not meet your needs' and 'what steps can we take to improve access to services'. The Council has used feedback to improve access across a range of facilities and services, including increased staffing levels, improvements to reception areas in public buildings and more appropriate waste collection methods. Such engagement helps to ensure that access to services is appropriately designed.

How good is the service?

Ease of access for all

- 40 Services are accessible, responsive and based on a good understanding of local needs. The Council has a planned and strategic approach to providing a range of effective, modern and traditional access methods through one stop shops, information points, a call centre, the website and video links. It works effectively with partners to deliver services at a single location. This extensive network means that the Council achieved its LPSA target to provide an access channel within a mile of 95 per cent of homes in Wirral. These facilities ensure convenient access to services for users and make efficient use of resources.
- 41 The Council knows the access preferences of its customers and why some people do not use services. It knows how groups and individuals within the community wish to access specific services and uses this information in the design of access, particularly for vulnerable users. The emphasis is on giving users a choice on how they wish to access services, by understanding and anticipating their needs and offering the most appropriate method. As a result one stop shops provide a more in depth response for complex issues and for users who value the additional support of face to face contact.
- 42 Personal access to services is good but is generally limited to office hours with only 2 out of the Council's 13 one stop shops open on Saturday mornings. The one stop shops are based in central locations across the borough, close to main transport routes. The Council places the one stop shops in well-known buildings, including libraries and sports centres, reducing the perceived stigma that users may have, for example, in seeking benefits advice at a traditional service counter. Facilities for personal visitors are well designed to meet their needs with procedures in place to manage peaks and troughs in demand - 87.1 per cent of users wait for 15 minutes or less to see an advisor and 82 per cent are interviewed within 20 minutes. This approach helps to create a user-friendly environment but users who work during the day have greater difficulty in making personal contact.
- 43 The one stop shops provide a comprehensive service. Here users can access a wide range of advice and services, including surgeries with, for example, the Citizens Advice Bureau and welfare rights advice officers. They deal with - on a first contact basis - the majority of users' enquiries and refer, where appropriate, more complex issues to specialist staff or to other agencies. With generic staff the Council is able to respond to a range of queries as well as promote related services. For example a customer making a housing benefit claim is also advised of an entitlement to a leisure pass and free school meals and offered appointments with partner organisations such as the Jobcentre Plus. Over 76 per cent of enquiries and transactions are resolved at the first point of contact. As a result users can be confident that the initial contact with the Council is likely to resolve their enquiry and that they will receive not only the service required but additional, associated support.
- 44 A comprehensive range of information and advice is also available at the one stop shops, for example:
- promoting job vacancies from local employers within the community, including jobs with flexible working hours that are suitable for lone parents;
 - facilitating public consultation such as regeneration plans for West Kirby;

- initial advice on business start-ups;
 - consultation with partner agencies such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Department for Work and Pensions; and
 - collaboration with Powergen to distribute free energy saving products.
- 45 Users have further, easy access to services through seven information points based in libraries. The information points provide first stage advice on council services as well as signposting to other services where users can access a more comprehensive level of service. Customers can also access more in-depth advice at seven further libraries through a direct video link to the call centre. These facilities, which complement the one stop shop network, mean that the majority of residents live within one mile of an access point for council services.
- 46 Access points are well located in the areas of most need. The one stop shop at Rock Ferry is within one of the borough's more disadvantaged communities, providing easy access to advice and support. In particular the one stop shops are a contact point for vulnerable people, such as users who present themselves as homeless. Staff act as an advocate on their behalf, contacting and liaising with relevant organisations and providing support to help to manage stressful situations.
- 47 Users with a disability have appropriate physical access to the one stop shops but not to public areas in all council buildings. All one stop shops are accessible to wheelchair users and have lowered counters and hearing loop facilities. However, in only 67 per cent of council buildings are all public areas suitable for, and accessible to, people with a disability. Fair access to all of the Council's facilities and services is, therefore, not available for users with a disability as easily as for non-disabled users.
- 48 Telephone contact through the call centre is generally accessible but for most requests is limited to office hours, with no evening or weekend service except for emergencies. In addition a Central Advice and Duty Team is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and offers advice or referral on Adult Social Services and Children's and Young People's Services. However, the Council did not achieve its target in 2007/08 to handle 95 per cent of calls. Although up to 94 per cent were answered on initial contact in one month, only 84 per cent of all callers received a response with 16 per cent of calls abandoned. Furthermore, only 62 per cent of calls were answered within 15 seconds, below the target of 80 per cent. Although demand has continued to increase recent improvements in call management and additional customer service officers have not reduced the rate of abandoned calls. Not all callers are therefore receiving the intended, prompt service.
- 49 The majority of users who do make contact by telephone also receive a comprehensive advice service. Call centre advisers are trained to deal with a wide range of enquiries and services covering, for example, benefits, council tax, waste collections and other general information. They resolve over 75 per cent of enquiries with one call and provide a flexible and responsive service to the public.

How good is the service?

- 50 The Council's website provides electronic access to a good range of services but is not fully transactional. It is easy to use and navigate with free access available at 24 libraries located across the borough. It provides access to an increasing range of council documents, information and services, for example, on-line benefit claim forms. The 'Do-it-online' and 'e-citizen' facilities offer a number of services that can be accessed electronically, such as making a service request, calculating benefits entitlements, making payments for council services and making a complaint against the Council. Electronic access to services is growing, demonstrated by an increase in on-line requests. All these developments provide further opportunities for users to access services more conveniently and efficiently.
- 51 Provision of information about council and partners' services is good. Individual services produce good quality advice and guidance, for example, a Bereavement Guide, a Care Services Directory, information for landlords, information to support revised waste collections and recycling facilities and the Wirral Fair Trader Scheme. All such publications provide information to make users aware about the range of council services provided and how to access them.
- 52 The Council does not have a comprehensive understanding about how well it responds to all service requests. Response times - other than for waiting times at the one stop shops, for telephone contacts, responding to complaints and national performance indicators – are not routinely monitored and reported. In 2007/08 the Council responded to 84.8 per cent of complaints within 15 working days compared with the target of 92 per cent. It has reported, for example, that fly tipping was removed on average within 2.05 days but this figure is based on a crude form of sampling. The absence of accurate systems to monitor response times in dealing with all service requests means that the Council cannot be assured that it is providing an efficient and prompt response across all of its services.
- 53 Comparative performances on national performance indicators that measure responsiveness are variable, ranging from the best to worst 25 per cent of councils. In 2007/08 the Council was, for example, amongst the best 25 per cent for the investigation of abandoned vehicles with all service requests actioned within 24 hours but below the median for their removal. Such inconsistencies in dealing with service requests mean that users do not always receive a similar, prompt service.
- 54 Information sharing is not systematic across all council services on specific customer needs. The overall effectiveness of the Council's customer relationship management system (CRM) is limited as not all services use this system. Until the Council puts in place appropriate systems it will not have a comprehensive understanding of which users within its communities are accessing all of its services.

Standards

- 55 Generic service standards are clear and comprehensive but service-specific standards are inconsistent. A Customer Charter and customer care standards are displayed in public areas. The standards include customer guarantees and response times for face to face, letter writing, telephone and e-mail and internet contact. Users therefore know that if their enquiry is not resolved at point of contact they will be told within 15 days what action is being taken.

