wrong department, sorry / there is no record here / I’m putting you on hold / we need a reference number / sorry we can’t help with your query /

Getting it right, and righting the wrongs
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Getting it right, and righting the wrongs
Early on in this Review, it became clear that we already know a lot about customer expectations and aspirations. As well as a wealth of research evidence, we have our own experiences. Everyone has their own story of deep disappointment, as well as one of delight when expectations were exceeded.

People’s expectations are set by whoever they get good service from. Very often it is the simple things which make the biggest difference. We have therefore concentrated our efforts, given the short timeline of this Review, on working out what those simple things are:

• Our promises to customers need to be clear and simple for both our services and our remedies

• The frontline staff who deliver these are easily the most important factor in the quality of the customer experience, and need to have the right skills and freedom to act

• The challenge for all of us in the public sector is to deliver a seamless offer to the customer, joining up our promise and delivery wherever possible, with partnerships which are designed for customer convenience.

We have produced a Toolkit with tools that practitioners can use to concentrate on shifting practice to ensure that customers notice the difference in the way services and remedy are delivered – getting it right and righting the wrongs. At the same time, we hope to see supporting action from central government to help put this into practice.
The Review team

Allen Graham – Rushcliffe Borough Council
I am convinced that this Toolkit will provide the practical answer to bridging the gap between customer service and empowerment.

Ossie Hopkins – Institute of Customer Service
People innovate – not systems or processes; and innovation – if inspired and encouraged – can emerge from anywhere in the organisation.

Alison Hopkins – Consumer Focus
Consumers tell us time and again that they value public services and that the best ones take the time to listen and respond when they have problems.

Tony Redmond – Local Government Ombudsman
Thinking about what the complainant wants helps to understand how the matter might be resolved.
Great customer service depends on great staff. Only by looking after our people can they look after our customers.

Complaints handling has not improved in the last decade despite huge investment in IT; the issue is about culture.

This Review offers a great opportunity for local government improvement.
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs
Context
Introduction

The empowerment white paper *Communities in control: real people, real power* (published in July 2008) aims to put the customer at the heart of the design and delivery of local public services. One of its key themes is redress, and it identifies the following features of good remedy systems (*righting the wrongs*), the principles of which apply equally to improving service provision (*getting it right*):

The principles underpinning complaints procedures should be that:¹

- the citizen is the most important person in any transaction, and has a right to decent, agreed standards of service and care
- everyone should have easy access to clear information
- both sides should have a clear understanding of what is expected from each other
- systems of redress and compensation should be clearly explained and understood
- services should learn from the complaints received and make sure that this learning influences delivery next time¹

¹ CLG (2008) *Communities in control: real people, real power*. July 2008 (paragraph 6.5, P97)
The white paper announced a short review to look at the feasibility and practicality of introducing and extending the idea of redress – or remedy – for citizens, where their council services fail to meet agreed standards. David Cook, Chief Executive of Kettering Borough Council, was asked by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to chair this quick, independent Review and report on its findings.

It was important to the Review to be adding something of value, and not just duplicating effort. Aside from the empowerment white paper, a wide range of research has been done in relation to customer service, complaints handling and remedy systems, with good practice identified. This report relies on the wisdom of this previous research, rather than trying to reproduce its findings, and a research appendix, available online\(^2\), points the reader to some of these papers.

After considering this evidence, the expertise of Review members\(^3\), and the views of citizens – or customers, the Review identified the three areas which it thinks make the biggest difference to the customer experience:

1. **The service and remedy pledge:** clearly setting out how you will get it right, and right any wrongs

2. **The importance of the frontline:** understanding that good people are more important than process, and

3. **Customer-focused partnerships:** making sure that partnerships deliver a seamless experience and an economy of effort for the customer.

At the same time, it seemed to the Review that the customer’s experience across the local government sector is currently very mixed, and talking to customers and customer service assessors confirmed this. The main aim of the Review has therefore been to help put learning into practice – to deliver best practice as common practice.

What the Review team thought was missing was easy to use practical support for local authorities to take forward the three drivers of the customer’s experience. The **main output of this Review has therefore been the production of a sector developed Practitioners’ Toolkit** that builds on current best practice and provides councils with practical tools to help them work to improve local services – **getting it right** – and remedy arrangements – **righting the wrongs**.

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\(^2\) See [www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment](http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment)

\(^3\) The Review has involved a wide range of people including local and national government, private and third (including not for profit) sector practitioners and partners.
The Toolkit is designed to:

- help you work out what your customers want from you and how they feel about your services, service areas, organisations or partnerships
- kick start thinking about how these can be more customer-focused or, if you’re someway down the line, challenge that thinking
- provide an easy route to developing plans for improvement, and
- help you consider whether there are other tools or standards you could use to assess and improve or recognise a specific problem or strength.

Alongside the Toolkit, the Review has also produced a report (this document), and a research appendix (a summary of the study conducted during the Review of both new and existing research).

The Review is recommending that the Secretary of State supports a fourth output – a “Trailblazer” programme, to help develop and embed the ideas in the Practitioners’ Toolkit.

The Review recommends that:

**Communities and Local Government:**

- runs a series of Trailblazer pilots whereby authorities and partnerships test and develop the Practitioners’ Toolkit

  *Nine of these – one in each region – should be invited to take advantage of the support of a ‘health-check’ panel drawn from the private, public and third (including not for profit) sectors. The Review has secured the agreement of Tesco, ICS and Consumer Focus to help run these alongside representatives from the local government sector.*

- funds a programme of regional learning events to highlight the messages of the Review and help local service providers understand the Toolkit and Trailblazer opportunities.
Review objectives

The local government sector and partners need to be:

Getting it right

- Designing it right, using customer input and feedback
- Delivering it right, through trained and empowered staff, and services and processes which are focused on the customer experience, and

Righting the wrongs

- Dealing with complaints better, rectifying errors, learning from mistakes and making sure they are not repeated.

To do this, organisations need to create and sustain a customer-focused culture, learning from the example of the best in their and other sectors, and increasing their efforts to concentrate on:

1. The service and remedy pledge: clearly setting out how they will get it right, and right any wrongs
2. The importance of the frontline: understanding that good people are more important than process, and
3. Customer-focused partnerships: making sure that partnerships deliver a seamless experience and an economy of effort for the customer.

Top management (members, leaders, chief executives, and senior management) have to champion this agenda if local authorities are to lead the way in shifting the curve of customer experience with local public services, so that people notice a difference.

Shifting the curve

We all know that it is much better if things do not go wrong in the first place, rather than just being a good response if they do. Getting it right and righting the wrongs looks at how service providers can shift that curve of customer experience. A culture of adequacy is not our objective; ultimately, we want to shift the curve from adequate towards great.
Shifting this curve further to the right will reduce complaints overall and improve people’s perception of the way services are being delivered.

