

ROCHDALE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

SERVICE PLANNING 2010/11

Service: Customers and Communications

SERVICE PLAN UPDATE

Brief Description of the Service

Customers and Communications brings together five groups of services comprising a number of specialist areas:

Communications Team

The Communications Team is made up of staff with specialisms in public and media relations, marketing, internal communications, broadcast and digital media, events marketing, editorial web content management, advertising and design and print.

Customer Services

Advice Service

The Advice Service provides free expert, confidential and impartial help with housing rights, debt and welfare rights to residents of the Borough.

Community Language Service

The Community Language Service helps other Council services and voluntary sector groups to communicate with customers whose first language is not English.

Customer Services

Customer Services provides access to and information about the full range of Council services through seven one-stop shops. In addition, this service also offers access to a range of related agencies' services.

Homeworking Service

The Homeworking Development Project provides specialist advice, information and support to potential and existing homeworkers.

Design and Print Services

Design and Print provide an integrated graphic design, printing and central reprographic service to Council Services and external customers.

Library Services

The Library Service provides a range of services, including:

- 17 static libraries and a mobile library that visits 125 locations every fortnight
- Free use of computers, including internet access and e-mail via the People's Network
- Local Studies, enquiry services and reference materials
- An annual programme of promotional events
- Specialist library services for people who are "housebound", visually or hearing impaired, residents in local residential homes and inmates of Buckley Hall Prison.

Revenues and Benefits

Our Service aim is to help reduce poverty within the Borough by; ensuring access to Council administered benefits, actively promoting take-up of the different types of benefit available, and collecting monies due to the Council within an anti-poverty framework which always takes into account the ability to pay. We strive to administer these benefits promptly and accurately to ensure the maximum financial assistance to those who are most in need and that in turn helps to stimulate the local economy. By helping to reduce poverty in this way, it is hoped that the Service contributes to the key agenda of ensuring better health and improving prosperity.

- Our main business is to award benefit to help customers with their Council Tax and/or Housing Costs, and to collect the bulk of the income due to the Council.

- The types of income we collect are:
 - Council Tax, Business Rates, General Income (excluding housing rents, house purchase loans and car parking fines) and Housing Benefit Overpayments
- The types of benefit we pay out are;
 - Housing and Council Tax Benefit (to help people with Council Tax and / or Housing Costs)
 - Education Benefits (to help people pay for school uniforms and provide free school meals)
- We issue approximately 450,000 bills, reminders, summonses, liability orders, benefit notifications, direct credits and cheques each year
- We take action for non payment, both internally and externally through the use of bailiffs, collection agencies, and tracing agents
- We process numerous types of application for discounts and exemptions e.g. for single persons, the disabled, students, empty properties, properties undergoing renovation, and many, many more
- We investigate fraudulent claims for benefit and take legal action where appropriate
- We provide a wide range of payment methods including direct debits, standing orders, debit/credit cards over the telephone, 24 hour voice activated phone payments, the internet, and cash facilities through Post Offices and 'PayPoint' – available in shops, supermarkets and petrol stations
- We account for and balance all income collected at post offices and through the banking system

In addition to these services directly managed by Customers and Communications, the Service also has a key role in leading the transformation of customer services across the Council

Broad Service Objectives

The Customers and Communications Service was established in April 2009 to transform the way the Council engages with and serves its customers. This includes the perception of residents, the experience of customers and their involvement and engagement in shaping and delivery of services.

A number of Principles for Change have been established:

- delivering services that are right first time at the first point of contact.
- excellent quality of services
- efficient choice of access channels for our customers
- a "Tell us Once" philosophy.
- embedded engagement and involvement of customers
- a single line of accountability for developing customer access channels
- highly-skilled and motivated staff
- a Centre of Excellence for all processing activities which are delivered directly to customers.

PART A Review of the Year

Achievements and Headlines 2009/10

Jobs and prosperity

The impact of the recession continues to be felt and we have seen significant rise in the number of people claiming benefits in the borough as well as a greater demand on the council's advice services. In addition to dealing with this increased demand, we have also taken pro-active steps to support local people by supporting capacity building activity in our communities, encouraging people to access recession related support and ensuring that benefits are paid promptly.

- Our advice team has generated an estimated £1m in unclaimed benefits and by supporting people to challenge benefits entitlements. This is real money in people's pockets, which, according to research has a potential knock on impact within the local economy of £250,000.
- Homelessness prevention through our debt and housing advice work has helped to keep a significant number of local people in their homes for at least six months. We have reported 84 cases to Strategic Housing and estimate that these interventions have helped the council to avoid costs of £1.5m over the full year in the cost of temporary homelessness.
- We have also seen a rise in the demand for housing and debt advice and the service has dealt with bankruptcy cases resulting in a total of more than £1m being written off in the period January – November

2009.