- 56 Service-specific standards are not published for all activities and for certain enquiries, such as homelessness, the corporate standard is not appropriate. A Housing Benefits Customer Charter and Landlords Charter (which have more stringent timescales for responding to enquiries) and a Policy Statement on Equality in Service Provision are visible in one stop shops. A Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Statement shows performance against national performance indicator targets and waiting times. Other standards, for example, response times to other types of service requests, are not clearly communicated. Whilst users may be told on contact the length of time to attend to a service request the lack of systematic monitoring and reporting means that they have difficulty in judging the overall responsiveness and quality of services.
- 57 Users who choose to report service requests via the Council's website are generally not informed about specific standards other than the customer care guarantees. For example, when reporting offensive graffiti users know of a 24 hour response time. But they are not informed within what time other littering service requests will be actioned and as a result cannot judge the quality and responsiveness in dealing with such incidents.
- 58 Local people are not routinely involved in defining service standards. Without their active involvement the Council cannot be assured that its intended response times and generic and service-specific standards match the aspirations of local people.

Diversity

- 59 Access to services embraces diversity and equality well through a thorough and comprehensive approach. The Council understands its communities and where it needs to target inequalities such as by working with partners to improve access to health services. Good arrangements are in place to engage with groups representing the diversity of the local community in terms of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, faith and sexual orientation. The groups provide an input in planning accessible and responsive services to meet their specific needs.
- 60 Work with local communities to ensure equity, fairness and representation in service take-up is effective. The Council is proactive in engaging with marginalised or otherwise vulnerable groups. Staff actively participate in groups such as a Race Hate Task Group, Ethnic Health Advisory Group and the Black Racial Minority Partnership. They work with these groups to address issues through, for example, multi-agency approaches to tackle and eradicate race hate, improve the health of people from ethnic minority backgrounds by promoting smoking cessation services and encourage the take-up of services that are under-utilised by certain communities. As such users from marginalised groups can be more confident that their voices are heard and have an increased awareness about accessing services.
- 61 The Council works well with children and young people and older people to design and shape services that meet their needs, for example, by producing a DVD 'what I look for in a social worker and foster parents'. A Youth Forum, a Youth Parliament and an Older People's Parliament are effective mechanisms for engaging with these users. The Council has received a Beacon award for Positive Youth Engagement in the Community and Democratic Process. The Council allocates a budget to each of these Parliaments to purchase services to meet their own specific needs. They provide a useful mechanism from which views of the wider community can be sought.

How good is the service?

- 62 Performance in access, equalities and diversity best value performance indicators displays a positive trend but is comparatively mixed. The Council scores 68.4 per cent for the duty to promote race equality (below the median) and is at level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. It is working towards level 3 but did not achieve its target to achieve this level by September 2008. It has engaged in an impact and needs assessment, a consultation process and an equality action planning process for employment and service delivery. This performance is consistent with the majority of councils although 100 out of 403 authorities are at level 3 or above.
- 63 An integrated approach to equality, diversity and human rights is reflected in decision making, policies and practices for both service delivery and employment. The Council is developing a new Single Equality Scheme and action plan, which incorporates all six equality strands and access themes, supported by a comprehensive training programme. It uses its statutory duties well to promote equality with action plans, developed through consultation, to provide fair access to services. A Corporate Equality and Inclusion Group - representative of the whole council, including staff diversity forums and trade union members - provides an input in planning accessible and responsive services that reflect diverse communities. Such processes and mechanisms help the Council to develop services that better meet people's cultural, personal and religious needs.
- 64 The workforce profile is mixed. The percentages of employees with a disability (2.9 per cent) and from an ethnic minority community (1.3 per cent) are below the respective medians. The Council has exceeded its target to increase the proportion of its workforce from ethnic minority communities but did not achieve its target to increase to 3 per cent the proportion of its workforce who have a disability. The percentages of top earners who are women or who have a disability are amongst the highest 25 per cent but the Council is amongst the lowest 25 per cent for top earners from an ethnic minority community. Overall the workforce is not representative of the local population.
- 65 Users have good access to information in alternative formats, through Language Line, the National Leaflets Service and Braille and minicom for users who have visual or hearing impairments. The call centre and one stop shops provide a mediated interpretation service for people whose first language is not English and this is signposted clearly for customers. These facilities ensure equal and fair access for a wide range of users and minimise barriers to effective communication.
- 66 Councillors, managers and staff across all service areas have a good awareness of diversity and equality issues. They have had training (for example, on equality impact assessments and cultural awareness on traveller communities) to ensure that policies and procedures in service delivery actively promote equality. The training has led to services taking action that is based on a better understanding of diversity and sensitive issues, such as confidential procedures for reporting hate crime that are incorporated into council activities.

- 67 The Council is making good progress with equality impact assessments on its services and policies - including the call centre and one stop shops - to identify and mitigate any adverse impacts on services-users. It assesses the impact of new services in terms of age, disability, faith, gender, race and sexual orientation. Senior officers are accountable for the implementation of equality action plans and ensuring that equality impact assessments are undertaken. As a result the Council has greater confidence that its services are being provided equally and fairly.
- 68 The Council's Procurement Strategy and Sustainable Procurement Strategy recognise the contribution to its equality objectives but they are not specific about how, for example, disability and race equality will be promoted. A procurement objective is 'demonstrating improvement in the equality of opportunity and the promotion of good relationships between people within a diverse community in all procurement activity'. The strategies do not indicate how procurement policies will provide equality of opportunity and the appointment of contractors who share that commitment, including the monitoring of performance against the objectives. As a result the Council cannot widely demonstrate how procurement is promoting diversity.
- 69 Members of the community generally can gain electronic access to services with free use of the internet available at the borough's libraries. The Council's website is being designed to follow the accessibility guidelines issued by the World Wide Web Consortium and the Royal National Institute of the Blind. However, it does not have Browsealoud (an on-line screen reader), alternative text and viewing options. Nor is it available in alternative languages. As a result whilst a wider range of citizens can access the Council's website it is not appropriately designed for visually impaired people and all users.

Service outcomes

- 70 The Council is delivering what it promised to and is effective in meeting local and national objectives. Access to services is used to address specific community needs where appropriate, such as a fair debt policy to support low income groups. An accessible range of council and partners' services provide benefits in terms of convenience, health promotion and learning opportunities, independent living and responsiveness. The impact of activities is demonstrated by, for example, a 4.5 per cent increase in users accessing the one stop shop services in 2007/08.
- 71 Outcomes from the holistic, one stop shops and call centre approach include:
- improving the free bulky waste collection service and diverting such waste from landfill to charitable organisations for reuse, which has helped to reduce flytipping and significantly increase the Council's recycling/composting performance;
 - 'added value' by addressing users' diverse needs by co-ordinating the provision of specialist services; and
 - working with the Department of Adult Social Services to improve the response rate for clients' assessments.

How good is the service?

- 72 The Council is proactive in using a wide range of innovative partnerships with the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide access to services. It works across traditional service boundary areas to deliver more accessible and customer-focused services. Recognising that customers often do not know who delivers the services they wish to access, the Council works closely with partners to deliver a seamless service to Wirral residents. These arrangements provide benefits for the local community and improved access to a wider range of council and partner services at a single location.
- 73 The Council can demonstrate examples of good practices that have improved access to services through partnership working, including:
- providing access to surgeries and advice with the Wirral Alcohol Services Harm Reduction Team to help to reduce health inequalities – numbers accessing these services have increased by 54 per cent in three years;
 - working with the NHS to increase access to a smoking cessation service for people from black and ethnic minority communities;
 - ‘Pathways to Employment’, which aims to reduce barriers for people with mental health issues in accessing work via support worker surgeries at one stop shops;
 - debt management and legal advice for residents in partnership with the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, providing preventative and early intervention advice; and
 - working in partnership with a registered charity to give vocational work experience to local people who have been long-term unemployed.
- 74 The Council has, through such partnerships widened access to services in a confidential and sensitive manner. One stop shop staff are, for example, trained to identify users who have an alcohol problem and refer them for specialist support. This joint working initiative, which has been nationally recognised, provides added value by linking any problems around debt and housing need that the user might have if excessive alcohol consumption is a problem that exacerbates other factors. As well as improving efficiency and accessibility these complementary facilities help to make a real difference to people’s lives.
- 75 The Council has clear aspirations to tackle health inequalities in the borough. It is undertaking a wide range of interventions and activities to improve health outcomes. Staff have a good understanding of how services provided by the one stop shops and call centre can help to improve the quality of life and well-being. A range of advice, information and support is available. Close working arrangements between the Council and NHS and PCT services are providing benefits for mutual users and patients through improved access to specialist services which has resulted in an increased number of kept appointments.
- 76 The Council makes good use of joint assets for access to services. Partners such as Age Concern, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Pensions Service host surgeries in the one stop shops. Four one stop shops are located within DWP premises. Housing benefits staff have access to DWP’s information system to efficiently handle users’ claims. These arrangements use combined resources more efficiently, allow knowledge and skills to be shared more easily and provide seamless services for users.