This means not just looking at how to deal with complaints better but at improving service provision. **Becoming better at handling complaints is a worthwhile aim, but a better one is to avoid them in the first place and delight our customers.**

### Changing behaviour

Knowing who your customers are, and understanding both what they want and need, is essential for planning how you deliver for your public. Also, in how you engage with customers to ensure that their voice is heard, listened to, and learned from⁴.

There are numerous ways to deliver services and remedy arrangements – by phone, web, or in person for example – and different methods suit different purposes and needs. There are existing guidance documents and tools which help organisations to work out which approach to take in what circumstance. Activities such as customer journey mapping⁵ can also help you work out what customers actually experience.

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⁴ Sir David Varney, for example, in his report “Service Transformation: A better service for citizens and business, a better deal for the taxpayer” (2006) -, stressed the importance of public services having a “greater appreciation” of citizen’s needs, and both bringing “the true voice of the customer into service design and delivery” and engaging them as the “focal point for services”. He also emphasised “achieving the right balance of channels to deliver services so that they are relevant”.

⁵ Customer journey mapping helps organisations to better understand the experience of customers and develop customer insight into their needs and preferences. Oxford Strategic Marketing (OSM) have produced a toolkit to help get to grips with the use of journey mapping; see: [http://www.cse.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/getDynamicContentAreaSectionResource.do?id=156](http://www.cse.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/getDynamicContentAreaSectionResource.do?id=156)
Further, previous reports identify the benefits of improving service and remedy provision, not least the reduction in costs if complaints are reduced. And there are plenty of examples of improvement and excellence in local service provision from both the local government and other sectors.

The Review identified, however, that the greatest gap is not in knowledge of what works best, but in the application of that learning. Further, organisations are sometimes at a loss to know where to start, or where to go next. And the perceived effort involved in identifying and taking that first or next step is often off-putting – “help can be hard to track down or looks (and sometimes is) complex or time consuming”. Even improvements which are easy to make can therefore sometimes be missed.

The Practitioners’ Toolkit has been designed by local government practitioners to be easy to use.

The Review also identified that not all of the existing tools involve direct engagement with customers, or involve the input of frontline staff. Gaining an understanding of the mix of customers in a particular area and of their particular wants, needs and experiences – sometimes called “customer insight” – is vital if service providers are going to get it right, and right any wrongs.

The Practitioners’ Toolkit is designed to involve customers and staff in reviewing services, service areas, organisations or partnerships.

Using the Practitioners’ Toolkit should help local authorities and partners develop that insight into customer wants, needs and experiences, and work out how to improve their service and remedy delivery.

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6 Practitioner input to discussions
Scope

The scope of this Review was to conduct a concise review within the broad area of customer service and remedy arrangements.

Services – Getting it right

There is a broad spectrum of services provided by local authorities and their partners. Some services are normally only noticed when they are not there or they fail. These services are the routine day to day activities undertaken by all councils including, for example, highway maintenance, collecting recycling and refuse, and processing a wide variety of administrative forms and applications for service provision. These tend to be the services by which the public generally judge the quality of their council.

Good services often require little personal interaction with citizens, so the public tends to judge their quality on the basis of visible and personally relevant services, typically including: clean streets, street lighting, refuse collection and recycling, billing processes and personal benefits from services such as education and social care7

These are also the services where swift remedies, well executed, are likely to do the most for customer confidence; and where simple approaches will achieve the greatest impact in improving customer services. The Review focused its attention on these more routine services to develop a set of guideline characteristics which, if applied, will help improve the customer experience.

At the other end of the scale, highly personalised, specialised services are often heavily regulated and subject to inspection. If things go wrong, remedies may often be appropriate for an ombudsman or other more official types of assessment. However, the Review believes that the principles of customer service it has identified should be able to be applied to all services, and may help reduce the instances where satisfaction needs to be sought from outside the local authority system.

Remedy – Righting the wrongs

For public services in the UK, there are four key pillars of remedy, each with a distinct focus and aim. The Review focused its attention on the remedy arrangements provided by local authorities themselves:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>Resolving complaints internally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector ombudsmen</td>
<td>Offering a non-court based, non-binding form of redress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribunals and public inquiries</td>
<td>Adjudicating disputes between the citizen and the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The courts</td>
<td>A final recourse if all other avenues have failed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do customers want?

The empowerment white paper gave an example of a housing association that gave its residents a gift voucher if they were late completing a repair. The Review considered this approach, but the evidence and our focus groups showed that monetary compensation is generally low on the motivator radar, with the majority of people not being interested in forms of compensation providing their problem is resolved.

There are occasions when specific reimbursement of costs or overpayments is sought. But the experience of the Review team members suggests that those who do seek additional financial recompense (as opposed to refunds) are often those who have not found satisfaction with the local authority. Such customers are now angry, or seeking to prove their case and elicit an apology via another stage of the complaints system, such as with an ombudsman’s office.
For these reasons the review team does not feel that extending financial redress in a systematic way is what is needed at this time to shift that curve of customer experience. Most importantly, both focus group and research evidence suggests that, while customers seek and expect different things when services fail, for most people, when making complaints about a public service, the key things sought are:

- An acknowledgement of the wrong done
- Confirmation that they were right
- An understanding of why things went wrong
- An acceptance of responsibility and a meaningful and timely apology
- Reassurance that the problem has been addressed and will not happen again
- A reconciliation of a relationship
- The restoration of the customer’s/service user’s reputation

In summary, when it comes to remedies for things that have gone wrong, the overwhelming desire is for an apology and acknowledgement of the problem, and a correction of the error or omission.

There is also evidence from abroad (see case study on page 12) that acknowledging the error and taking responsibility does not mean that customers will want to escalate the issue, but quite the opposite.
Patients expect to be fully informed about the care they receive, particularly when things don’t go according to plan. **Open Disclosure** is the name given to the process of communicating with patients and their families when things have gone wrong. Additionally, it is about investigating and correcting systems failures to improve patient safety, which is a key imperative for health care organisations.

The key components included in all the pilots were:

- An apology or expression of regret
- A factual explanation of what occurred, including actual and potential consequences
- The steps being taken to manage the event and prevent its recurrence

Some key findings

- Executive support and leadership from the executive was a critical facilitator of successful adoption of **Open Disclosure** into clinical practice.
- The most commonly expressed concerns of clinical staff were in relation to medico-legal issues. An apology or expression of regret does not constitute admission of fault or failure, and the education and training of staff undertaking **Open Disclosure** was an important factor in dispelling this myth.

### 2. Other examples of disclosure programmes

In the University of Michigan Hospitals, their full-disclosure programme halved the number of lawsuits and saved substantially on the litigation bill.
The Practitioners’ Toolkit: changing behaviours
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs
The Review team worked with a wide range of local and national government, private and third (including not for profit) sector practitioners and partners in identifying the three areas that make the biggest difference to customers’ experience. These three areas are:

1. **The service and remedy pledge**: clearly setting out how you will get it right, and right any wrongs
2. **The importance of the frontline**: understanding that good people are more important than process, and
3. **Customer-focused partnerships**: making sure that partnerships deliver a seamless experience and an economy of effort for the customer.

