

Meeting:	Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Date:	29 <sup>th</sup> April 2008
Subject:	By exception: Officers' report on performance in Customer Satisfaction
Key Decision: (Executive-side only)	No
Responsible Officer:	Jill Rothwell
Portfolio Holder:	Paul Osborn
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

## **SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report sets out key points in relation to performance issues in the Customer Satisfaction area.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- a) That the report, and the proposals for improvement, be noted.
- b) That the Sub-Committee make any additional recommendations for improvement they think fit.
- c) That the Sub-Committee decide whether further action on this topic be required, subject to the options set out in “main options” in the body of the report.

## **SECTION 2 - REPORT**

### Background

In July 2007 members agreed that performance issues would be considered by the sub-committee on a “by exception” basis. The specific criteria for the “by exception” items at committee having been agreed, it was concluded that for the sub-committee to function most effectively key information should be raised and discussed at committee – focusing directly on improvement – and that the reports being despatched to committee should reflect this commitment.

As such this report contains a number of answers, provided by officers, to a set of questions that are identical to those asked for all other “by exception” issues brought up at committee, the intention being that the same quality of information be made available to members on all topics, without the presumption being placed upon officers to provide a great deal of onerous written documentation.

### Current situation

This report is being provided to give members an insight into performance issues identified by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman at a recent meeting.

This report presents officers’ responses to a standard set of questions relating to the issue under discussion.

### Why a change is needed

In performance terms, it has been established that this issue meets the “by exception” criteria established by Performance and Finance to govern which issues are considered by the Sub-Committee. As such, there is a significant need established for improvement.

### Main options

Findings and recommendations pertaining to this issue will be discussed at committee. Members may:

1. Make comments and recommendations as appropriate, and decide to escalate the issue to Overview and Scrutiny, for that committee to commission work on the subject.
2. Make comments and recommendations as appropriate, and resolve to consider the item again only insofar as it meets the “by exception” criteria in the future.
3. As above, but request that performance information on this issue be – where possible –made available monthly to permit the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to monitor this matter closely.

The option to request that another report to be made available to the next meeting of the sub-committee will not automatically be available, as performance issues are only escalated to this body if they meet the “by exception” criteria on each occasion the committee comes to consider the relevant item.

### Other options considered

Not applicable

Recommendation: - that the improvement information presented below be considered by members of the sub-committee, for recommendations to be made and, if necessary, for issues to be escalated to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their consideration.

### Considerations

Resources, costs and risks: N/A

Staffing/workforce: N/A

Equalities impact:

Customer satisfaction could be considered as an alternative name for equalities. In service terms, equalities is all about identifying the distinct wants and needs of individual customers and, as far as is possible, satisfying those needs. Any increased attention paid to customer satisfaction advances the equalities agenda.

Legal comments:

There are no legal implications arising from this report

Community safety: N/A

### Financial Implications

This report is not seeking any additional resources. The costs of satisfaction surveys are contained within existing approved budgets. The new Communications contract is supported by a centralised communications and publications budget which should produce higher volumes of communications outputs.

### Performance Issues

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Officer comment</b>
Why is performance failing?	<p>Since the last report in November 2007, there has not been any further test of public satisfaction, so it is not possible to judge whether satisfaction ratings are continuing to decline.</p> <p>The New Quality of Life Survey is currently in the field and should report initial findings towards the end of June.</p> <p>The next test of public satisfaction with Council Services will be the first</p>

	<p>iteration of the new Place Survey which the Council is required to undertake. Most of this survey will comprise questions set by Government that measure several of the new National Indicators. There should, however, be space to include some locally relevant questions and it is hoped that this will enable us to maintain the trend data derived from the last 5 years of Quality of Life Surveys.</p> <p>There are also discussions underway with London Councils about a London-wide approach to collecting the data that used to be generated from the Triennial Best Value Survey which gave detailed service by service satisfaction scores for environmental services.</p> <p>Finally, a programme of establishing service user groups across all services has been approved and will be rolled out this year. User groups provide immediate customer feedback about service standards and inform officers of niggling problems that are often easily solved but which otherwise can reduce satisfaction rates.</p>
<p>How will performance be improved? Is an improvement plan a) in place and b) being followed?</p>	<p>Members might recall that the Quality of Life surveys regularly showed that residents who felt well informed by the Council were also significantly more satisfied with the services that the Council provides. The new Communications contract includes as one of its targets a significant improvement in the number of people feeling informed by the Council.</p> <p>The most recent data shows that exactly half the respondents to the Quality of Life survey feel informed with the other half feeling uninformed – a net well informed score of nil. The Communications Plan seeks to improve this net score to 50%.</p> <p>Other relevant targets include</p>