- 77 The Council is effective at bringing other agencies together to provide good access for vulnerable users. The borough's largest registered social landlord, Homelessness team and DWP are all located at the Birkenhead one stop shop premises. As they serve the same users they can complement the work of the others more effectively. Through this joint working initiative users gain access to much wider and comprehensive services which is helping to limit the numbers of households in temporary accommodation and rough sleepers.
- 78 The Council works well with partners to improve community safety. The Police hold advice surgeries at one stop shops and, at West Kirby, this is enhanced by locating a 'Cop Shop' within the premises. Further work with the Police and local community is done via the Neighbourhood Action Groups and Key Individual Networks which bring together ward councillors and Homewatch groups. These activities provide a forum to discuss concerns that affect respective areas and inform the allocation of Police resources to proactively tackle issues such as under age drinking and anti-social behaviour, resulting in improved community safety.

User experience

- 79 The Council can demonstrate that users experience quality services, recognised by external awards, such as Chartermark accreditation and Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Excellence in Customer Service. Reception and front-line staff deliver good customer-focused service in an appropriate and friendly way. The innovative developments in partnership working are making a real difference to Wirral's residents in their contacts with the Council. All these factors enhance the quality of the service experience for users.
- 80 Users of the one stop shops have high levels of satisfaction with most aspects of the service provided but they are less positive about the resolution of their enquiries. Surveys in April and June 2008 showed that over 99 per cent are satisfied with the overall service provided. Satisfaction with ease of access, opening hours, waiting times and facilities range from 94 per cent to 99 per cent. Mystery shopping exercises have confirmed that staff have empathy and interact courteously and efficiently with users. Comparative data confirms high satisfaction amongst users of the one stop shops. However, a third of respondents had to make contact with the Council a second time regarding their enquiry, although two thirds stated that they would make contact about a similar issue in the future.
- 81 The Council cannot demonstrate satisfaction levels for all sections of the community. Survey data shows that 78.5 per cent of users are satisfied with the Council's overall service. The data is analysed for age, disability, ethnicity, gender and length of residence but users' satisfaction is not determined across the borough's individual neighbourhoods. Consequently the Council does not know to what extent satisfaction is consistent and how users judge the quality of services across the borough's communities.

How good is the service?

Is access to services value for money?

- 82** The Council delivers value for money in access to services. It has brought services – including partners’ services - together within the one stop shop and call centre. It promotes a choice of access channels and encourages the use of less expensive channels. The result is that the Council has reduced costs in this area whilst improving access arrangements.
- 83** Transaction costs for accessing services and dealing with users at one stop shops indicate that the Council is providing value for money. Although face to face contact is the most expensive access channel, added value is achieved by linking services dealing with more complex enquiries and anticipating users’ needs whilst taking the pressure from the back office services. In 2006/07, based on comparative information provided by the National One Stop Shop Benchmarking Club, the Council’s costs were lower than average and, as such, demonstrate the competitiveness of these services.
- 84** The Council has some information on how higher cost services compare with others. It has used Audit Commission profiles to analyse for example, the costs of benefits administration and certain adult and children’s services. Chief officers have reported to Cabinet with an explanation of the level of expenditure and what action has been taken, and is planned, to reduce costs where possible. The Council now understands the reasons for some differences in costs, for example, a fair debt policy that increases the cost of council tax collection and discretionary rate relief on small clubs and voluntary organisations. It has used this information to review cost-effectiveness in the context of wider community benefits such as the impact of a club having to meet a rates liability against the potential loss of some clubs to the local community.
- 85** The Council has made effective use of cost data on transaction methods for council tax and housing benefits; for example, direct debits cost 60p per annum compared with £1.70 by debit card, £10 for cash, £17.50 by credit card and £50 by cheque, excluding the cost of reminders. With this information it is maximising the financial incentives and encouraging take-up of direct debit and internet access.
- 86** Costs are overall commensurate with outcomes. The overall costs of benefits administration, for example, are amongst the highest 25 per cent. Processing new claims is above the median and processing change of circumstances is below the median with 83 per cent overall satisfaction amongst users. Satisfaction with most services is above the median and reflects the cost of individual services.
- 87** Resources are allocated in accordance with policy decisions to meet the Council’s priorities and to provide for users’ preferred access channels. Targeted investment, responding to an analysis of users’ needs, has resulted in improved access for users. The majority of users prefer to contact the Council by telephone - this has been reflected by investment in the call centre to manage increased demand and minimise the number of lost calls. However, other users prefer face to face contact, particularly for more complex enquiries and the Council has extended this facility. The Council recognises that the website is the cheapest method to access services and is widely promoting its use to encourage greater take up. The outcome is that the Council is promoting better value for money through more cost-efficient access channels whilst recognising the preferences of individual users.

- 88 Capital spending decisions are taken with full information on the revenue implications and financial forecast of their longer term impact. The savings on annual support and maintenance over the contract period for a new, integrated revenues and benefits IT system is £1,080,548 (excluding inflation). In addition the new system has enabled changes to be made in the delivery of these services producing staff savings of £70,000 from 2007/08 and a further £260,000 from 2008/09.
- 89 The Council has effectively improved value for money in accessing services by encouraging enquirers to use the more cost-effective channels (based on comparative cost analyses by the Cabinet Office and another council), service re-engineering and partnership working. All potential services which could migrate are fully scoped with a business case to identify costs and savings. The Customer Access Strategy is subject to continual review with an annual work programme that sets out which services are being absorbed into the front office. The Council therefore sustains focus on the change agenda whilst identifying where the greatest efficiencies can be made.
- 90 Consideration is given to the likely impact on service users of changes in spending levels. The Council is committed to improving its priority areas as well as keeping council tax at affordable levels. Spending plans are subject to continuous review to ensure that they are aligned with need as the aim is to deliver high quality, well-performing services within the finite resources available. Where appropriate resources are increased to improve efficiency, effectiveness and service delivery to handle, for example, Streetscene enquiries. In this way the Council is making good use of available resources that are targeted towards important front-line services.
- 91 The Council makes good use of partnerships to improve value for money in access to services. Options for joint procurement and working with partners are identified and acted upon. These include joint commissioning of adult social services with the health sector and front of house service with Wirral Partnership Homes following the transfer of the Council's housing stock. By working in partnership the Council is better placed to improve outcomes and value for money through the provision of seamless services for users.

Prospects for improvement

What is the track record in delivering improvement?