The Review then focused on producing easy-to-use, practical tools to support each of these three areas. These tools can be found within the Practitioners’ Toolkit. They have been designed to be at the fun and engaging end of the spectrum in contrast to a more formal presentation.

The tools should therefore provide an easier way to apply the learning which exists to improve service and remedy provision. Most importantly, they provide an easier route for local authorities and partners to effect actual improvement and make a real impact on the quality of customer service and customer relationships; changing behaviours in a way which permeates the whole organisation, from the leadership to the frontline.

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*The Practitioner’s Toolkit is a separate publication and can be found at www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment*
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs

Tool 1 —
The service and remedy pledge

Make a clear pledge about what will be done

Customers need clear, explicit promises – pledges – of the standards that they can expect in terms of service provision and what will happen if things go wrong. The pledge is a clear part of a two-way deal with the customer, who needs to engage with the council in both helping to design these pledges and their delivery, and to play their part in helping the council to fulfil its commitments. This might mean, for example, simply putting their bin outside on time, or making the time to draw attention to issues and ideas for improvement.

The pledge also helps customers to distinguish whether their issue is about a failure to deliver (promises not being met), or if it is more to do with wishing to change what is being provided (the service level being offered). This clarity will also help customers constructively and meaningfully engage with and use avenues for remedy – such as the Councillor Call for Action.

The competitive environment in which private sector businesses operate means they need to have a clear understanding about what their customers want and be able to talk clearly and simply about how this will be done. While they may not always get it right, private sector pledges about service and remedy are often very clear. On the back of most products that you buy from a supermarket will be a statement about what to do if you are not satisfied with the product, and the receipt will often also tell you about the returns and refund policy. This information gives the customer clear information at an easy access point.

The Policing Pledge

The Policing Pledge represents an example of a clear promise from the public sector. For the first time the public will know the minimum standard of service they can expect to receive from the police and will have a greater say over the issues that they would like the police to prioritise in their local areas. The Pledge includes standards and commitments on response times, neighbourhood policing, community engagement and time spent on patch, provision of local information about crime and policing issues in the area, complaints procedures and follow up for victims of crime.
Work out the pledge before the process

The cartoon series The Simpsons records the actors’ voices then draws the animation around that recording rather than actors trying to fit their words to the drawing. In other words, the emotions and people-centred elements are considered first. Similarly, Tesco works out its customer promise, then designs its service delivery around that promise. They are very clear about the things that their staff need to pay attention to, and these are distilled into key customer-focused actions that everyone in the organisation understands and is committed to delivering. Local government, and other public services, tend to work out their pledges based on what their processes can deliver.

The Review recommends that:

- Local authorities, and partners, start with the development of the pledge and then ensure that systems are set up to deliver these (so that standards are those that meet customers’ needs, not merely what the organisation thinks that it can do).

The five characteristics of a good service and remedy pledge

The level of service provided has to be based on what is needed and appropriate at a local level, and it is for local authorities and their partners to work this out for their own local area. However, from looking at existing work in this field, and drawing on experience, the Review team identified five key characteristics (principles) of good practice for service and remedy pledges. Pledges should show how service and remedy arrangements are: transparent; simple; timely; easy; and flexible.

We asked our customer focus groups if they agreed with these characteristics, and their feedback showed that they are a good way of grouping the elements that are important to customers. The characteristics can therefore be used by service providers to consider how customer-focused their services, service areas, organisations or partnerships are.
The table below shows a summary of customer views and, to illustrate how they can be used to identify good practice, an example of what these characteristics might mean if applied to supermarket delivery services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did this mean to customers?</th>
<th>What might this mean for supermarket delivery services?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparent</strong></td>
<td>All information visible and accessible, in a variety of formats; customers kept informed; promises kept; one person taking responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service standards on the website, in store, from customer services, and on the side of the delivery van; customer knows what to expect on delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simple</strong></td>
<td>Non-bureaucratic processes, with clear and simple rules; able to find the right person without repeating information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remedy is given if the delivery is late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timely</strong></td>
<td>Decisions made as quickly as possible; short waiting times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remedy is given immediately by the delivery driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Easy</strong></td>
<td>Clear, non-patronising staff; a non-stressful process; access channels appropriate to customer needs; well-staffed access points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer does not have to prove the delivery was late – the driver takes action there and then (e.g. issues an apology and a voucher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flexible</strong></td>
<td>Flexible enough to deal with different cases; personalised services that treat everyone as individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remedy is specific to the service being offered; method (e.g. voucher/ bottle of wine/ new delivery time) may change depending on customer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To take the above illustration further, the Review used the five characteristics to make a subjective assessment of the actual delivery and remedy provision of a group of supermarket delivery services, and compared these with a group of train companies, and refuse collection services. The table on pages 20–21 shows the findings.

To the Review team, this table demonstrates the differences that there are between a clear and simple system, and one that is complicated and sometimes difficult for the customer. The Toolkit provides an easy way for local authorities and partners to test their own services, service areas, organisations or partnerships.

The Review recommends that:

**Local authorities:**

- use the Toolkit, involving customers to self assess their service and remedy provision against the characteristics defined within, and develop clear, simple, customer-focused pledges and improvement plans.
- look for good practice examples from the public, private and third sectors to challenge their thinking and provide ideas for improvement activities.
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs

Transparent

• How clear are standards and remedy systems and how easy are they to find and access?

• What does this mean to the customer?
  All information visible and accessible; kept informed and promises kept; one person to take responsibility

Simple

• How simple is the service offer and remedy system? How easy is the service and remedy system to navigate and access? Can the customer find the information?

• What does this mean to the customer?
  Simple; not bureaucratic; clear and simple rules; being able to find the right person to help them

Timely

• Are services and remedies delivered as soon as possible? Is it immediate or is there a long delay?

• What does this mean to the customer?
  Decisions made as quickly as possible; short waiting times

Easy

• Where does the burden of proof and administration fall? Does the customer have to prove something has failed or does the provider know?

• What does this mean to the customer?
  Clear and non-patronising staff; non-stressful process; access channels appropriate to customer needs; well-staffed access points

Flexible

• To what extent is the remedy flexible to the customer’s needs? How much discretion is there for frontline staff to determine this?