- Working with our Strategic Housing and CAB partners, we have supported the government's introduction of support packages for homeowners, including the Mortgage Support and Mortgage Rescue schemes. A temporary advice worker post was established to deal with demand and to date 59 cases have been dealt with to mid year.
- We continue to support capacity building and the raising of aspiration in our communities, most recently with the completion of a vibrant and modern refurbishment of Darnhill Library. Young people have been heavily involved throughout and the new library includes a wide selection of books for youngsters, Playstation 3 and a plasma screen.
- Working with partners has allowed us to expand our informal learning offer to improve IT skills at a local level. To date we have supported recycled teenagers events, held regular 'silver surfer' sessions, genealogy sessions and more.
- The recent refurbishments at Smallbridge, Heywood and Darnhill, accompanied by improved communication and library based events means that visits to libraries are predicted to increase by 5% more than any previous year on record. The use of the library by adults (NI19) has increased in 2009 by more than any other library service nationally since 2008(excluding London).
- The opening of the new joint service centre in Heywood has also presented a major opportunity to improve the overall customer experience and our first express library has also opened within the Phoenix Centre. This allows a range of books to be loaned outside of normal library opening hours, as well as enabling community web access through the use of public PCs.
- In Milnrow, customer services has been co-located within Milnrow library to provide local people with a one stop shop approach to the delivery of council services.
- Benefits processing times have improved significantly, with new claims reducing from 21.75 days in 2008/9 to a projected 18.5 days for 2009/10. Change of circumstances updates are projected to reduce from 9.67 days to 8.3 days. If this continues, it will place us in the upper quartile of councils in this area.
- Our council tax collection performance is also ahead of last year, currently by 0.6% compared to our target of 0.3%. After achieving 95.56% collection last year, we are on course to exceed 96% for 2009-2010.
- Business rate collection looks like it will be maintained at last year's level (96.8%), which considering the tough time businesses are going through in the credit crunch, is a worthy achievement if it happens. So far we have collected the same amount (allowing for inflation) as this time last year. We have tried, wherever we can, to show a sympathetic approach to local businesses who are in financial difficulties. Every effort will continue to be made to maximise collection but in a way that doesn't contribute to local firms closing down. The team has worked hard in trying to collect charges in a difficult environment, and has also dealt with some significant work pressures involving the deferral scheme, the new Valuation lists (with most businesses seeing a change in their rateable value) and yet further changes to the charges for empty properties. This has been done within existing resources and has been dealt with efficiently and with a minimum of complaints from customers.
- For the third year running, the maximum amount of benefit overpayment subsidy will be claimed, which will bring in approx £212,600 of additional income into the council. This has been achieved by not allowing housing benefit overpayments to be created in the first place due to dealing with work more promptly and more accurately.
- We have seen an increase of over 2,200 new benefit claims over the past 12 months, and prioritisation of benefit take up will continue throughout 2010-11. This take up work involves getting closer to local communities, with staff holding local surgeries, visits, and forums, and also through the use of the 'Benefits Bus'. This take up work is resource intensive, but is vital in terms of income maximisation and avoiding hardship.
- The benefits side of the service was inspected in November under the Audit Commission's new, "harder test". We have been awarded a 'good' verdict, with 'promising prospects' - the best result received by any council so far. Staff across the service – and within Performance and Development and Supporting People worked hard to achieve a very positive outcome.
- Since October the service has offered a wider variety of options for paying council tax by Direct Debit, as follows: weekly; fortnightly; 4-weekly; and 12 monthly on either the 9th, 15th, 19th or 25th and communications and staff training have been put in place to actively promote Direct Debit as the council's preferred payment method.
- We have led on the implementation of the borough's Shop Local campaign, in partnership with the Rochdale Observer.
- We have also worked with services across the council to deliver co-ordinated and customer friendly information related to recession support in the form of the 'Beat the Crunch' campaign.
- At a time when positive messaging about the borough is critical to its future economic growth, we have also set up a partnership communications sub group, specifically to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the communication of town centre regeneration initiatives including town centre east, the new interchange,

Metrolink and the new council offices. As part of this, we have supported the initial consultation about the new council offices.

- We have also provided communications support to the Regeneration Service's skills campaign in order to increase registration onto training courses.

Making sure every child matters

As well as involving young people in the redesign of our libraries, this year we've introduced new projects to support better outcomes for the borough's children – and we've also launched a campaign to increase the number of foster carers in the borough.

- We have been nationally recognised as a best practice authority for our approach to Bookstart for Babies and Bookstart Treasure Boxes provided to children in their pre-school year, achieving our Aiming High target of 98% for three Bookstart stages overall.
- Our Summer Reading Challenge was the borough's most successful yet – Quest Seekers had more participants than any previous year and the 'Reading Champions' partnership with schools was highlighted as Best Practice in the DCMS Libraries Modernisation Review.
- Partnership work has also gathered pace, with the introduction of 'What's My Story' sessions in conjunction with Link4Life to help people read stories to their children
- We have also started a 'Fulfilling Their Potential, Year 3 project' to positively engage young people with the library service. This includes offering a range of positive activities for young people in all libraries and reaching out to young people using the Youth Bus to get them engaged in a more interactive manner. We've also allowed snacks to be brought into libraries to create a more relaxed atmosphere and move away from the traditional 'stuffy library' image! Young people have responded positively to this and have treated the libraries with respect.
- Our communications work has also supported this agenda with the implementation of an ongoing strategy for positively promoting young people and activities, including the provision of a 'Youth Matters' section in the local press every fortnight and the development of an online portal for young people to access and engage in positive activities across a wide range of partners.
- Our new fostering campaign, designed to increase the number of available foster carers in the borough launched in October and between October and January, increased interest by 63% compared to the same period in 2008/9. Since the campaign launched, 98 people have expressed an interest in fostering - 36 more people than the previous year.
- A multi agency communications group has also been set up to bring together all communications staff working with children or on children related projects and programmes. This means that over time we can make better use of resources and start to cross promote activity so that we have a greater impact in supporting outcomes in this area.

Improving community safety

National and local targets around community safety mean to be successful, the council and its partners must reduce crime and also the fear of crime. This year, we have developed and started to implement a new communications strategy for the Safer Communities Partnership which will deliver improved perceptions as well as impacting on hard targets – and we have continued to build on our work with young people to ensure that they are engaged in positive activities through our library service.

- A new, research based, communications strategy has been created for the Safer Communities Partnership. This is designed to impact on the key borough outcomes for the partnership.
- We have supported the LAA stretch target to increase the number of reports of domestic violence to the police by carrying out targeted communications activity among particular sections of the community. Real life victims of domestic violence have been involved in the research for the project. Funding for this is being raised through the sale of 'Hands off' wristbands. All money raised goes directly into supporting victims and encouraging reporting of the crime.
- We have also delivered a social awareness campaign to promote safe and sensible drinking and to improve perceptions of drunk and rowdy behaviour (NI41). Direct contact was made with 500 people through face to face promotions and 250 of these took part in a quiz style consultation to determine attitudes to and understanding of alcohol that will help to inform future campaigns.
- Plans have also been developed to pilot monthly safety newsletters in neighbourhoods where there is the highest perception of anti-social behaviour. Baseline data is now available and we will monitor the impact that this activity has.