- 92** The Council can evidence a record of effectively implementing change that has improved access to services and has delivered clear benefits for users, focusing on the most disadvantaged and those in priority need. Over the past few years it has successfully targeted resources which have resulted in more users accessing services.
- 93** Users have benefited from improved outcomes that have been delivered directly by the Council or in partnership, including the choice of wider access to seamless services with longer opening hours, offering multiple services in one stop shops close to the community and resolving more queries at the first point of contact. Improved electronic access is demonstrated by increased usage of automated telephone payments and on-line services providing greater convenience for users. E-citizen has extended access to a high volume service area. In addition the call centre has made access easier for users wanting to report changes in personal circumstances that impact on their receipt of a range of public services.
- 94** Trends with equalities and diversity performance indicators are positive. Buildings with public areas that are accessible to, and suitable for, people with disabilities have increased from 46 per cent (2003/04) to 67 per cent (2007/08). The Council is now at level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and the score for the duty to promote race equality has increased from 58 per cent to 68 per cent in the last year. The percentages of BME employees, employees with a disability and top earners who are women or who have a disability have increased but not top earners from BME communities. The positive trends demonstrate the progress with the Council's diversity and equality policies.
- 95** Other performance indicators demonstrate improved access and responsiveness. They include the quicker processing of benefits claims, issuing of statements of special educational needs, delivering equipment and making adaptations within seven working days and the removal of abandoned vehicles. Improved responsiveness has not, however, been sustained across all service areas such as the time to repair street lights - better lit areas are important for more vulnerable groups travelling at night.
- 96** Trends in user satisfaction are mixed. Compared with surveys in 2003/04 resident satisfaction in 2006/07 increased with the cleanliness of the local environment, planning and libraries. Satisfaction with complaint handling, sports and recreation, museums and galleries and parks and open spaces was comparatively the same. However, satisfaction reduced with services such as waste collection and planning. More recent surveys have shown satisfaction with the Council to be 78.5 per cent. The variable trends and levels of satisfaction show that users' expectations are not being sustained across all services.

- 97 The Council has improved value for money in accessing services. Resources have been targeted towards key front-line services through a programme of service re-engineering. The continuing development of the call centre and web-based access channels have enabled greater generic working resulting in reduced staffing costs and other efficiency savings. Migration of services such as bulk waste collection to the contact centre has contributed to a saving of £30,000 on the cost of this service. Improved access to kerbside collections of recyclables resulted in over 34,500 fewer tonnes of household waste sent to landfill in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07. This achievement reduced landfill tax by £0.5 million despite an increase from £21 to £24 per tonne.

How well does the Council manage performance in access to services?

How good is the improvement planning?

- 98 Planning to improve access to services is good. The Council's aims for improvement include the achievement of outcomes that matter most to users and communities. The Customer Access Strategy, which is integrated within a change programme that includes ICT developments, is supported by a work programme that is reviewed and updated annually. It contains milestones for the completion of actions within a financial year and also details the next phase of work to be undertaken. The strategy sets out priorities and enables councillors and managers to assess and monitor progress.
- 99 Corporate Plan aims link to departmental plans, one stop shop and call centre action plans and individual work plans. The plans and strategies set out a range of actions and targets that are intended to improve access to services, including:
- further migration of services to be delivered and resolved at initial point of contact through service re-engineering;
 - progressing actions relating to diversity and equalities to achieve level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government;
 - ICT and web strategies to further improve electronic access to services and realise efficiency savings;
 - improved access to public buildings accessible to, and suitable for, people with a disability, following audits to assess compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act;
 - publicising revised customer care standards, introducing a consistent set of service standards in consultation with users, developed in line with National E-Services Delivery Standards (NESDS) to ensure a consistent approach to service delivery and performance;
 - partnership working with post offices through the Community Canvas and Validate projects to widen the scope for user feedback and extend opportunities to users to ensure that their housing and council tax benefits are correct; and

Prospects for improvement

- identifying carers and enable them to access good quality and appropriate information, advice and support services to assist them in their caring role and to promote social inclusion – a Local Area Agreement target which is linked to the new national indicator 135.

Achievement of these aims enhances the choice of users for accessing services and allows them, for example, to remain independent for as long as possible through direct payments.

- 100** Aims for improving access to services are challenging, clear and robust. They address corporate and national priorities, link to the Local Area Agreement and seek to make a real and measurable difference for service users, particularly the most vulnerable, and reduce inequalities. Users can therefore assess how the Council is developing its services to better meet their collective needs.
- 101** Self-awareness about the opportunities to further improve access to services is good. The Council has conducted an investigation into the feasibility of introducing an outreach service through one stop shop mobile working by targeting, for example, users with a disability who are not able to attend one stop shops. Other proposals include text messaging and piloting self-access to the website based around life events. Such projects provide further opportunities for improving access to services by not only making them more responsive but also minimising avoidable contact.
- 102** The range of plans and strategies collectively identify what the Council is seeking to achieve but they are not closely integrated with the Customer Access Strategy. An overarching strategy that consolidates actions, including partners' for improving access to services is not in place. The lack of such a strategy creates a risk that collective resources are not used to best effect to achieve the intended outcomes and prioritise improvement projects.
- 103** The Council works well with residents and partners to structure its services in the way that people want to access them. It has recently launched the 'You Decide' initiative to give more choice for local people on what services should be provided within individual areas. Community engagement means the Council's aims closely link to their expressed aspirations, concerns, needs and priorities.
- 104** Good progress is being made towards embedding a culture of equality and diversity. One project is working with the Terence Higgins Trust to offer personal appointments for people living with AIDS/HIV through the network of one stop shops. The commitment to diversity is further demonstrated by profiles for monitoring pupil progress in learning English as an additional language at foundation stage, stages 1 and 2 and stages 3 and 4, with supporting information to help staff meet the pupils' needs. Such activities demonstrate positive attempts to engage with vulnerable users and help to reduce perceived stigmas in accessing services.

105 The Council has clear and robust proposals for improving value for money in accessing services. The Customer Access Strategy is linked to the Council's three year efficiency plan. It sets out the need for resolution at first point of contact, wherever possible, to minimise repeat or avoidable contact. It has a focus on developing and utilising the web as a low cost self-access and transactional contact channel. All potential services which could migrate to access channels are scoped with a business case to identify costs and savings. This process provides reassurance that the intended outcomes will be achieved as well as maximising the most efficient and cheapest access channel appropriate to the enquiry.

Are there arrangements and a culture in place to support continuous improvement?

106 Arrangements and an appropriate culture are in place to support continuous improvement in accessing services. The Council has active, effective and visible management and leadership, recognised by staff, partners and other stakeholders. Councillors and managers demonstrate their commitment to improving access to services by facilitating and engaging in a wide range of activities, including partnership working to promote equality. These approaches are helping to reinforce the importance of this issue within the Council and amongst its partners.

107 The Council further demonstrates community leadership by seeking to ensure fair access to services, working to eliminate discrimination and promoting sustainable communities. It is, for example, improving the quality of neighbourhoods and access to health improvement opportunities and, in relation to older and younger people, their engagement in council activities. These outcomes set a good example to users.

108 The Council has strengthened its arrangements for implementing the Customer Access Strategy. A Corporate Improvement Group is responsible for the management and co-ordination of activities. Individual programmes have been evaluated so that the required resources, timescales, ICT implications, ownership and outcomes have been established for each project. A range of internal groups inform policies and drive and monitor progress on customer services, ICT and website development and diversity and equalities. The increased focus on project management is more likely to result in the delivery of intended improvements.

109 Good arrangements are in place to manage and monitor the change process. A Customer Service Development Team – supported by a Transformational Change Team - works with departments to re-engineer the services for maximum delivery at initial point of contact and expand the CRM system. The arrangements ensure that liaison between front and back office staff is effective and corporate processes for change are employed to maximum benefit to improve services and value for money.

110 Priorities are linked to service improvement plans and performance targets. Departmental plans identify projects and 'significant routine activities' which contribute to improving access to services and link to the corporate objective 'to be an excellent council.' The plans set out the practical and realistic tasks necessary to achieve the Council's aims, such as holiday, outreach and diversionary activities to help raise the aspirations of young people. The actions provide a good focus to improve access and outcomes and to promote community cohesion, diversity and equalities.