• What does this mean to the customer?
  Being flexible enough to deal with different cases; personalised services that treat everyone as individuals
### Service standard on the side of the delivery van

- Standards buried in regulators’ websites
- Service standards are available through customer service centres, on leaflets and on councils’ website

### Simple – remedy given if delivery is late (there are no pre-qualifying periods for example)

- Complicated – there are different remedies for different delays (e.g., up to 30 minutes, 31–60 minutes, over 1 hour)
- If the bin is missed customers can either visit a customer service centre, phone, text or report it online

### Immediate – the delivery driver gives the customer a voucher for free delivery next time

- Slow – claim form needs to be posted along with evidence, takes several weeks to receive and claim
- The missed bin will be collected within e.g. 6 working hours

### The customer doesn’t have to prove the delivery is late, the deliver knows they’re late and apologises and issues a voucher

- The customer has to evidence the delay
- The customer does not need to provide any evidence that the collection was not made

### There is no flexibility, but the remedy is closely related to the original service being offered

- There is no flexibility
- Individual arrangements can be made if necessary
Tool 2 —
The importance of
the frontline

Why good people are more important than process

People dynamics are critical in the delivery of excellent public services. Staff are also crucial to ensuring that delivery is done in a way that demonstrates the five characteristics of good service and remedy provision outlined above.

Customers told us they want:

• **Personal, and responsive, face-to-face contact** – all our focus groups bemoaned the reliance on computerised systems, or when staff “acted like a machine”;

• **Well-trained staff** with excellent **communication** and **negotiation skills**

• Welcoming contact points with friendly, approachable, knowledgeable staff who are polite, understanding and empathetic.

\\In my experience, great people can mend poor processes; but good processes don’t work without good people\\

With this in mind, the senior political and professional leadership – members (including leaders), chief executives and senior managers – needs to ensure that frontline staff are empowered to take responsibility for pursuing the customer interest within the organisation where service or remedy is needed. This should not be at the ‘expense’ of the organisation, but rather an expression of its values; that the organisation and its people want to “get it right, and right any wrongs”. For example, where a complaint refers to the actual provision of services (rather than to do with a council policy decision), giving frontline staff the maximum discretion to decide how to resolve the complaint in the first instance could benefit the organisation as a whole; as fewer complaints are escalated, so efficiencies can be realised.

9 Local authority chief executive speaking in discussion with the Review team
The importance of the frontline

To do this, organisations need strong leadership, promoting and actively supporting a focus on the customer. This focus then needs to be built into staff competencies, objectives, performance assessment and rewards and, most critically, the culture of the organisation.

The role of frontline staff

Feedback (and our experience) gives a clear indication that, for customers, the role and quality of frontline staff is one of the key determinants of satisfaction. The quality of frontline staff, and the culture of the organisation in which they work, is pivotal both to the quality of initial service delivery (getting it right) and to remedy provision when errors emerge (righting the wrongs).

Focus groups for the Review showed a strong preference for the human touch in methods of contacting public service providers – either face to face or by telephone – and this is backed up by other research. Accenture10 for example states that, while email is “bucking the trend” with some customers enjoying this method of communicating with providers, the preference is still for a personal and personable service, and being able to reach a person when wanted. In essence, customers see and relate to organisations through their people. It is doubly important therefore that staff have the right skills and knowledge to be able to address queries and complaints, as well as the right attitude and consideration for the caller or visitor.

To deliver excellent customer-focused services, authorities must have staff who put customers first, and who have a clear understanding of customer needs, supported by the right knowledge, quality based systems and processes. This means having a positive attitude, being dedicated to getting it right first time, and a commitment to both colleagues and customers. Good customer service is not necessarily about being nice all the time; it is about being professional, compassionate, fair and honest, and the quality of what is delivered and how it is delivered.

I always tell employees of any organisation – every time you interact with a customer you are making a difference but do you know – is it for good or bad? Until everyone gets into the mould of knowing the impression they have made then we have not succeeded

Colin Livingstone, Serco

Staff should also be empowered and encouraged to spot errors and suggest improvement themselves:

\[\text{Every decent service innovation we have ever had has come from the frontline}\]

*Local authority performance improvement manager*

The Review commends the empowerment white paper’s creation of the Empowering the Frontline Task Force and recommends that:

- The Empowering the Frontline Task Force considers the findings of this Review in determining what empowering staff means in practical terms, including the role of leaders and chief executives, and how to ensure that the customer benefits from this.

The role of members, chief executives and senior managers

\[\text{Our leadership team spends a lot of time on the frontline not stuck in a chateau a long way from the trenches. I visit hundreds of stores a year and I would say 40 per cent of my time is spent in stores. I talk to staff a lot and I talk to customers a lot, I attend customer panels as a way of life}\]

*Sir Terry Leahy CEO of Tesco PLC*

Members (including leaders), chief executives and senior managers also have a key role in establishing a customer service ethos – customer service needs to be part of each organisation’s vision and core priorities. This means members and chief executives taking an interest in performance information around both satisfaction and dissatisfaction – including complaints and the way they are handled. The House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee has also recommended that management boards consider trends in complaints at least annually\(^{11}\).

Excellent customer service will only be achieved with a clear understanding of customer needs, strong leadership, corporate quality standards, customer-focused procedures, consistent marketing messages, middle management support, and ‘buy in’ from staff who have the individual skills and knowledge to deliver.

### 92% of the reasons for failure to change are concerned with people, not technology\(^\text{12}\)

- **42% – leadership**
  - senior management involvement and understanding of the issues
  - middle management support/attitude

- **27% – organisational/cultural issues**
  - Clear view of direction, opportunities, benefits and process
  - Alignment between technology-process-people

- **23% – people issues**
  - Lack of commitment
  - Lack of involvement and inability to unleash creativity

- **4% – technology issues**

- **4% – other**

The role of members is key to the success of a variety of customer-focused activities such as the Councillor Call for Action and the new Duty to Involve. Similarly, with the scrutiny process, members can monitor and assess progress as well as flag up residents’ feedback. Members’ casework is another good source of information on how well local authority services are performing or not performing as most of it arises from customers’ problems or complaints. The various improvement bodies which exist have done some good work in focusing on training and developing members’ skills in this area.

**The Review commends the work of the sector improvement bodies and recommends that:**

- The Local Government Improvement Board and IDeA continue to work to ensure that any new National Member Development programmes have a strong emphasis on customer service and a customer-focused approach.

\(^\text{12}\) Cited from an internal presentation by Colin Livingstone with an original source given as Organisational Dynamics, Jim Markowsky
Customers

The key to all of this is of course the customer and their experience.

Research shows that young people, those from a black or minority ethnic background, or those who are unskilled are more likely to find systems unapproachable and inaccessible. It is worth considering whether the existing staff mix is representative of the local population, helping to remove barriers and encourage the customer voice.

Essentially, when developing services and methods of service and remedy provision, providers need to remain sensitive to the individual needs of the customer, and not just ‘push’ people into channels of engagement. E-enabled services can be a good way of reaching some customers and of providing cost efficiencies. However, the drive for e-enabled services is having unintended consequences in some areas with, for example, vulnerable and customers who are not e-enabled being excluded from service provision, or being seen as an inconvenience because they are not able to self-serve online. It is also not always easy for people to reach your central point of contact – using other places and services that are open anyway, for example libraries and visitor information centres, can be a useful way to extend your reach. In other words, can the people who need to see you or get to you do that?

