

CUSTOMER FIRST PROJECT

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Summary: This report updates Members on progress with the Customer First Project and the national reputations project launched by the LGA and IDeA.

Recommendation:	a) That progress with the Customer First Project is noted. b) That Members agree to sign up to the concerted Action Plan within the Local Government Reputations Programme.
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Impact on delivering the Corporate Plan: This project impacts on the resident Best Value Performance Indicators.

Impact on other statutory objectives (e.g. crime & disorder, LA21): Improved lighting in the tunnel under Whitehaven Civic Hall is in line with recommendations from the Police

Financial and human resource implications: Currently no financial implications but human resources will be directed to focus upon the improvement activities within the plan. There are some financial implications in future plans, and resources have been requested via the budget bid process.

Project & Risk Management: None

Key Decision Status

- **Financial:** N/A
- **Ward:** N/A

Other Ward Implications: None

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members of the Executive received a report on 24th May 2005 regarding resident's satisfaction and agreed a set of action plans to be implemented. As part of the consideration of that report Members asked for regular feedback and this report provides details of progress to date and a proposal to be part of the National LGA IDeA Reputations Project.

2. PROGRESS MADE

- 2.1 The project has made significant progress since May, details below:

- The car park at the Copeland Bowls Centre in Cleator Moor has been resurfaced
- The railings to the exterior of Whitehaven Civic Hall has been repainted; improved lighting outside has improved security underneath the tunnel; additional litter picks have been

implemented outside the Hall; chairs have been re-upholstered in response to customer feedback regarding comfort;

- At the Copeland Pool, cleaning rotas have been improved; staff have been trained in the use of the improved heating arrangements for the pools; changing rooms for disabled users have been refurbished; the temperature in the changing rooms has been adjusted downward to improve comfort for users
- At the Sports Centre, some items of new gym equipment have been installed
- The Clean and Green team have been busy cleaning up public areas blighted by litter, including Egremont, Whitehaven, Seascale, Kirkstanton and Cleator Moor
- Parish Councils have been contacted and now have a nominated waste management officer to liaise with regarding waste issues
- The Council has purchased 1000 black box lids in response to customer feedback, and these are being offered for sale
- Doorstep Collections have started to collect cans in addition to paper and glass
- A review is ongoing of all recycling sites, and some sites such as Hensingham, have been updated with new containers. The review will also cover signage and container emptying frequency.
- The Council is working with Cumbria County to define improvements to Civic Amenity Sites. The facility at Frizington now has extended opening hours.
- The Council's website has been updated and is now more interactive
- An A to Z of council services is currently available on the internet, and will be published in the next edition of Copeland Matters
- Customer service standards for responding to communications from customers have been developed and are being monitored
- The Complaints, compliments and comments procedure has been updated and monitoring processes established

2.2 Action Plans

The delivery of the action plans is closely monitored, and is supported by a comprehensive communications plan. The winter 05 edition of Copeland Matters has a customer service theme, and press releases are being used proactively to communicate delivery of the actions in the plans.

2.3 Monitoring Impacts

- 2.3.1 The objective of the action plans is to deliver an improved customer service that is reflected in how satisfied residents are with the council.
- 2.3.2 Regular surveys have been undertaken using market researchers to test how satisfied residents are, and to gather further intelligence about what causes dissatisfaction. The information is then used to inform service managers of problems. The number of surveys conducted to date is not sufficient to indicate whether there is a changing trend in terms of satisfaction, but the last survey was encouraging.

2.3.3 In addition to these surveys, the Customer First team have been visiting council facilities and recording, via photographs, how these facilities appear to customers. This has helped to identify some key areas for improvement in terms of presentation and maintenance.

2.4 Stakeholder Challenge Meetings

2.4.1 The first Stakeholder Challenge meeting was held in April 05. The objective of the meeting was to check whether council stakeholders agreed that the action plans would deliver improved satisfaction, and addressed the key areas of dissatisfaction.

2.4.2 The second Stakeholder Challenge meeting was held at the beginning of this month. Lead officers of the action plans reported back on progress to date, and demonstrated improvements. Stakeholders were also asked whether they had felt the council had improved over the past six months. The feedback was very positive, and the stakeholders continue to support the improvements already delivered and the future plans.

2.5 Future Plans

2.5.1 The proposals for future plans include a number of improvements that require financial resources. These have been requested via the budget bid process in the past month, and will be subject to prioritisation by Members.

3. REPUTATIONS PROJECT

3.1 At the Local Government Association conference in July the LGA and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) launched a Local Government Reputations Project. This is seen as a long-term project to improve Council's reputations and is based on the fact that while public satisfaction with Council services is improving, public approval of local government is not keeping pace. This is a problem that the LGA and IDeA are determined to tackle in partnership with Councils. The LGA feels that local government should get the credit that it deserves for improving people's lives so that Councils can have the confidence to be even more ambitious for their communities.

3.2 The project has 2 strands:

1. To get Councils to commit to implementing a set of core actions that their research tells them will increase customer satisfaction and improve their reputation. These core actions are around communications and providing a clean, safe and green environment. MORI research shows that these are what local people really care about and are what impacts most on their feeling of satisfaction with their Council.
2. To make sure that the good things Councils do are reported in the national media so that key decision-makers have a balanced picture of local government. Too often the national press only publish bad news about Council's work and the LGA are determined to redress the balance.

3.3 Councils across the country are being asked in a unique pledge to sign up to a concerted plan of national action to boost the reputation of local government. The planned "local government reputation" which was launched by the LGA chairman, commits Councils to act now to improve their standing with local people.

3.4 MORI research undertaken for the LGA has highlighted how Council action in 2 keys areas, communications and the visible street scene will go a long way to raising perceptions of what Councils do.

3.5 The LGA and IDeA have issued a list of cleaner, safer, greener core actions that will have a positive impact on Council's reputations if they do them well. This list has been road tested by a number of authorities.

- 3.6 MORI's work shows that what matters most to local people and increases the standing of the Council is to see clean streets and improvements in their local environment. The public also want better information about their local authority's work, evidence for what value for money it's providing and to be more involved and consulted on the decisions it takes.
- 3.7 The Local Government Reputations Project is intended to help Councils take targeted action that will bolster their reputation with the people that matter to them. It asks why the actions are important and highlights examples of Councils who have led the way and made a difference.
- 3.8 The actions include:
1. On street scene and improving quality of life:
 - Ensure a visible cleaning presence with a strong link to the Council
 - Ensure no gaps or overlap in cleaning and maintenance contracts
 - Have one phone number for all street scene problems
 - Know where your grot spots are and why they are there
 - Set a 24 hour target for action on fly-tipping and abandoned cars
 - Aim to have a green flag award for at least one park
 - Educate and enforce to protect the environment
 2. On communications:
 - Effective media management
 - Provide an A-Z guide of Council services
 - Public a regular Council magazine/newspaper
 - Branding – effective and consistent linkage of the Council's brand to community services
 - Good internal communications
- 3.9 At the moment a significant number of Councils have formally committed and signed up to the core actions. It is recommended that Copeland also commit and sign up to the actions.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Action Plans approved at the Executive in May are now being implemented.
- 4.2 A second stakeholder group meeting has been held and plans, actions and future plans have been robustly challenged and comments fed into revised plans.
- 4.3 The action taken so far concentrates on local issues. There is some benefit to be gained by linking into the national project and the Local Government Association's Reputations Project is recommended.
- 4.4 Further detail to follow.

List of Appendices

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List of Background Documents:

List of Consultees: Corporate Team