Prospects for improvement

- 111** Medium-term financial and service planning are integrated. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) identifies how resources will be diverted to deliver the Customer Access Strategy and into front-line services. Corporate planning is based upon a hierarchical framework that seeks to integrate national and local priorities into a series of clear objectives. The alignment of service and financial planning ensures resources are being allocated to address users' needs.
- 112** Effective performance management arrangements are largely in place to drive and monitor progress and review the impact of intended actions to improve access to services. Councillors and managers are clear about their roles in performance management. They have a strategic focus on delivery against established plans, standards and targets, especially where these are not being met, taking corrective action in response to variations in performance and reviewing progress systematically. A portfolio holder and an Overview and Scrutiny Committee are responsible for customer and community engagement. These arrangements mean that the Council is more likely to achieve its aims and reflect its commitment to accessible services in decision-making, implementing policy and ensuring that objectives are met.
- 113** Performance management arrangements are in place to monitor responsiveness at initial point on contact by monitoring call activity and making sure that advisors meet their work requirements relating to scheduled time on-line, off-line work and outbound calls. One stop shops monitor individual and site performance via an interview logging system and compare achievements against set targets. Customer numbers, waiting/interview times, resolution rates and staffing resource information are routinely monitored. A call recording system tracks the quality of responses to users to review staff performance. These arrangements provide a framework for continuous improvement with performance openly discussed with staff at a 'Key Issues Exchange'.
- 114** However, performance is not routinely reported or publicised against response times to individual service requests, linked to the pledge to provide a consistent and high quality service. The lack of such measures and benchmarking performance against other providers means that users find it difficult to know the actual quality of access and responsiveness for all service requests. The Council cannot determine progress and whether actions are having the intended impact.
- 115** Furthermore, the Council has not yet introduced, as intended, the following metrics to monitor outcomes and performance: the cost of providing each service; levels of customer satisfaction with each service; numbers of repeat contacts (avoidable contact); and local performance indicators in every service as well as for each customer access channel. Until these monitoring arrangements are in place the Council will be not able to assess the overall effectiveness of the Customer Access Strategy and to what extent more users – rather than repeat callers - are actually accessing services.
- 116** Good use is made of the available performance information. A recent initiative is using profiles on two of the borough's most disadvantaged areas to identify high levels of worklessness and target action to maximise benefits take-up. Monitoring of the waste contractor using CRM is a good example of how these systems can improve performance. The use of such intelligence means that the Council and its partners are better placed to improve responsiveness and focus resources to increase impact.

- 117** The Council is exploring and implementing other systems to strengthen performance management, including a:
- further expansion of CRM, and where appropriate alignment with contractors' systems (for example, waste collection);
 - profiling questionnaire and a policy for monitoring equalities in procurement and service delivery;
 - focus group of users to act as a critical friend in terms of accessible services;
 - telephone survey undertaken automatically at the end of a call to obtain feedback from users; and
 - framework of service level agreements with individual services to improve quality assurance.
- 118** A range of complementary mechanisms help the Council to sustain its focus on its priority areas. It makes good use of the Overview and Scrutiny function to identify improvements in accessing services and for example, the effectiveness of a youth outreach project. Councillors therefore not only monitor the progress of actions and policies but also contribute to future developments.
- 119** Effective performance management arrangements are generally in place to drive and deliver improved value for money in accessing services. The Council uses comparative data and value for money profiles to identify areas for review. However, the Council has not assessed the precise costs of dealing with enquiries through each of its own access channels. Assessing and comparing the efficiency, level of use and quality of access channels with their respective costs provides stronger assurance that value for money is being achieved.
- 120** The Council learns from other providers, user feedback and its own experience. It has effective arrangements to consult with a range of stakeholders to inform service delivery. Quarterly user satisfaction surveys, complemented by a residents postal survey three times a year and bi-annual surveys by an independent organisation provide regular feedback on the perceived quality of services and their accessibility. But the views of citizens who have not contacted the Council are not routinely obtained. As a result whilst the Council is better informed about users' needs - and can plan access channels accordingly - it is not maximising opportunities to gauge the views of non-users.
- 121** Staff feedback is used effectively to improve services. They are clear about the culture and values that are necessary for service delivery and to promote user-focus. They are able to contribute suggestions through a variety of methods such as suggestion schemes, surveys, Key Issues Exchange, team briefs and the Chief Executive roadshows. Their knowledge and experience is used to identify how services can be further improved and joined-up to benefit users. A 'can do' culture and commitment ensures that the Council can continue to provide and expand accessible services in a user-friendly way.

Prospects for improvement

- 122** A well publicised, user-friendly and supportive system invites compliments, complaints, grievances, representations and suggestions about council services. Customer complaints data is recorded via the CRM system. Complaints are co-ordinated by nominated staff, monitored and reviewed to ensure that issues are addressed and arrangements put in place to mitigate the risk of reoccurrence. These procedures, including analysis by complaint type, service area and council ward provide a consistent, transparent and comparable process to ensure customer service standards are being uniformly applied.
- 123** The Council learns from other service providers, including for example, call centres operated by other councils and the private sector. Staff are actively involved in national and regional improvement networks and benchmarking groups to identify further opportunities for accessing services and improving responsiveness. Activities include mystery shopping exercises that provide an independent assessment of the quality of access and services.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve access to services?

- 124** The Council has access to the appropriate skills, tools and finances to improve access to services. It has the people, skills and capability that it needs to deliver its service priorities. Well trained, generic front-line staff, who have an impressive breadth of knowledge on a range of council and other public services, are able to respond to a range of enquiries at initial point of contact, supported where necessary by specialist officers. They offer both efficiency and flexibility by delivering a wide range of both council and partnership services and extend the ability to respond to peak volumes in user calls.
- 125** The Council has invested effectively in staff capacity to improve access to services. A Customer Service Group provides a consistent and co-ordinated approach to improving access to services. A Customer Service Development Team is progressing the action plan to deliver the Customer Access Strategy. Key appointments include an Employee and Elected Member Development Officer, a Press and Public Relations Officer, a Resource and Performance Officer, an Equality and Diversity Officer and a Web Services Manager. The Council has also invested in capacity to review and strategically manage its assets. These appointments mean that the Council is in stronger position to manage demands on services, communicate with users more effectively, achieve its diversity and equality objectives and make best use of all its assets.
- 126** Staff provide added value in service delivery, for example, an advocacy role to improve users' quality of life and anticipating and identifying needs. An employee satisfaction survey has provided feedback in terms of advisors' commitment, motivation and desire to deliver the high standard of service that customers expect. Users have complimented staff on their pro-active approach in offering services that they had not previously considered.
- 127** Human resource planning - to improve access to services - is effective and operates within a strategic framework. Job descriptions and specifications are reviewed and updated to ensure that the skills required remain relevant. Staffing levels have been evaluated and increased to maintain service levels in line with increased user demand.

- 128** Staff development fully supports improving access to services. It is relevant and well planned from induction to training in customer service skills, service area knowledge and diversity and equalities. It is complemented by specialist training, to support for example, the alcohol reduction programme. A weekly training hour for front-line staff helps to ensure consistency in service delivery, share information, and provide opportunities for staff feedback. Staff appraisals are linked to corporate objectives and result in a 'key issues exchange action plan' which can result in a recognised qualification in customer service. All these activities provide a good framework for further improving the quality of service and outcomes for users and ensuring the right skills mix.
- 129** Capacity is further enhanced by extensive, effective partnership working, such as the Wirral Advice Network which unites solicitors, statutory and voluntary agencies across the borough to provide quality, community-based advice services. Budgets are pooled and joint commissioning of services is in place where appropriate, for example, with the health sector. Delivering services on behalf of other organisations is also more convenient to users and improves wider, community outcomes for them in accessing services.
- 130** Overall the Council is making good use of ICT to improve access to services (for example, video conferencing) but not effectively as it could to provide management information about service users and non-users. Improvements include:
- document scanning which has improved processing times for housing benefit claims;
 - enhancing telephony systems so that users can select an option according to the nature of their enquiry and virtual telephone handsets for 'overflow' calls;
 - developing a geographical information system (GIS) for advisors and for self access to provide further enhancements to service delivery;
 - investing in a workforce management software solution to respond more effectively to peaks in call volumes and balance the demands of multiple service delivery; and
 - electronic mapping tools to support the re-engineering of new services.