- A new, township based, Communities Matter pull out has also been introduced. The first edition appears in the February edition of Local Matters. This is planned as an update twice per year to ensure people are informed about what the police, council and other partners are doing as a result of public concerns about safety in each area.
- We continue to promote positive activities for young people to discourage youth nuisance and improve perceptions of young people overall.
- Within libraries we are working in partnership with the Youth Service to positively engage with Young People, and offer a range of activities in all libraries. Two pilot projects are underway at Balderstone Library and Darnhill Library. This new way of working with young people, will lead to exciting services offered to and by young people, youth volunteering opportunities and intergenerational work.

Creating a cleaner, greener environment

- One of the requirements of Green Flags park status is to have a Green Flag Parks Marketing Strategy in place. This year we have refreshed the strategy and implementation plan which has helped towards Environmental Management's achievement of the related stretch target.
- We have also taken on responsibility for recycling communication from the Environmental Management Service. This means that we will now be better able to co-ordinate communication in this area across the customer facing channels and through marketing and media.
- The communications element of the Big Clean campaign is also being co-ordinated in the service. Last year's Big Clean saw a 50% awareness rate across the borough and high levels of community engagement in both nominating sites and also through direct action, taking part in community litter picks. The current campaign (2010) will be evaluated in May.
- We have also taken physical steps to improve our energy consumption by introducing energy efficiency measures have as an integral part of library refurbishments at Darnhill Library and by instigating a print management programme that will help to reduce overall office print volumes and impact on levels of CO2.

Improving health and well-being

Addressing health inequalities continues to be a focus for the service and this year we have:

- Increased the use of the Books on Prescription service in libraries.
- Given NHS Choices website training to library staff, in order to promote the service to customers.
- Jointly co-ordinated the promotion and delivery of the borough's Live Life event with the PCT .
- Supported recycled teenagers events across the borough.
- Prioritised easy to understand health and physical activity messages through the council's civic magazine, Local Matters. The PCT and Link4Life representatives work jointly with the Communications Team to co-ordinate the content of the publication and ensure that it is directed at supporting boroughwide priorities.
- Strengthened our monthly reading groups in 10 libraries. There are 16 reading/writing/poetry groups in total. These groups provide a chance for people to nurture their love of reading, socialise, in many cases enhance their general confidence and help us by developing advocates for the service. They are one of the ways that we contribute to the prevention agenda.
- Supported more than 20 people to complete the Six-Book Challenge. This scheme for adults who can read, but have yet to build reading stamina and experience, has had a huge impact on those individuals lives. They have more reading skills, and in most cases higher levels of confidence within themselves.
- Delivered sessions to children with Profound Multiple Learning Disabilities using specially designed resources called book bags, much to the delight of all involved.

Meeting customer needs

This has been a significant area of work for us this year. From the physical changes as a result of the new joint service centre and planning for the new council offices, to preparation work looking at customer access as a whole, we've put in place some solid foundations that we will build on in 2010/11.

- Groundwork has started on customer access strategy, with colleagues in Performance and Development supporting us to really start to understand our customers through the use of customer insight. Customer insight is a powerful tool that uses consumer and local data to tell us the way that our customers would prefer to receive our services based on what they tell us and on other choices that they make. It can also help us to target services to customers who most need them, as we have done with the recent benefits take up project.
- The web is now better linked in to the other primary access channels – face to face and phone - and there are further plans to better integrate these channels to ensure a more consistent customer experience from 2011 onwards.
- We have worked with colleagues in Impact to establish what ICT infrastructure will be needed to support

the delivery of a truly customer focused approach to service delivery. Only by making better use of ICT will we be able to have a single view of our customers and give them the things that they have told us they want (quicker, more efficient services tailored to their needs).

- We have started to make better use of web analytics to understand what people are using our website for. We can now find out how many people have visited a particular page, where they came from, how long they stayed and at what point they exited the site for example. We are now using this information to put our most popular web content on the homepage – and to be more intelligent about how we structure our information – from a customer rather than a council point of view.
- We have also made some initial improvements to the search engine on the website so that it delivers better results for customers and will continue work in this area in 2010/11.
- We have also successfully promoted BECS online and offline and increased self service take up as a result. Self service via the website in this particular area is now running at the same level as face to face enquiries, reducing costs of delivering services and also improving the customer experience.
- We have developed a section of the site specifically for older people, based on feedback that they have given to us.
- Usability testing has been introduced for any major developments of additions to the site. This means we use real people to test the site rather than making assumptions about what's successful and what's not.
- To set clear standards for the way that the council communicates with customers, we have created a Style Guide and Corporate Identity guide. This will be rolled out to all services in 2010/11.
- Acted as sponsors for the "Tell us Once" project – a roll out of a national initiative making it less bureaucratic for customers to report deaths to the council. This project is being delivered by two of the council's enterprising leaders.
- Heywood Library integrated within the new Joint Service Centre – Phoenix Centre. Partnership working with Council Services and PCT will lead to enhance customer experience and opportunities for further integrated working. Extended library facilities through the Express Library, where people can join and issue books – including outside of normal library opening hours.
- Public Libraries User Survey for Adults was conducted in October 2009. Respondents reported a 93% satisfaction rate, which will be above the national average. An action plan is being produced for each library, in response to the survey.
- Improved consultation with the public, through the introduction of Comments Books in each library, and surveys of the mobile library, Doorstep Library and Darnhill Library customers.
- Programme of events and activities developed specifically for refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minority communities, led by the Library Link Worker.
- A range of successful reading development initiatives and events in libraries, including author visits to libraries, World Book Day events.
- Together, the service co-ordinated and delivered the council's annual Customer Service Awards with staff across the service receiving nominations.
- Media demand continues to grow year on year and although the local printed press has located to Manchester we have seen an increase in the number of enquiries received to date. To 31 January 2010, the Communications Team responded to 696 media enquiries (excluding follow up enquiries) and 90% of these were answered fully within 24 hours/before the journalist deadline (whichever was sooner). 419 proactive media releases were issued in the same period.
- A random survey of households in the borough (producing 660 responses) indicated a readership for the council magazine, Local Matters, of 89%, with 75% of people saying that they thought Local Matters provided value for money at a cost of just under 30p per copy to produce.
- We have also produced an average of five printed publications per week that are customer focused and tested before use. Examples include the council tax guide, the A to Z of services, the township guides, customer information leaflets and more. On average, we have also intercepted a similar number and worked with services to ensure we are targeting information effectively and not simply churning out paper.
- We have also provided events marketing support to the Feel Good festival, the Christmas lights switch on (including raising the bar on events by booking better acts to attract more people), the launch of the joint service centre, Middleton Arena and the fusiliers march.