	<p>increasing satisfaction with value for money by 10% and increasing service satisfaction rates by between 5% and 10%.</p> <p>A new programme of service reviews is being developed and will shortly be submitted to Cabinet for confirmation. This seeks to address areas which impact on the efficiency, effectiveness and value for money of key services. More details should be available by the time of the Committee's meeting.</p> <p>Finally, the Chief Executive's review of the organisational structure includes giving more prominence to customer care functions in the expectation that, for example, the development of corporate customer standards will increase satisfaction rates.</p>
<p>What resources are being put in place to deliver these improvements?</p>	<p>The elements of improving customer care cannot, by themselves, turn round the Council's reputation. Services also need to improve. It was noted at the meeting in November last year that environmental services have the greatest impact on satisfaction and reputation because they are used by virtually everyone. The negative impact of dirty streets and graffiti can be significant.</p> <p>The decision in the budget for 2008/09 to allocate growth of more than £1m to increase the standards of environmental services should make a physical impact on Harrow's streets and on public attitudes.</p> <p>In parallel, further investment of more than £300,000 has been approved to increase the capacity and reduce waiting times in Access Harrow which should also contribute to improved satisfaction scores.</p>
<p>How, if at all, will other PIs or services</p>	<p>If all of the elements that contribute to improving customer satisfaction deliver</p>

<p>be affected – positively or negatively – either by this performance, or by any redirection of resources to alter this performance?</p>	<p>the anticipated increase in performance, then not only will the headline satisfaction score improve but so will the service specific performance indicators. In that sense, customer satisfaction is an overall measure of how the Council as a whole is performing albeit that some services have a much greater impact on satisfaction than others.</p>
<p>How are residents and service users impacted?</p>	<p>Again, the benefits of increased standards in environmental services, at Access Harrow and through the development and implementation of customer standards should produce real and valued improvements in service quality and delivery.</p>
<p>How will the success of the improvement plan be monitored?</p>	<p>The Quality of Life Survey currently underway and the forthcoming Place Survey will give indications of whether the measures described in this report have been or are being effective in reversing the decline in public satisfaction with the Council and its services. Neither survey will be able to identify the discrete affect of any particular element. If this is thought to be important, Focus Groups would need to be held to identify the relative impact of each element.</p>
<p>How are the service / council's finances affected by this performance issue and by the steps put in place to improve performance?</p>	<p>The growth resources available to the Council for 2008/09 have been used to improve the key services that contribute most to public satisfaction/dissatisfaction – namely environmental services and customer access. Additionally, resources have been directed at the public's other main concern which is community safety and the Council needs to ensure that it is credited with its contribution to policing in the town centre.</p>
<p>What impact will there be on partners (statutory and otherwise)?</p>	<p>Customer satisfaction and the extent to which residents can influence the local agenda are likely to be components of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment, which will replace the</p>

	CPA regime next year. The main vehicle for this assessment will be the Strategic Partnership and the Council's increased attention to customer satisfaction could be a catalyst for general improvements across the Partnership.
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**SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE**

Name: Sheela Thakrar.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: .....18 <sup>th</sup> April 2008..		
Name: .....Helen White	<input type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: .....18 <sup>th</sup> April 2008.....		

**SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Contact:** Mike Howes, Service Manager, Policy and Partnerships  
**020 8420 9637:** [mike.howes@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:mike.howes@harrow.gov.uk)

**Background Papers:**

List scorecards considered: None  
MORI Quality of Life Survey 2007

**IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?**

1.	Consultation	YES/ NO
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES / NO
3.	Manifesto Pledge Reference Number	