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13 Kettering Borough Council has a public contact centre in each of three libraries
Mapping the demographics of the area can help to identify the needs of the local population, to help inform thinking about the shape of structures, systems, engagement opportunities, service priorities, and the way both services and remedy arrangements are delivered. Sir David Varney describes this in his report on “Service Transformation: A better service for citizens and business, a better deal for the taxpayer” (2006).

The Review recommends that:

Local authorities:

- take forward the Varney recommendations on customer mapping\(^{14}\) to understand their customers, including understanding the proportion of the population who have access to a full offer walk-in facility within five miles of home
- use the Toolkit, inviting customers to be part of the review, to ensure that channels of engagement are varied enough and appropriate for their differing needs
- ensure that people who are less able to access services centrally have a route provided for them that is appropriate to their needs (this may not necessarily, for example, mean e-services, but more centres or extended opening hours).

Involving a representative mix of people and organisations when using the Practitioners’ Toolkit to assess and improve service and remedy arrangements will provide an opportunity for both learning from and empowering local people.

\(^{14}\) Mapping the demographics of the area can help to identify the needs of the local population, to help inform thinking about the shape of structures, systems, engagement opportunities, service priorities, and the way both services and remedy arrangements are delivered. Sir David Varney describes this in his report on “Service Transformation: A better service for citizens and business, a better deal for the taxpayer” (2006).
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs

Tool 3 — Customer-focused partnerships

Organisations have to be refocused around the needs of the citizen as a customer of public services, rather than the problems of those who provide the services

What’s the problem?

Partnerships are often developed with an overall aim of improving governance structures and decision making; improving the impact on customers is less often a concern. Joining up of providers of the same service can produce economies of scale for producers, but the impact on the customer experience can be minimal.

Customers are often required to visit or contact numerous service providers and repeatedly explain their circumstances to access services even where, for the customer, they are focused on the same outcome. The current economic climate has highlighted particular stresses around redundancy, for example, with new customers often needing to access and use a wide range of public services such as benefits, job centres, skills councils, tax credits and rebates. The community and voluntary sector is often involved in providing advice and help to the customer as well.

There are some examples of efforts to join these particular job-related services up, as shown by, for example, the work done in Leek by Staffordshire Moorlands contact centre who let out desks to the Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service to enable local customers to access these services at the council. But far more effort is needed across the sector as a whole to make a difference for the public during the current economic downturn. The diagram on pages 30-31 illustrates the problems which can be faced by customers.

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The issue of what to do when a complaint arises is also not often considered when setting up a partnership. However, it is a key factor in how that partnership will be perceived, and the level of trust people will place in it and, potentially, the partners within.

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) identified the main problems regarding partnerships and their complaints systems as:

- the confusion facing customers when they wished to complain about a local service – who did they go to?
- the inaccessibility of the redress system due to a lack of clear lines of accountability among partners – customers end up passed around the system between the various partners involved, while they figure out who is responsible.

This ‘journey’ through the partnership (or even organisation) from first point of contact to resolution is often seen by that partnership or organisation as a set of discrete processes, independent from each other. Their focus is on the individual products. However, people do not want to be passed from service to service to get their requests dealt with, and are less likely to draw distinctions between service providers or areas and less likely to understand why they cannot be dealt with more simply. The customer is more likely to see this process as representative of the partnership or organisation as a whole. Their focus is on the outcome.

Many local authorities are leading partners in local strategic partnerships (LSPs), for example, which attempt to bring together local public service providers at the most senior levels. In the Review team’s experience, only some of these partnerships have brought together the frontline delivery of their customer service and remedy arrangements.

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Redundancy journey
(without partnerships)

Twinkle loses her job, this is her journey...

I’ve been made redundant, I’m worried about losing my home, my debts are mounting. Please can you help?

No. We help with the council tax/housing benefit. The rest isn’t us!

I’ve been made redundant, can you please help me with:

- Arranging for free school meals for my children
- Debt advice?

No. We help with the school meals. The rest isn’t us!

I’ve been made redundant, can you please help me with:

- Getting help with council tax/housing benefit
- Arranging for free school meals for my children
- Debt advice?
I’ve been made redundant, can you please help me with:
• Getting a job
• Re-training
• Sorting out my tax rebate/credits
• Getting help with council tax/housing benefit
• Arranging for free school meals for my children
• Debt advice?

No. We help with the job. The rest isn’t us!

I’ve been made redundant, can you please help me with:
• Re-training
• Sorting out my tax rebate/credits
• Getting help with council tax/housing benefit
• Arranging for free school meals for my children
• Debt advice?

No. We help with the training. The rest isn’t us!

I’ve been made redundant, can you please help me with:
• Sorting out my tax rebate/credits
• Getting help with council tax/housing benefit
• Arranging for free school meals for my children
• Debt advice?

No. We help with the tax rebate/credits. The rest isn’t us!
Case studies

1. Co-location
The ‘no wrong door’ public sector promise developed in Hackney across the local strategic partnership:

Team Hackney has formulated the Public Service Promise (PSP). By signing up to this PSP, the local authority and its partners are seeking to reduce the number of service delivery locations, as well as the number of visits clients must make to engage with services. Where it is not practical or possible to co-locate services, then partners are committed to improving access by providing a signposting service to other public and voluntary service providers. Partners have signed up to a shared customer care pledge that provides a ‘no wrong door’ practice.

The London Borough of Hackney is opening a new customer service centre in spring 2010. Provision has been made in the centre to accommodate partners’ front counter service delivery. An estimated footfall of 2,000 people a day is expected through the centre.

2. Integrated services
Kettering Borough Council is working in partnership with the police, fire services and voluntary sector organisations, including Victim Support, to deliver improvements in the quality of life for residents of its small market towns. In October 2006 there was no permanent police presence in these towns. Now, police community support officers (PCSOs) are based in the towns, and the police and Kettering Borough Council are delivering an anti-social behaviour pilot using shared infrastructure and staff for reporting and resolution, with an average of 380 police enquiries handled every month by a mix of police and council staff. The police officers, PCSOs, Kettering Borough and Northamptonshire County Council staff were all trained together, and the IT support and infrastructure has been put in place so that local customer service centres also operate as the local police station. The opening of these centres has been a great success with customer feedback showing that the additional police presence has increased public faith in public services, with customer satisfaction levels up from 87.3 per cent in 2004/05 to 97.3 per cent in 2008/09. The number of customers visiting the customer service centres has also risen from an average of 2,800 customers to 4,200 per month. Through this joined up partnership approach, a saving of £550,000 has been made between all partners.
What needs to be done?

The LGO recommendations around partnerships particularly emphasised:

- the need for **one point of contact for the citizen**; supported by
- **protocols** between local partners outlining clear lines of accountability and autonomy in dealing with a complaint; and clear roles and responsibilities of both organisations and staff; and
- The importance of **keeping the citizen informed** at each stage.