Partnership working

Our partnership work continues to gather momentum, and the pace of this has been accelerated by the need to generate significant efficiencies. This year we have:

- Taken responsibility for LSP communications and set up a new LSP strategic communications group designed to better co-ordinate communications across the borough and to explore opportunities for joint working, improvement and efficiency.
- Worked on collaboration in communication plans with the PCT, looking at how we can maximise use of resources across the two communications teams.

- Introduced a more collaborative approach to the delivery of key publications like Local Matters (which is now delivered by the council in partnership with the PCT and Link4Life who support the collation and co-ordination of the magazine).
- Placed a greater focus on strengthening internal communications across the LSP with the launch of a new stakeholder website.
- Worked with partners on key events and to plan and deliver the communications for consultation activity to renew the Corporate Plan and the Community Strategy.
- Played an active role in exploring areas for potential collaboration with AGMA authorities on the customer side.
- Supported the implementation of a new e-recruitment system across AGMA, which will lead to the delivery of significant savings for all ten authorities. Rochdale is leading on the communications for this project.

Local studies / arts and heritage

- Continued to develop and enhance the local studies offer in partnership with Link4life, e.g. improving online access to local studies material.
- Partnership work in providing access to local studies material for HLF Community Curates Project, the Youth Curates at Heywood Library and a display at Middleton Arena.
- The Library Service funded the display case at the refurbished Heywood Library to facilitate and encourage engagement with the Borough's Arts & Heritage.
- Two Local Studies groups began at Heywood Library, covering family history and local history.

Maximising the potential of our people

Staff development and training is key to our success and this year we have:

- Supported a number of managers through the Enterprising Leadership Programme.
- Put two of our managers in communications through a coaching programme so that they can introduce a coaching approach to leadership. These managers are now actively coaching a handful of staff within and outside of the authority.
- Taken forward a cross service staff Steering Group - the Building On Success Steering Group. This meets monthly, to improve internal communication and find ways of improving and modernising the libraries service.
- Held our 3rd libraries staff conference in October. The day featured examples of best practice from other authorities in the North West. More than 80% of attendees rated it good, and more than 80% stated that it was useful to their day to day work.
- Put all of our communications staff through e- procurement training.
- Enrolled a member of staff onto an NVQ looking at basic process mapping to support change work in the communications team.

We have also strengthened internal communication to ensure that all of the council's staff are aware of developments and that there is a good two way flow of information between management and staff. We have:

- Created a new internal communications strategy for the council.
- Implemented a new internal magazine called People Matter at low cost.
- Introduced pop up messages on PCs and HTML emails to communicate with staff more effectively.
- Introduced a face to face core brief system to ensure information is cascaded right through the organisation and that ELT and Heads of Service have a mechanism for capturing staff feedback.
- Provided communications support for Stepping Up and the efficiency programme.
- Provided communications support for pay and grading.
- Provided the infrastructure for internal events.

Value for money

We have:

- Implemented a new, centralised way of managing recruitment advertising that is on target to achieve £50K of savings in 2009/10 and will save £150K a year after that.
- Reconfigured the senior management structure within the service to significantly reduce the number of senior managers, align parts of the business and generate efficiencies.
- Merged communications with design and print and removed duplication, deleting posts to reduce overall staff costs.
- Started to roll out a print management strategy that will reduce the overall volume of printed materials across the council, supporting the council's intention to move to electronic documents record

management. Although volumes are falling, this project is yet to deliver efficiencies, but we can evidence an overall reduction in volume and consequent residual savings and a positive impact on CO2 reduction. More work is being done to assess how best to remove cashable efficiencies from the new financial year.

- The schools service has also transferred its communication officer into the central team, which has increased the team's resilience to deal with high demand. This has had a positive impact on helping the team to manage peaks and troughs and has helped to join up customer information (linking school closures to other weather related queries for example during the recent poor weather).
- Secured an in-year saving to the Council of £182,000 by strictly controlling non-essential expenditure across the Service.

PART B Key Changes to Service Plan proposed for 2010/11

Aiming High 2007 – 2010

Aiming High Targets

Customers and Communications is directly responsible for the following Aiming High Targets:

SP1.N	Increase library visits from 3.6 per year per head of population in 2006/07 to 6.0 per year per head by 31 March 2010.
SP2.C	Increase participation in the Summer Reading Challenge in libraries amongst 4-12 year olds from 7% in 2007/08 to 12% by 2010

However, every area of the Service contributes to the key priorities of Aiming High.

We do not intend to make any significant changes to the service plan for 2010/11, as a wholesale refresh will take place as part of the consultation around Pride of Place and Aiming High.