These developments all contribute to more cost-effective and efficient services.

- 131** The Council is now making good progress in developing a more transactional website – with a dedicated staff resource - to widen access and maximise self- resolution of enquiries. It is investigating other methods - such as text messaging - and facilities to improve service quality through a voice recording system to evaluate the quality of staff responses and identify any training needs. As a result electronic access to services has increased significantly.

Prospects for improvement

- 132** ICT is part of an integrated approach to improving access to services for users and potential users. The strategic development of ICT links to the Council's improvement priorities. It aims to improve services by integrating CRM, content management and financial systems. It is also piloting home and mobile working but does not have a strategy for agile working in order to maximise the use of current technology by staff working away from the office environment or 'hot-desking'. Consequently the Council has yet to exploit the potential efficiencies to be gained, for example, by visiting users in their homes to calculate benefits entitlements.
- 133** The Council has adequate financial capacity to deliver its access objectives. It has allocated resources to deliver the Customer Access Strategy. It has invested in staff capacity and ICT to enhance the skills base and access channels to deliver the intended improvements. The strategic asset management review is intended to identifying further opportunities for the Council to make the most effective and efficient use of its public access points.

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CO-ORDINATOR

**ACHIEVING LEVEL 3 OF THE EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ESLG)
– QUARTER 3 2008 / 2009 PROGRESS REPORT**

1. Introduction

Please find attached (as Appendix 1) the latest progress report on reaching Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, for the period 1 October 2008 to 31 December 2008.

Please note the % ratings on progress on pages 3 and 4.

JACQUI CROSS
CORPORATE EQUALITY & DIVERSITY CO-ORDINATOR
CORPORATE SERVICES

EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ESLG)**QUARTER THREE 2008/2009 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT****DATE: 16/01/09****OFFICER: JACQUI CROSS (Corporate Equality & Diversity Co-ordinator)****Introduction**

Welcome to the third quarterly monitoring report for 2008 / 2009. Within this report you will find details of the equality and diversity work undertaken across the whole council.

Once again, numerous achievements have been documented across all departments.

Contents

Summary of progress towards level 3 of the ESLG	Pages 2 - 3
Quarter 3 departmental equality and diversity progress (in detail)	Pages 4- 31

Notes

1. No information was provided by Technical Services
2. Department of Adult Social Services is moving through a period of considerable transformation and change. This has had an impact on the work of the Departmental Equality Group (DEG), and as a result the implementation of the Department's Equality and Diversity Action Plan has been affected.
3. For equality and diversity issues Corporate Services still includes HR, Law and Asset Management Department.

ESLG Level 3: Summary of Progress

ESLG Key Element	% Complete	Recommendations
1. Corporate Approach to Equality	92%	<p>Chief Officers to sign off their Departmental Equality Group Action Plans</p> <p>All employees to be made aware of the above</p>
2. Corporate Equality & Inclusion Group	90%	<p>CEIG needs to review the diversity profile of the workforce</p> <p>CEIG to formally request a review of the Key Issues Exchange process in order to incorporate equality behaviours</p>
3. Corporate Equality Policy & Strategy	85%	<p>Policy and Strategy to be refreshed once a Single Equality Scheme has been agreed</p> <p>Chief Officers and Service Managers to be briefed on any changes to the Policy and Strategy</p>
4. Corporate Participation Strategy	40%	<p>The Council's Corporate Engagement Strategy to be completed and implemented, and includes how diverse community groups will be invited to help to improve services and how those groups will be supported to build capacity</p> <p>Establish an Equality Watch Review Group which includes a cross section of diverse communities</p>
5. Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)	90%	<p>A corporate approach to involving diverse communities during the EIA process to be established</p>
6. Performance Management System	60%	<p>The PIMS system to include equality indicators and targets</p>
7. Partnerships	75%	<p>Partners to be encouraged to develop shared equality objectives</p>
8. Risk Management	75%	<p>Cabinet to agree Task Group recommendations</p>

9. Customer Satisfaction	60%	Customer satisfaction to be corporately recorded and analysed on a quarterly basis
10. Fair Staff Policies & Procedures	75%	<p>Equality guidance and training to be provided for interview panels</p> <p>A corporate equality and diversity training framework to be established</p> <p>CEIG to formally request a review of the Key Issues Exchange process in order to incorporate equality behaviours</p> <p>Task Group recommendations to be implemented</p>
11. Procurement Practices	75%	Cabinet to agree Task Group recommendations
12. Equality & Diversity Training	70%	A corporate equality and diversity training framework to be established
13. Equality Objectives and Targets	100%	
14. External Assessment	30%	Complete the IDeA's tasks list for Level 3 assessment

Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG)

Quarter Two 2008 / 2009 Achievements & Hotspots

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
1. Corporate Approach to Equality	<p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental objectives and targets for E&D have now been incorporated into Dept Plan 2009/10 • E&D continue to be standard agenda items at DMT and team briefings • Dept Plan will be used as part of the KIE appraisal system making staff aware of the E&D objectives and targets <p>Corporate Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Equality Watch scheme public consultation commenced 		

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
2. Corporate Equality & Inclusion Group	<p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department has been represented at all CIEG 		

(CEIG)

- meetings
- E&D targets and objectives identified at Manager’s Awayday (27/10/08) and subsequently incorporated into Departmental Plan 2009/10
- Responsibility for completion of the actions has been detailed in the Plan together with timescales for achievement
- Resource implications (Financial, Physical and Financial have been included in the Dept Plan.

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
3. Corporate Equality Policy & Strategy	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental Equality Group meetings agreed and scheduled for 2009/10 to monitor departmental progress. <p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Dept Plan the department commits to ensuring equality of 		

opportunity and promoting diversity are at the core of everything it does as an employer, service provider, commissioner and in its community leadership role.

- The department has an equality action plan in place as part of this framework, which takes into account any actions identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process.

Corporate Services

- Development of the Equality Watch Scheme has clarified the Council's strategic aims in relation to E & D, providing the basis for a refreshed policy and strategy from April 2009.