In other words, we should be thinking more in terms of providing **economies of effort for customers**, rather than economies of scale for producers. As well as being integrated at the point of planning and strategy, **services need to be integrated at the point of delivery.**

\[The legislation that introduced the council tax requires a single bill to be issued between all partners. How long will it be before we have a single front desk for police, fire, and council’s services?\]

\[\]

**The Review therefore recommends that:**

- Local authorities and partners use the Toolkit to do an assessment of the level of integration of their customer service offer and, where it does not exist, seek to provide a single access point of service and remedy for public and related private and third sector services.

  **Such centres should provide a single face (shared customer service advisers) who can deal with customers on behalf of all partners and services, so that people can deal with multi-agency transactions easily, and without repetition or onward referral.**

- In particular, we recommend that local authorities, with their leadership role in local strategic partnerships, undertake a review, using the Toolkit, of how local authorities and their partners might better provide for such shared front-desk service points.

  **Using the Toolkit will be a useful way of kicking off this discussion and ensuring that the focus is on the customer’s experience.**

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17 Local authority chief executive speaking in discussion with the review team
The Review therefore recommends that:

Central government:

- identifies national (legislative and other) barriers to closer partnership working and investigates whether these should and can be removed.

(For example, can Housing Transfer Manual rules be amended to clearly allow the co-location of a customer service desk in the case of large scale voluntary transfers of housing stock to a Registered Social Landlord? Could the 1972 Local Government Act (Sections 101 and 113) powers be used more or extended to more easily allow a partner’s statutory duties to be discharged by another, or for officers to be put at the disposal of another, including other public and voluntary agencies?)

- consolidates existing advice to different partners and agencies about what can and cannot be done in terms of data sharing in a single digest for public services.

Barriers and opportunities

The Practitioners’ Toolkit is designed to help partners and partnerships consider whether they are maximising opportunities to join up different services, to deliver a seamless customer experience and an economy of effort for the consumer.

Maximising opportunities to join up delivery of service and remedy provision also means ensuring that barriers to partnership working are removed wherever possible. This is not an area that the Review has had the time to look at in any detail, but co-location issues, the accountability for action and issues around data sharing were all raised by stakeholders during the course of wider discussions.
What are the incentives to change?
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs
What are the incentives to change?

The public sector is in the midst of a period of transformation, and shifting the curve of the customer experience of how we deliver services and remedy is key to the success of that change.

The transformation is being driven from a variety of external sources (for example, central government and audit bodies), customers (including through the use of new statutory avenues), as well as from the sector’s own desire to get better (evidenced in the push to gain accreditation for good practice). The Practitioners’ Toolkit and the recommendations in this report are designed to help evidence and drive that improvement.

A cross-government push

There are many government programmes and initiatives which aim to develop a customer-focused approach in public sector services. To illustrate this point, the table on the next page is a snapshot of some of the initiatives we identified in a quick look across departments. The Review feels that there needs to be a more consistent approach to the issue of customer service across the public sector, particularly as each reform often puts different pressure on the same delivery partners. However, the principles expressed by these initiatives are often similar to the ones identified in this report, and the Toolkit offers practical help to implement them.

Statutory duties

The new Duty to Involve came into force on 1 April 2009 for local authorities. Statutory guidance\(^{18}\) sets out what is expected from authorities, including how they should consider providing opportunities for representatives of local people to:

- influence or directly participate in decision making
- provide feedback on decisions, services, policies and outcomes

\(^{18}\) ‘Creating strong, safe and prosperous communities’ issued under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
### Some examples of cross-government initiatives

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<th><strong>BERR</strong></th>
<th><strong>Department for Business Enterprise &amp; Regulatory Reform</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Act 07</td>
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<td>• Consultation on consumer redress schemes in gas, electricity and postal services</td>
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<td>• Consumer Law Review white paper</td>
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<th><strong>DH</strong></th>
<th><strong>Department of Health</strong></th>
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<td>• Launch of new complaints system (Jan 09)</td>
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<td>• Consultation on NHS constitution (Oct)</td>
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<td>• Possible move of social care into the remit of the local authority</td>
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<th><strong>Cabinet Office</strong></th>
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<td>• Co-ordination of PASC reports – ‘when citizens complain’ and ‘from citizens charter to public service guarantees’ (July 08/Oct08)</td>
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<td>• Excellence and Fairness (August 2008), Working Together (March 09)</td>
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<td>• Parliamentary Ombudsman’s work on principles for remedy and principles for good complaints handling (ongoing)</td>
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<th><strong>Communities</strong></th>
<th><strong>and Local Government</strong></th>
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<td>• New CAA framework</td>
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<td>• NI 4 (% of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality)</td>
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<td>• NI 14 (reducing avoidable contact)</td>
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<td>• Review of remit of Local Government Ombudsman (Summer 09)</td>
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<td>• ‘Local Incentives’ works strand of the Operational Efficiency programme (early 09)</td>
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<th><strong>Home Office</strong></th>
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<td>• Policing Green Paper (e.g. policing pledge)</td>
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<td>• Reform of procedures for complaints against police officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Better customer service a key theme of the Working for the Public inspection which Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary will carry out on all 43 police forces and authorities in 2010</td>
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<td>• Customer survey – includes customer journey from making the complaint to receiving a resolution.</td>
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<td>• Management assessment – asks the customer about complaint experience</td>
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<th><strong>Ministry of Justice</strong></th>
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<td>• Law Commission report: citizens redress against public bodies (Oct 08)</td>
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<th><strong>Department for children, schools and families</strong></th>
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<td>• Consultation on new mechanism to deal with school complaints</td>
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What are the incentives to change?

- co-design/work with the authority in designing policies and services
- co-produce/carry out some aspects of services for themselves
- work with the authority in assessing services

As part of their independent assessments under the new CAA framework, the inspectorates of local services will be looking for evidence that the new duty to involve is being implemented; looking at how well people are involved in local decision making and shaping local services. CAA also places particular emphasis on ensuring that the needs of diverse and less empowered communities have been considered and met wherever possible.

Involving customers in using the tools in the Practitioners’ Toolkit to review services, service areas, the organisation or partnership, can help to evidence the above.

Performance recognition

Guidance on the national indicator 14 (NI 14) “Reducing avoidable contact: minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or of no value to the customer” was issued last year19. Many of its messages were echoed in our research and are a focus of the Toolkit – for example, the importance of cultural change and of looking at services from the customer’s point of view.

“We want (the customer) experience to be one that is responsive, timely and efficient and which meets their individual needs. Achieving this means designing services in ways that make sense to our customers rather than being convenient to our organisations and our own internal structures. It means looking for the opportunities to better join up what we do and giving people choice in the way they can access services20.”

At the same time, while NI 14 is very customer focused in its intent, the language used by this and some other performance measures is not focused on the customer – it is often either impenetrable or off-putting. The message about reducing the burden of effort for the customer can be lost.

“Avoidable contact? It sounds like something to do with a disease, doesn’t it?21.”