Stepping Up

Maximising the potential of our people

- Staff will be supported to learn new skills this year to ensure that our services are not delivered in silos and that all front line staff across the service are able to deal with generic information requests.
- A new induction will be introduced – corporately, we will embed customer focus into the council wide induction and at a service level we will introduce a comprehensive induction process for all new starters (as well as ensuring all existing staff are re-familiarised with this)
- Encourage managers from across the Service to participate in the Council's Enterprising Leadership Programme.
- Create further opportunities for staff to get involved in shaping service delivery
- Support the Councils workforce development programme by promoting further apprenticeships in the Service and work placements. We will also explore the use of the Response to Redundancy scheme to support displaced staff obtain alternative employment and the potential to use the Future Jobs Fund to create work opportunities for young unemployed people and older people who are long-term unemployed.

Customer Focus

We intend to focus heavily on improving our understanding of customer needs through so that we can:

- Set out clear customer standards that will apply across the council. This will include how we deal with customer contact and will be tested by mystery shoppers.
- Support staff to ensure that they know how to treat customers well – and so that they have the right systems in place to get the information they need to do this.
- Provide an appropriate ICT infrastructure to enable customers to “tell us once” and to ensure that we deliver services in a holistic way. Over time, as systems integrate, this will stop the need for customers to make multiple contacts with us – and it will enable us to proactively offer them services that meet their needs.
- Create and start to implement a three to five year customer access strategy that will improve how our customers access our services, deliver efficiencies and ensure that we put our customers at the heart of everything we do.
- Make better use of our libraries, creating a “community hub” approach to service delivery within our local neighbourhoods.

- Use customer insight data and what customers tell us to really improve how we deliver services. By doing this, we take out management assumptions about what people want – and can give them what they want and need in a way that suits them.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration – working with partners to reduce procurement costs, develop common processes and make things easier for our customers.
- Put in place mechanisms to support digital development and inclusion – which means upskilling local people to make better use of ICT. The knock on benefits of community capacity building are significant in both improving skills (so tackling worklessness and preparing for a knowledge economy), and also by helping the council to offer people our services more flexibly – and at times that suit them.
- Improving our overall engagement with customers to ensure that they are integral to the design of our services.

In addition:

- We will introduce better and more consistent ways of obtaining customer feedback across all of our access channels and will use this in the improvement and development of our services.
- We will explore possible new approaches to the mobile library service – looking at procuring a new vehicle and also at other services it could offer, by asking people what they want to see.
- Several work placements are also planned through the through the Future Jobs scheme.
- We also intend to build on the initial Fulfilling Their Potential, Year 3 project to positively engage Young People with the library service. Building partnership with the Youth Service to positively engage Young People, and offer a range of Positive Activities for Young People in all libraries. This project will also bring volunteering opportunities, and promote intergenerational activities.
- We will work with schools to increase the use of the libraries online resources by young people, to assist with their educational attainment.
- We will implement the Communications Strategy for the Rochdale Safer Communities partnership, contributing heavily to the performance outcomes in this area and will continue to ensure that all communications activity underpins and supports the delivery of the borough's core priorities.
- The library will work with partners to loan SMART meters, contributing to reductions in CO2.
- We will also conduct a Peer Review of Health and Wellbeing with the Library Service.
- Establish Health Information Points in one Library in each township
- We will also work with Age Concern, POPPS and NHS/PCT to develop innovative projects to promote health and well-being, including placing a joint bid for Communities for Health Funding.
- We will facilitate the PCT Expert Patients Programme at Wheatsheaf Library.
- During 2009-2010 the revenues and benefits team introduced a comprehensive Performance Management Framework. The methodology used will be looked at for potential roll out across the wider service.

Value for Money

We will:

- Undertake a wholesale review of the council's design and print provision in order to recommend the most cost effective solution for the Council.
- Make process improvements in advertising, working towards a 'ready state' to join the AGMA collaborative services model for advertising procurement. Negotiations are ongoing to ensure that this has benefits for Rochdale and the wider AGMA consortium.
- Work with AGMA colleagues to ensure a consistent approach to customer contact, with the potential to deliver efficiency savings.
- Where appropriate, enable and encourage customers to access services by telephone or online, rather than through more costly face-to-face transactions.
- Contribute effectively to the cross-cutting services reviews undertaken as part of the Council's Efficiency Programme.
- Secure a further in-year saving of £205,000 by strictly controlling non-essential expenditure across the Service.
- Claim the maximum available benefit overpayment subsidy, which will bring in additional income to the Council of approximately £200,000.

Performance Management 2010-2011

It is proposed to add the following new indicators to the Customers and Communications scorecard for 2010-11:-

- Number of Positive Activities for Young People attendee hours – I.e. library service contribution to NI 110
- Number of New Library Members
- Percentage of residents living in the bottom 3% of super output areas that are active library members

Township Devolution

One of the great strengths of local democracy in Rochdale is the township structure. Each Township Committee has produced its own Township Plan. Although these are all set within the context of Pride of Place and Aiming High, they do illustrate the different visions for the future development of each township. Each Plan also identifies a number of key priorities and actions to be taken. Collectively, the Township Plans provide a focus for individual Service Plans to guide prioritisation and the deployment of resources within each Service. None of these key actions falls directly within the remit of the Customers and Communications Service; however, we have a significant role to play in supporting the delivery of these plans. Whilst we are yet to have detailed discussions with each township, the following table indicates some examples of how we can contribute.