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
4. Corporate Participation Strategy	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Parliament provided opportunity for young people to meet and question elected members Equality & Diversity open day, held at Wallasey Town Hall, attended by staff from Children & Young Peoples Department. CiC held their Panto in December, which was well attended. Attendees included the Mayor, Chief Executive and elected members. CiC undertaking Duke of Edinburgh's Award. 6 Children went to Prague as part of the Gold Award to study Social Care & Fostering and are producing a DVD of their trip. 6 children undertook an expedition in the UK as part of their Bronze Award. 	<p>Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for implementation of corporate community engagement strategy in order 	<p>Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of corporate community engagement strategy

to agree protocols, co-ordinate activity and avoid omission or duplication

- Once strategy in place, Customer Services can integrate the approach into the Customer Access Strategy

Regeneration

- The department as a whole and service areas individually involve designated community, staff and stakeholder groups on their EIA's and service delivery. There continues to be considerable engagement with the community and stakeholders providing avenues for further consultation and participation

Corporate Services

- Action planning underway in relation to corporate community engagement activities in line with the principles of the draft Comprehensive Engagement Strategy to provide a framework for activity

Corporate Services

- No overarching framework in place

Corporate Services

- Draft Comprehensive Engagement Strategy will be going out for public consultation during February – April 2009

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
5. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	<p data-bbox="456 248 837 274">Children & Young People</p> <ul data-bbox="501 288 965 842" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="501 288 965 580">• Schedule for completing Equality Impact Assessments over the next three years drawn up to include all Services, Functions, Policies and Procedures. Progress to be monitored by the Departmental Equality Group <li data-bbox="501 627 965 842">• Action plan for 2009/10 created, informed by completed Equality Impact Assessments. Progress to be monitored by the Departmental Equality Group <p data-bbox="456 1142 577 1168">Finance</p> <ul data-bbox="501 1198 965 1441" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="501 1198 965 1374">• Customer Services have now completed a review (using the new template) of the initial Equality Impact assessments carried out last year <li data-bbox="501 1410 965 1441">• EIA action plans integrated 	<p data-bbox="1003 879 1330 904">Adult Social Services</p> <ul data-bbox="1048 919 1487 1023" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1048 919 1487 1023">• Setting up review and monitoring of actions falling out of initial EIAs 	<p data-bbox="1554 248 1939 274">Children & Young People</p> <ul data-bbox="1599 288 2056 504" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1599 288 2056 504">• The Children & Young Peoples Department to organise a focus group of young people to consult with on the action plan developed from EIA's. <p data-bbox="1554 879 1877 904">Adult Social Services</p> <ul data-bbox="1599 919 2056 1134" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1599 919 2056 1134">• Review initial EIAs & establish functions of Department as a result of Transformation to ensure EIAs are carried out on all new areas of work.

into overall department action plan

- DEG has identified EIA programme for 09/10

Regeneration

- 100% service areas, policies and strategies have undergone EIAs
- A review of EIAs has taken place
- An action plan drawing out the main points of the EIAs has been produced and incorporated into the Departmental Plan

Corporate Services

- 100% EIA's completed in Law, HR and Asset Management

Regeneration

- Need to be vigilant to ensure new policies and strategies undergo EIA as and when they are produced
- New joint Trading Standards enforcement policy will need an EIA

Corporate Services

- Ensuring that all departments contribute to the development of the EIA programme for 2009/10

Regeneration

- Set up system to ensure that new policies, strategies and procedures undergo EIAs

Corporate Services

- EIA action plan to be incorporated in the departmental plan
- 2009/10 EIA list to be drawn up of new/emerging policies and strategies

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
6. Sound Performance Management System	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Children & Young Peoples Department has drawn up an action plan that links to the Corporate Objectives for 2009/10 and PIMS and National Indicators, were appropriate. Information strategy developed to collect and collate information to clarify the nature of the area within which each Children's Centre operates. <p>Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Services will be represented at the launch of the Wirral Ethnic Health Advisory Group Information & Resource file launch due to be held Friday 23rd January 2009. The purpose of the Information & Resource File is to provide information on the various ethnic communities on the Wirral including cultural, health, and religious needs for each community. The event is being held at Wirral Multicultural Centre and key 	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Service have issues around data which they are working through. 	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Children & Young Peoples Department to organise a focus group of young people to consult with on the action plan developed from EIA's. Need to resolve Youth Service Data issues. <p>Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly report progress to Finance DMT through quarterly monitoring reports. Revised performance and risk management and monitoring process to be agreed by DMT February 2009 DEG action plan and EIA programme to take account of Access to Services inspection report and integrate with action plan

speakers include The Mayor of Wirral (Councillor Adrian Jones), who will launch the Information and Resource File, Mr Stephen Hesford MP, Mrs Frances Street – Chair of NHS Wirral, and Mr John Webb – Director of Social Services, Wirral Council.

- Customer Services will be involved in the forthcoming review of the interpreting contract with a view to improving the functionality of the service and the way it is delivered taking on board experience gained during the initial contract period.
- Customer Access Strategy reviewed annually with quarterly progress reports to Cabinet (as part of Change Programme)

Regeneration

- E&D objectives and targets have been integrated into the performance management framework through their inclusion in the Departmental Plan
- Targets to be regularly monitored at DEG and as part

of departmental performance management framework

- Performance Information including national figures will be fed back to senior management and Members on a quarterly basis

Corporate Services

- Introduction of consistent action plans for DEGs

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
7. Partnership (internal and external)	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion award presented to St Agnes Preschool by Steven Hesford MP, for there inclusive practice, the Wirral Globe was also present. This award scheme is part of a process set up to recognise inclusive behaviour in the children’s sector. • Staff from the Social Inclusion Branch have trained 17 Access Officers that are part of a team across Merseyside linked to Museums & 		

Galleries. These staff are offering consultancy and training advice to staff in museums and galleries around SEN inclusion issues.

- Plans presented and approved by the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership Board for the redesign and building of improved Children & Families Health services on the Arrowe Park Hospital site.
- Proposals presented and approved by the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership Board for male circumcision to be commissioned to meet religious, cultural and social needs in Wirral.
- Hate Crime Workshop attended to address all hate crime stands using a MARAC approach.

Finance

- New Polish outreach service launched 5th January 2009, in conjunction with CAB and PCT. This gives access to a polish speaking outreach

Finance

- Liaison with external partners is not co-ordinated across the council – resulting in over and under representation and inconsistent approach (see

Finance

- Improve communication and co-ordination (links with the corporate community engagement strategy)

worker at various One Stop Shops across the borough. The service provides free advice on issues such as debt, welfare benefits, housing, employment, consumer problems and community care. Particular emphasis is placed on reducing stress and anxiety caused by unfamiliarity with the language and benefit system.

- One Stop Shops are working with Age Concern to promote awareness of the problem of elder abuse. One Stop Shops are currently hosting an Age Concern display at different sites. Customer Services are liaising with Age Concern on a bereavement support scheme where older customers identified as having suffered a recent bereavement can be referred for a home visit from a support worker.
- One Stop Shops will be hosting a joint working event for WPH w/c 23rd Feb where various agencies including Pensions Service will be

also section 4. Finance Hotspots)

providing a presence across all of the equality strands.

Regeneration

- There is considerable community and stakeholder engagement within the department as the department has forged partnerships across a range of services and service agencies.

Regeneration

- Not all partnership arrangements make reference to the Corporate Equality Policy

Corporate Services

- Full participation from across departments for Equality Watch staff diversity day
- Special edition of Equality Watch newsletter to celebrate Council's first staff diversity day produced and placed on Council's intranet
- Council's E&D section of website is currently under development
- Additional initial EIA's published on Council's website
- Economic Policy Team have led on co-ordination of good partnership activity aiming to support disadvantaged groups and tackle worklessness, child poverty

Corporate Services

- Ensure appropriate representation on Inter-departmental equality group
- Draft Comprehensive Engagement Strategy will be going out for public consultation during February – April 2009
- Economic Policy team to continue to co-ordinate partnership activity through involvement in the LAA, City Employment Strategy and emerging Multi Area

and wider deprivation.

Agreement.

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
8. Risk Management	<p data-bbox="454 547 837 576">Children & Young People</p> <ul data-bbox="501 587 954 759" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="501 587 954 759">• The Departmental Equality Group action plan has links into the Risk Management procedure and identifies and monitors risks. <p data-bbox="454 807 577 836">Finance</p> <ul data-bbox="501 847 972 1134" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="501 847 972 1134">• The Change Team has looked at the documentation around Risk Management to try and ensure that more consistent practices are taken when using Project Management documentation around the Council <p data-bbox="454 1182 658 1211">Regeneration</p> <ul data-bbox="501 1222 972 1437" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="501 1222 972 1321">• E&D risks are included in the risk planning element of the Departmental Plan<li data-bbox="501 1332 972 1437">• These will be monitored as part of the risk performance monitoring process to check		

whether the planned contingencies are still appropriate and adequate.