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19 See www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/pageid=8507853
20 ibid (P6)
21 Comment made by a Review stakeholder in a discussion
The Review also feels that there has been an over-emphasis from the centre on quantitative measures of performance, and a reliance on ‘golden indicators’. NI 14 is a useful indicator for example, but it is a quantitative indicator and does not, by itself, show the full picture of the customer’s experience of an organisation.

A more qualitative approach is needed, and recent changes do give the opportunity to do this. The new comprehensive area assessment (CAA), for example, will take account of service and survey satisfaction levels and council performance on complaints – picking up where complaints or how they are dealt with raise significant concerns about outcomes. Although not a specific key line of enquiry, how redress is handled and learnt from will therefore be an important source of evidence for CAA judgements and risk based inspections.

**Using the Toolkit should not only help councils look at their service and redress design and delivery from a user perspective, but can also provide an opportunity for real engagement with local people by involving them in that review. Using the Toolkit, and the way improvements are identified and put into practice, should therefore be a useful source of positive evidence for CAA assessors.**

However, while the CAA has taken steps to try and become more focused on the outcomes for local people, the Review team feels that it does not yet go far enough. When visiting local authorities, assessors have a clear opportunity to examine, first hand, key qualitative evidence about the customer experience of that organisation.

The Review team has gathered a wide range of evidence about the qualitative factors that influence customer service. These factors are also echoed in other qualitative assessment frameworks such as Customer Service Excellence (CSE) and Investors in People (IIP)

22. Key points identified were that:

- **Good customer service is noticeable**

The Review identified some key facets of good customer service, including:

- easily accessible services with opening hours designed around the needs of the community and a variety of access methods
- a friendly and welcoming atmosphere with professional staff
- well-staffed access points where customers are provided with information about services available and how to access them

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22 For more information on CSE and IIP see [www.cse.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cse.cabinetoffice.gov.uk) and [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk) respectively
What are the incentives to change?

- **Customer service permeates the whole local authority**

  The importance of organisational leaders, both professional and political, having a strong focus and commitment to customer service was a key indicator of the standard of customer service. This could be identified by
  - members (including leaders), chief executives and senior management taking a visible lead in customer service initiatives and acknowledging the importance of frontline staff in delivering customer service excellence.

- **There are empowered frontline staff who deal with all aspects of customer service at the first point of contact**

- **The local authority is progressive and approachable**

  The organisation is committed to getting better and better, and encourages feedback from customers and staff.

**The Review recommends that:**

- The Audit Commission develops the guidance to CAA assessors to include an emphasis on the qualitative points above as the basis of their investigations into the customer experience.

- Local authorities use the Toolkit, in discussions with customers, to build their own simple model to measure the success of their customer service.

  *(The Review team liked the way, for example, that Tesco identifies and uses five key customer-focused measures for its stores – reasonable prices, clear aisles, no queues, good staff, and customers feeling that ‘I can get what I want’)*

- IDeA and/or the Local Government Improvement Board support Trailblazer pilot areas in the use of their ‘mystery shopping’ tools to help them evaluate their service and remedy provision and/or progress in implementing improvement.

**Trust**

Making sure people receive good customer service and remedy if things go wrong needs to be at the heart of any empowerment policy. Not doing so means a risk that trust in local services will be undermined by a negative experience. Evidence shows that the main reason that customers complain is to seek an improvement in services, and there is a link found between remedy and public confidence in a service provider.
Interestingly, however, the way customers are treated can be a driver of dissatisfaction even where the end outcome is the one originally sought. This is about getting it right in the way you right the wrongs. Systems of engagement need, therefore, to be more ‘bottom up’, reflexive, responsive to customers, and inclusive and supportive of their needs and contribution. They also need to be delivered by friendly, knowledgeable and helpful staff.

The success of the supermarket model is based on them building a trusted brand in one area that has allowed them to expand their services into other areas, for example financial services. This concept of a trusted brand should be something that we are working to achieve in the public sector through positive support of other agencies and clear joined up messages to the customer.

Support and improvement tools

The Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) and the Local Government Delivery Council (LGDC), and the Leadership Centre for Local Government, are all examples of organisations working at a national level to support local authority improvement. These complement and link closely with other organisations providing support at national, regional and local level and provide examples and evidence for good practice in a variety of areas. IDeA, for example, has a peer assessment and mystery shopping tool which we have recommended as useful in Trailblazer pilot areas.

However, as stated, good practice is not always being learnt from; and the Review feels that more use needs to be made of the good practice identified by this Review and others.

The Review therefore recommends that:

**Communities and Local Government:**

- ensures that the Trailblazer programme includes an element of sharing and encouraging learning from pilot areas; participants should help identify what is useful and what is not, and should also act as mentors and champions within their region or theme area.
- invites the Local Government Improvement Board and/or IDeA to become partners in the implementation of the Toolkit and the approach it recommends.

23 For more details about IDeA and the LGDC go to www.idea.gov.uk; and for the leadership centre (LGDC) go to www.localleadership.gov.uk; More details about which organisations provide support for improvement, and what they do can be found in Prospectus 2008: the guide to improvement and efficiency support available on www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/efficiencysupport
Local authorities:

- consider the use of other tools, such as the IDeA’s peer assessment and mystery shopping tool, as a route to further improvement.

Awards and recognition

Awards and recognition can publicly demonstrate the quality of service that is being provided and can have real value in terms of internal pride and motivation. Two examples are:

– Awards and Knowledge Transfer scheme (previously the Beacon scheme)

The Beacon Award scheme is to be replaced with new Awards and Knowledge Transfer scheme. The introduction of these new awards offers an ideal opportunity for a shift in focus towards the need of the customer and the importance of frontline staff in delivering excellent customer service. It will also help add to the learning from existing Beacon Council schemes which focused on similar areas.

– Local government awards

The Local Government Chronicle and Municipal Journal awards could be considered to be the local government ‘Oscars’. The awards are given to local authorities who are judged to be leading in specific areas of service design and delivery. The Local Government Association also makes awards for frontline staff at the end of its annual conference. At present, there is no explicit customer service award.

The Review recommends that:

- Local government award schemes introduce (or reinstate) an explicit award for achievement in frontline customer service (for example, customer service team of the year).
- CLG focuses on sponsoring awards that promote the aims of this Review, concentrating on the customer experience of services rather than just on improvements in behind the scenes process and efficiencies (such as large scale IT projects).
Standards and accreditations

Standards and accreditations are a powerful way of demonstrating the quality of service that is being provided and of driving improvement. They can be seen as strong indicators of the performance of the organisation and can, again, have real value in terms of the internal pride and motivation of staff too.