Contact centre, web and face to face service centres	To ensure a similar range of services for customers across all townships. To tailor services to customer need.
Libraries	Support for learning and e-learning initiatives Support for improvements in literacy Enhanced job prospects through the development of ICT skills of people using the "People's Network" free public access computer terminals in each of our IT public libraries. Use of our libraries to facilitate public consultation on local issues and development projects (e.g. Darnhill Community Centre Project) Support for health initiatives by selecting appropriate lending stock and "Bibliotherapy" project. Support for work with children and young people e.g. Surestart, Bookstart initiatives.
Advice Service	Specialist advice services in relation to Debt, Housing and Welfare Rights
Community language Services	Interpretation and translation service to help all council services engage with customers who may not speak or read English
Joint Service Centres	Development in Heywood complete. Future phases in Littleborough and Middleton. In each case, these include a customer service centre and a public library.
Communications	Production of Local Matters the Council's information magazine, with a focus on an individual township in every edition Support for tourism communication Support for specific events commissioned by townships Delivery of Big Clean, In Bloom and Green Flag parks marketing Delivery of township you said, we did guides.
Revenues and Benefits	It has been agreed with Township Committees that Revenues and Benefits, with responsibilities for collecting a national tax and assessing benefit under a national scheme, has little or no potential to deliver services differently across the various townships (see also para 3.7). To this extent, no requests have been made for any involvement with devolved budgets or linkages with Township Plans. However, a lot of effort is currently being made to engage with community groups and bodies and the service will continue to look to respond to the needs and wishes of local people. A big priority for the service in 2009/10 will be to build on and develop our community links and get nearer to the people we serve.

Financial Planning and Budget Update

CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNICATIONS

2009/10 REVISED ESTIMATE £' 000		2010/11 ORIGINAL ESTIMATE £' 000	2011/12 ORIGINAL ESTIMATE £' 000	2012/13 ORIGINAL ESTIMATE £' 000
	Budget by Service Area			
	Management			
516	<i>Expenditure</i>	18	18	18
0	<i>Income</i>	0	0	0
27	<i>Net effect of Internal service recharges</i>	-18	-18	-18
4	<i>Contribution to/-from a reserve</i>	4	4	6
547	Total	4	4	6
	Customer Services			
2,799	<i>Expenditure</i>	2,813	2,880	2,947
-527	<i>Income</i>	-266	-267	-267
-1,381	<i>Net effect of Internal service recharges</i>	-1,570	-1,608	-1,652
891	Total	977	1,005	1,028
	Communications			
690	<i>Expenditure</i>	545	559	551
-153	<i>Income</i>	-151	-153	-155
-487	<i>Net effect of Internal service recharges</i>	-361	-371	-360
50	Total	33	35	36
	Design & Print			
791	<i>Expenditure</i>	549	559	571
-1,000	<i>Income</i>	-447	-447	-447
206	<i>Net effect of Internal service recharges</i>	161	164	166
-3	Total	263	276	290
	Library Service			
4,054	<i>Expenditure</i>	3,639	3,784	3,829
-112	<i>Income</i>	-81	-83	-85
339	<i>Net effect of Internal service recharges</i>	374	387	384
4,281	Total	3,932	4,088	4,128
	Revenues and Benefits			
80,462	<i>Expenditure</i>	80,576	80,638	80,707
-78,468	<i>Income</i>	-78,468	-78,469	-78,470
1,678	<i>Net effect of Internal service recharges</i>	1,095	1,137	1,131
2	<i>Contribution to/-from a reserve</i>	2	2	4
3,674	Total	3,205	3,308	3,372
9,440	Net cost of providing services to the Public	8,414	8,716	8,860

CUSTOMER AND COMMUNICATIONS

2009/10 REVISED ESTIMATE £' 000		2010/11 ORIGINAL ESTIMATE £' 000	2011/12 ORIGINAL ESTIMATE £' 000	2012/13 ORIGINAL ESTIMATE £' 000
	<u>Budget by Expenditure Type</u>			
8,314	Employees and related expenses	8,027	8,179	8,301
860	Premises related expenses	950	974	994
81	Transport related expenses	80	81	80
3,546	Supplies and services	2,601	2,818	2,861
75,844	Agency and contracted services	75,859	75,847	75,848
667	Depreciation	623	539	539
0	Management cost redistribution	0	0	0
89,312	Total Service Expenditure	88,140	88,438	88,623
3,244	Central departmental and support services	2,503	2,588	2,585
-2,862	Less internal service departmental recharges	-2,822	-2,897	-2,934
382	Net effect of internal service recharges	-319	-309	-349
89,694	Total Service Expenditure net of Internal Service Recharges	87,821	88,129	88,274
	<u>Income</u>			
-2,778	Rents, Fees & Charges	-1,931	-1,937	-1,942
	Grants			
0	Dedicated Schools Grant	0	0	0
-77,482	Other Grants	-77,482	-77,482	-77,482
-80,260	Total Income	-79,413	-79,419	-79,424
6	Contribution to/-from a reserve	6	6	10
9,440	Net cost of providing services to the Public	8,414	8,716	8,860

Improving Health and Well Being and Tackling Health Inequalities

As a service, we will be carrying out Health and Wellbeing Peer Review this year and implementing any recommendations that arise from it throughout 2010/11. In addition we will:

- Work with the PCT and Link4Life to promote health and wellbeing through relevant communications channels and campaigns, using this to support the delivery of key objectives of the borough strategy.
- Continue to support the Mental Health Advice Project. This has continued to develop training and has produced publicity material on benefit issues for service users and other professionals. The mental health advice project has also completed a successful campaign to increase the take up of the lowest rate mobility component of DLA. The project also offers access points at the key mental health resource centres and the psychiatric ward.
- Continue to increase the use of the Books on Prescription service in our libraries
- Embed the promotion of the NHS Choices website in our libraries and face to face centres.
- Jointly co-ordinate, promote and participate in local health related events, such as Live Life and recycled teenagers.
- Hold reading groups in libraries – and look at expanding these and other intervention activity, particularly for older or more vulnerable people.
- Explore further opportunities for collaboration with partners in this area.
- Continue to deliver sessions to children with Profound Multiple Learning Disabilities – using specially

designed resources.

- Utilise the MAC to promote free smoke alarms, gas and electricity safety checks and the Handypersons scheme to improve properties
- Build on the disability benefit project to reduce poverty and improve health and well being

Tackling Deprivation

Access to the advice service is promoted across the townships and is designed to help people with housing, welfare benefits and debt issues. It is accessible by email, phone and face to face. Service level agreements are in place with the law centre and the CAB and we also provide home visits.