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
9. Customer Satisfaction	<p data-bbox="454 580 837 616">Children & Young People</p> <ul data-bbox="501 619 972 951" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="501 619 972 951">• Marketing strategy developed and implemented to raise the profile of Children Centers, in particular to under represented groups to improve accessibility. A range of publicity materials provided to the full spectrum of community venues. <p data-bbox="454 991 577 1026">Finance</p> <ul data-bbox="501 1029 972 1430" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="501 1029 972 1430">• Wirral Drug Action Team (DAT) held an event in November 2008 to explore the provision of their service away from the traditional town centre locations. OSS offered as possible option for delivery of service to all sectors of the community in neighbourhood locations		

Regeneration

- Some service areas monitor customer satisfaction

Corporate Services

- Meeting with Finance colleagues to discuss customer segmentation
- Customer satisfaction is now a regular agenda item at Customer Services Group meetings

Regeneration

- Need to set up systems and procedures to ensure customer satisfaction is measured in a more uniform and consistent manner

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
<p>10. Fair Staff Policies & Procedures</p>	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff have started to undertake Cylix (Elumos) equality and diversity training. <p>Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment to Customer Services this month has resulted in progress being made around the objective of closing the ethnicity gap 		

between the customer service workforce profile and the ethnicity profile of the population in general.

- A member of the Change Team is involved in reviewing Staff Policies as a member of the Employee Equality Forum

Regeneration

- A limited number of staff take advantage of work life balance protocols

Regeneration

- All staff are not aware of equality related policies and procedures
- Equality and diversity training is not provided to short-listing panels and interviewers
- Appraisal of managers and relevant staff does not include competency and behaviours to implement the Equality Standard for Local Government
- Not all managers and relevant staff have received equality and diversity training

Regeneration

- All equality and diversity training to be reviewed
- All staff to undergo Cylix (Elumos) training and corporate base E&D training
- Specific training to be provided for front of house staff, managers and panel members and interviewers
- Publicise the opportunities for work life balance more widely in the department

Corporate Services

- Updated forms (grievance, capability, disciplinary and work-life balance) for collection of employees E&D data
- Presented list of HR Policies

under review within next 6-12 months and feedback proforma to Employee Diversity Forum for future consultation

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
11. Procurement Practices	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals presented and approved by the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership Board for male circumcision to be commissioned to meet religious, cultural and social needs in Wirral. Primary Review Consultation completed. Secondary Review consultations started. <p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department ensures that equality & diversity issues are considered as part of tendering processes 	<p>Children & Young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues around restructuring of Birkenhead secondary school provision with the possibility of an imbalance developing between girls and boys in mixed sex provision. 	<p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All procurement for goods

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
12. Equality & Diversity Training	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff have started to undertake Cylix equality and diversity training. • Training programme implemented for appropriate school staff and across the partnership and VCF sector to increase the understand of data (neighbourhood data) and the effects of poverty on achievement. • Training provided to staff on the transition of children with a disability to Adult Social Care. <p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of E&D Training as part of the MDP programme been successfully delivered in 2008. 	<p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make E&D training available to all staff alongside e-learning software. • To make Equality Impact 	<p>and services to be in accordance with corporate E&D guidance and procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young People involved in recruitment need to be provided with Equality Training. <p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of Equality & Diversity training for all staff

Assessment training available to all staff.

- As above

Finance

- Majority of OSS staff have now completed level 1 & 2 of the Elumos Equality training package. Anticipate all staff will have completed by end of this month, ahead of schedule. CC staff also on target to meet March deadline for delivery of training.

Regeneration

- Training has been carried out for some managers to complete EIAs
- 40% of staff have successfully completed module 1 of Cylix (Elumos)

Corporate Services

- E&D taster sessions delivered to Wirral's foster carers
- Facilitated Redeployment Training Support Day for redeployees. TU Learning Reps and Lifelong Learning were present – promoting basic skills
- ELUMOS – on-line training

Regeneration

- E&D training is patchy in the department

Regeneration

- Ensure all staff undergo Cylix (Elumos) training and basic corporate E&D training
- Ongoing EIA training for new managers
- Managers and staff undertaking interviews to be prioritised for corporate training.

- completed to date:
 Corp Serv – level 1 33%,
 level 2 70%, level 3 55%
 Law, HR & Asset – level 1 44%,
 level 2 57%, level 3 20%
- Attended Real Equality Training Event “Everything you wanted to know about gender identity and transgender but were afraid to ask”

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
13. Equality Objectives & Targets	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children & Young Peoples Department has drawn up an action plan that links to the Corporate Objectives for 2009/10 and PIMS and National Indicators, were appropriate <p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Hate Crime/Incident reporting procedure 		<p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To implement the Hate Crime / Incident reporting procedure

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
14. External Assessment & Validation	<p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets and objectives are now integral to the service and performance planning process • Further targets and objectives have been set in the Workforce Development Plan • Many of the NI and Local/Departmental performance indicators for which this department is responsible for relate directly to E&D issues <p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children and Young Peoples Department achieved a 4 (Excellent) for positive contribution as part of the recent inspection of children’s services, due to the efforts made in engaging young people. <p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department is making preparations the external assessment. 		<p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to identify managers and staff for assessment

ESLG Key Element	Achievements	Hotspots	Recommendations
15. Other Activities	<p>Children & Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of intervention strategies have been developed to support under-achieving and under-attaining groups of pupils. Plans produced for each school or cluster of schools and activities planned for vulnerable groups either within the Authority or the North West. <p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive Action Scheme x 2 trainees <p>Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will utilise the Equality Data produced by the senior research and information officer to inform service impact review. Review of PSH action plan, with focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged households. Deliver over 230 affordable and supported housing units in 2008-2011. Ambassadors employed from the Bengali community, 		<p>Adult Social Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Positive Action Scheme

- Arabic speaking community, Polish community, Chinese speaking community to promote and deliver stop smoking sessions in their own language
- A Polish Christmas event with music and food was organised and delivered by Wirral Council and the Wirral PCT Stop Smoking Service to launch the quit and win campaign.
 - Halloween & Winter Wonderland events held at 2/4 Laird Street. Engaged residents and allowed those involved to partake in activities and breakdown barriers between individuals and groups within the community.
 - Review of principle of applying fees in connection with assistance policy correctly applied to clients 60+ by Supporting People Team.
 - Meeting held with Wirral Change to discuss Equity Loan compliance with Sharia Law or any Islamic cultural issues.
 - Homemovers Service assisting non English

speaking clients to access property ownership through HOUSED Scheme.

- Staff received training in imported food standards
- Fair Trading Staff received training in safeguarding vulnerable adults
- Developing a Hate Crime MARAC to integrate reporting system within the community.

Corporate Services

- Questionnaire on E&D for Youth Parliament
- E&D embedded in new LSP website
- All contacts on E&D community database have been written to in order to update records
- Equality Watch distribution list increased to 265 members
- Rotating Chair agreed by Wirral Equalities Forum (WEF)
- E&D article for One Council completed
- Working Wirral activity is being commissioned in line with Economic Policy team priorities. This will support particularly disadvantaged groups and deprived areas in Wirral.

Corporate Services

- Feedback required from Youth Parliament

- The impact of declining economic conditions and the economic downturn are of concern. Evidence indicates an increase in worklessness and lower employment levels,

plus higher levels of debt and financial exclusion. This will clearly have a negative impact on levels of deprivation and inequality. The work of the Economic Policy team continues, to gather intelligence about the impact and to inform and influence appropriate policy responses.