The Greater Manchester LA Financial Inclusion Strategy Group of which we are part has been successful in bidding for funding to secure the appointment of two Financial Inclusion Champions to help develop financial inclusion strategies across the AGMA authorities and we will continue to work in partnership to ensure Rochdale sees the benefit of this.

In addition the service is represented on the Rochdale and Oldham Financial Inclusion Forum which is made up of representatives from Rochdale's Social Landlords RSL's, and local statutory and voluntary agencies across the borough. This body has been successful in securing funding for the appointment of a debt advice worker to provide a dedicated service to RSL tenants in Oldham with the intention to introduce a similar service across Rochdale.

Further developments in this area include the development of a borough wide financial inclusion strategy with the commissioning of independent research to ascertain the scale of financial exclusion within the borough. This includes a feasibility study into the creation of a credit union for Rochdale.

We also promote a range of recession support via our available channels – and via the media as appropriate. Free services offered include internet access and ICT skills transfer at all libraries, free events, no fines for under 16s or over 60s. We also work in partnership with Blue Orchid and Next Steps to provide job seeking and business start up support in libraries.

The mobile Library stops in deprived communities where there is no static library provision and there is specific provision for asylum seekers and refugees, via the Library Link Worker

Similar to the ways the Service aims to contribute to tackling health inequality, we can also help to alleviate the affects of deprivation by maximising take up of benefit and by taking account of ability to pay when determining the most appropriate recovery method. Another priority is to ensure that some communities, groups or individuals are not excluded from the services we provide. Efforts to prevent this happening include:

- Targeted take up events in those areas identified by a demographic analysis as being highly deprived
- Attendance at all frontline events for the unemployed to ensure we can effectively signpost customers to access services which can help them return to work
- Reaching older people at the Electric Blanket Testing Day to promote benefit take up
- Participation in National Carers Rights Day, working with a range of partners and other agencies to promote the range of benefits and practical support available
- Joint work with Warm Front fuel poverty grant agency to increase uptake and hopefully result in an improvement in installations
- Campaigns to promote better awareness of benefit changes and how they affect families and pensioners
- Promotion of Free School Meals and School Uniform Grants at schools
- Communication of and attendance at 'Beat the Recession' advice sessions for local businesses
- The provision of Disability Reduction advice in Council Tax info leaflet, on our stationery and on the web
- Wide publication of the availability of Single Person Discount
- Increased and publicised the number of Council Tax payment options
- Working closely with the CAB to ensure benefits are maximised and helping people deal with debt
- Produced a wide range of literature such as information leaflets and posters to promote benefits.

Collaborative Working

The service continues to work in partnership with a number of organisations in order to provide local access to their advice and information. This includes various organisations holding surgeries in Customer Service Centres throughout the Borough so customers can access these services locally without having to travel to different offices or to different parts of the borough. This is part of an ongoing process of closer working between various agencies and the Service will continue to look for new partnership opportunities.

Within communications, a new LSP communications group has been established to provide better co-ordination of communication activity and to explore opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of resources.

Joint working protocols are now agreed with Stepping Stones Crisis Housing team and Safeguarding team for both children and adults to ensure each organisation is able to signpost customers to the help, advice and support available to vulnerable people and so that appropriate referrals can be made

We continue to work jointly with the Pension Service, CAB, Job Centre Plus (JCP) and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) taking the MAC into the community 4 weeks every year to provide customers with a wide range of benefit, debt and health advice

We have been short listed for IRRV Social Inclusion award for innovative way we utilise the MAC

Our partnership with Pension Service has continued to result in backdated Pension Credit payments for pensioners with latest exercise resulting in over £111K in backdated and projected payments (new exercise ongoing)

We work with large local Registered Social Landlord (RSL) to enable them to accept and verify HB/CTB claims to improve service access, with plans to roll this out to other large RSLs in the area during 2010

The Single Equality Bill

In April 2009 the IDeA launched the New Equality Framework and we have migrated to this framework. This new framework has 3 levels and since we were at level 4 of the old Equality Standard for Local Government, we were placed in the interim category "moving towards excellence" which is on the New Equality Framework. This level is located between level 2 and Level 3. We have set a target to achieve level 3, Excellent by March 2011.

Example of work we have done, or intend to do, to eliminate inequality from our service delivery include:

- During 2009 we carried out a full demographic analysis of our caseload and identified variations in processing times across different client groups. We will use this information during 2010 to address these inequalities and standardise these times
- Throughout 2010 we plan to carry out Equality Impact Assessments on all our policies and procedures
- A review of our HB payment methods will be carried out and consideration will be given to the use of Pre-Payment Cards to remove existing barriers to financial inclusion
- We have specific actions included in the Council's 'Recession Action Plan' and 'Older Person's Strategy' to help customers claim full entitlement to benefits and discounts to minimise the financial impact of the credit crunch on vulnerable people
- We carried out joint work with Advice Services, Pension Service and CAB to promote disability benefits, resulting in 50 successful claims for Attendance Allowance and/or Disability Living Allowance, and 25 new or increased HB/CTB awards, totalling more than £110K
- Participated in the Council's annual 'Equalities Listening Event', providing feedback on actions taken as a result of issues raised at previous events
- Used the MAC to provide access to information and services in all townships and priority areas of high deprivation, including information on benefits, health improvement advice and employment opportunities
- Working to develop effective benefit take up strategy with actions which will ensure we identify households eligible for support, that we reach the most vulnerable groups and that we reduce the numbers of people living in poverty and deprived circumstances

Legislative Changes

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

The current system of limiting HB subsidy in respect of claims from customers living in temporary accommodation by a series of thresholds and caps will be replaced from April 2010

For customers placed into non self-contained accommodation (board and lodging or licensed), HB subsidy will be limited to the 1 bedroom self-contained Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate based on the location of the property. This will impact the amount of subsidy received on payments made to those placed in bed and breakfast accommodation where households have been placed into these properties to discharge a homelessness function under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

Consultation will take place with The Homelessness Team to determine the financial impact for Rochdale.

Housing Benefit Overpayments

Changes are being made to Housing Benefit legislation to reduce the amount of subsidy that will be payable to

authorities due to 'non-residency'. These cases are where the customer has changed address within the same LA's area and the HB is being paid to the same person at both the old and new addresses. By amending the legislation so that these overpayments are dealt with as a simple offset rather than recovery the figures payable by way of subsidy will reduce.

It is expected that these changes will mean around a £25,000 reduction in subsidy for Rochdale.

Business Rates

Although not a legislative change the new rating list will come into force on 1/4/2010 following the draft list which was published by the Valuation Office Agency in October 2009. Although there will be transitional relief for Businesses whose Rateable Values have risen sharply, this revaluation will still cause yet more difficulty for businesses already struggling due to the impact of the Credit Crunch

Key Improvement Activity 2010/11

Specific developments include:

- Contribution to the strategic cross-cutting service reviews which are to be undertaken as part of the Council's Efficiency Programme.
- Leading the transformation of customer focus across the Council.
- Redesigning the Service structure to streamline management and ensure joined up delivery of services to our customers.
- Continued transformation of the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- Continued modernisation of the Library Services
- Improving attendance across the Service
- Contributing to work with Council Services and our partners to tackle the effects of the recession on local people and the local economy.

Advice

- Review support to customers on debt cases to establish a more efficient use of resources.
- Explore additional measures of our outcomes / outputs from service enquiries and casework.
- Review our evaluation of training courses and talks to groups / services / agencies to improve our intelligence for planning future training opportunities with customers.
- Review our duty service and other means of contacting the service to improve the customers experience and best use of our resources.

Customer services

- Use customer insight data to improve the way we deliver our services, better structuring them around customer needs
- Improve ICT provision to introduce a single view of our customers which will help to improve overall service delivery
- Work closing with web services to join up access channels for customers and to encourage channel shift
- Set clear customer standards for the council as a whole and improve waiting times in customer service centres specifically
- Improve customer experience through creating better environments for our customers, including better provision of signage and information.
- Explore the possibility of greater collaboration at an AGMA and local level to improve overall service delivery from a customer perspective.
- Review the language needs of customers and adapt our approach in this area accordingly.

Libraries

- Build on the success of our libraries to introduce a community hub approach to the delivery of services, working in partnership with other council services and external partners
- Implement a new libraries management system to ensure that we have a robust ICT platform for service delivery.
- Introduce more modern ways of stock control and self service, freeing up staff to concentrate on excellence in service delivery and engagement.

Revenues and Benefits

- The interim structure implemented in January 2009 will be further amended and finalised no later than June 2010. Lessons will be learnt from what has worked well and what hasn't and further changes will be introduced to reduce cost and make us more efficient. The emphasis will continue to be on performance

management, introducing new technology and leaner working practices. The culture will be to get things right 'first time' and therefore eliminate waste and inefficiency, in other words, to do more, with less.

- Because of the ongoing impact the credit crunch is having, we will continue making the promotion of take up of benefits our number 1 priority. As well as this being good for the citizens of Rochdale, the more successful we are with this, the more beneficial it will be to our collection rates. The promotion of direct debit with more payment dates and choice will be another main priority. We are also looking to introduce Direct Debit as a new option for the payment of General Income invoices, in line with customer demand. Higher take up of direct debit benefits the service in so many ways, as it is not only less effort to collect payments by this method, it is considerably cheaper to process a direct debit transaction than cash, cheque, or credit card.
- Once we agree and finalise the Audit Commission report, following our recent benefits inspection, an action plan will be drawn up to address the criticisms and recommendations in the report. We will aim to introduce these changes before the end of 2010.
- A key area of improvement activity is the cementing of individual performance management, which is being introduced gradually so that we can learn from what works well and amend or discard what doesn't. The intention is to have the scheme firmly established for when the new structure is introduced in June 2010. Already we have seen some considerable improvements in productivity and if we are to continue improving as a service with reduced budgets, then improving individual productivity and becoming more efficient is the only answer.
- Continue to promote BECS as a self service option to our customers.

Asset Management

We will work proactively with the finance service and with Impact to manage our physical and financial assets appropriately – this includes considering the floor space taken up at Haynes Street at present as part of the Design and Print review.

Revenues and Benefits are already well placed to move into the new building, given the recent transfer of all our paper files to an electronic document management system. This system has not only electronically archived all existing paper files but all new incoming work is scanned and distributed to members of staff via their electronic 'work trays'. This 'paperless' method of working will also enable the service to adapt to the concept of 'hot desking' with little difficulty.

The communications team are already working to the desk ratios that are likely to be in use in the new building and will adapt their work further once a corporate EDRMS is rolled out.

On the customer services side, process improvements are envisaged to introduce and embed scanning and indexing of information as routine, rather than relying on paper documentation.

Revenues and benefits staff have also been trialling home working for the past 18 months, and even though some ICT issues are ongoing, by the time the new building is ready for occupation, the number of 'homeworkers' is expected to have risen from the existing level of 9 to double that, if not more. This will help save space and hence money.

Sustainable Development

Living within environmental limits is one of the key drivers of sustainable development.

The UK sustainable development principles identify that respecting the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity are necessary to improve our environment and ensure that natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations.

The Council is committed to the above principles and therefore all services will ensure that when making decisions about spending and service delivery, they consider the effects purchases and service delivery have on the environment and the depletion of natural resources. There is also an intention to reduce services' reliance on carbon based products e.g. electricity, gas, fuel and oil and make progress in reducing the carbon footprint in line with the Carbon Reduction Commitment

Approved by Portfolio Holders
Opposition Member
Opposition Member
Head of Service

Cllr Thirsk & Cllr T Flynn
Cllr Godson
Cllr Holly.....
Paul Young.....