This Review is glad to see, for example, that the Cabinet Office is reintroducing the practice of a congratulatory letter from the Prime Minister for the achievement of the Customer Service Excellence award to encourage staff to value their customer service approach.

\[\text{The letter from the Prime Minister on receiving the Charter Mark award, was really appreciated by frontline staff and invariably proudly displayed} \]

\textit{Local authority chief executive}

Independently assessed accreditations can be particularly useful in providing a qualitative measure of a local authority’s customer service performance, and may help to address a problem area or develop a strong area which was identified when using the Review’s self-assessment tool. Two such examples have a particular resonance with the Review and the Practitioners’ Toolkit and are already helping many public sector organisations to make the changes in behaviour outlined by the Review.

\textbf{The Institute of Customer Service}

The Institute of Customer Service (ICS)\textsuperscript{24}, which was represented on the Review steering group, offers a way of achieving recognition for customer service performance and professionalism with their membership and accreditation programmes. ICS Touchstone, for example, is designed specifically for public sector organisations, and is a simple yet effective method of assessing the effects of an organisation’s actions in relation to its customers’ experience.

\textsuperscript{24} For more information on ICS see www.instituteofcustomerservice.com/
The Customer Service Excellence standard

The Government’s ‘Customer Service Excellence’ (CSE) standard\(^{25}\) (launched in March 2008) concentrates on achieving customer focus in public services. It provides a practical tool for service improvement that supports the wider public service reform agenda. The standard is designed to work on three levels: as a driver of continuous improvement, as a skills development tool and as an independent validation of achievement.

The fundamentals of good customer service underpin the content of the new standard but, in addition, CSE has a particular focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. There is emphasis on developing customer insight, understanding the user’s experience and robust measurement of service satisfaction. The importance of leadership and service culture are recognised and form an important element of the criteria. Staff, partnerships and redress all feature strongly, in the same way as in the Toolkit.

The Practitioners’ Toolkit, ICS Touchstone and CSE standard fit together well. The Toolkit can help to provide the insight organisations need into their customers’ wants, needs and experience (both good and bad) and is easy to do; ICS Touchstone and CSE can help answer the question – ‘what now?’ and help take you that step further.

The Review recommends that:

- Local authorities and/or partners consider the use of standards such as ICS Touchstone and CSE as a route for further improvement.

\(^{25}\) For more information on CSE see www.cse.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/
The Practitioners’ Toolkit

As previously stated, the Review has worked with a wide range of sector practitioners and also private and third (including not for profit) sector partners to produce the Practitioners’ Toolkit, with self assessment and improvement tools for the three areas we believe will make the biggest impact in getting it right and righting the wrongs and shifting the curve of customer experience towards ‘great’

The Toolkit is available online\(^{26}\), and the tools within are designed to be an easy way to kickstart or challenge thinking around how customer-focused your service and remedy pledges and delivery are, and to lead users into the development of an improvement plan. Most importantly, therefore, the tools provide an easy way for local authorities and their partners to work out how to effect actual changes in behaviours in a way which permeates the whole sector and each organisation within it.

\(^{26}\) See [www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment](http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment)
Appendices
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs
## Appendix A

### Review recommendations

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<th>The Review recommends that:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communities and Local Government:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• runs a series of Trailblazer pilots whereby authorities and partnerships test and develop the Practitioners’ Toolkit.</td>
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<td>• funds a programme of regional learning events to highlight the messages of the Review and help local service providers understand the Toolkit and Trailblazer opportunities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• ensures that one of the Trailblazers looks at the area of partners joining up to better deliver services and remedy for those recently made redundant. In particular, that local authorities work with other partners, including HM Revenue and Customs, Job centre Plus, and the Learning and Skills Council, to map and reduce the number of repeat visits and duplicated information needed for someone out of work in each locality.</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• ensures that the Trailblazer programme includes an element of sharing and encouraging learning from pilot areas; participants should help identify what is useful and what is not, and should also act as mentors and champions within their region or theme area.</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• invites the Local Government Improvement Board and/or IDeA to become partners in the implementation of the Toolkit and the approach it recommends.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• focuses on sponsoring awards that promote the aims of this Review, concentrating on the customer experience of services rather than only on improvements in behind the scenes process and efficiencies (such as large scale IT projects).</strong></td>
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The Review recommends that:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central government:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• identifies national (legislative and other) barriers to closer partnership working and investigates whether these should and can be removed.</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>• consolidates existing advice to different partners and agencies about what can and can not be done in terms of data sharing in a single digest for public services.</td>
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<td>• Revises the wording of the NI 14 indicator.</td>
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<th>Local authorities:</th>
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<td>• ... and partners, start with the development of the pledge and then ensure that systems are set up to deliver these (so that standards are those that meet customers’ needs, not merely what the organisation thinks that it can do).</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>• use the Toolkit, involving customers to self-assess their service and remedy provision against the characteristics defined within, and develop clear, simple, customer focused pledges and improvement plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• look for good practice examples from the public, private and third sectors to challenge their thinking and provide ideas for improvement activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ... and/or partners consider the use of standards such as ICS Touchstone and CSE as a route for further improvement.</td>
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<td>• take forward the Varney recommendations on customer mapping(^{27}) to understand their customers, including understanding the proportion of population who have access to a full offer walk-in facility within five miles of home.</td>
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<td>• use the Toolkit, inviting customers to be part of the review, to ensure that channels of engagement are varied enough and appropriate for their differing needs.</td>
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<td>• ensure that people who are less able to access services centrally have a route provided for them that is appropriate to their needs (this may not necessarily, for example, mean e-services, but more centres or extended opening hours).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• ... and partners use the Toolkit to do an assessment of the level of integration of their customer service offer and, where it does not exist, seek to provide a single access point of service and remedy for public and related private and third sector services</td>
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<td>• with their leadership role in local strategic partnerships, undertake a review, using the Toolkit, of how local authorities and their partners might better provide for such shared front-desk service points</td>
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<tr>
<td>• use the Toolkit, in discussions with customers, to build their own simple model to measure the success of their customer service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• consider the use of other tools, such as the IDeA’s peer assessment and mystery shopping tool, as a route to further improvement.</td>
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\(^{27}\) Mapping the demographics of the area can help to identify the needs of the local population, to help inform thinking about the shape of structures, systems, engagement opportunities, service priorities, and the way both services and remedy arrangements are delivered. Sir David Varney describes this in his report on “service Transformation: A better service for citizens and business, a better deal for the taxpayer” (2006).
### The Review recommends that:

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<th>The Empowering the Frontline Task Force:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• considers the findings of this Review in determining what empowering staff means in practical terms, including the role of leaders and chief executives, and how to ensure that the customer benefits from this</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Local Government Improvement Board and IDeA:</th>
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<td>• continue to work to ensure that any new National Member Development programmes have a strong emphasis on customer service and a customer-focused approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• support Trailblazer pilot areas in the use of their ‘mystery shopping’ tools to help them evaluate their service and remedy provision and/or progress in implementing improvement.</td>
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<th>The Audit Commission</th>
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<tr>
<td>• develops the guidance to CAA assessors to include an emphasis on the qualitative points above [described in the report] as the basis of their investigations into the customer experience.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Local government award schemes</th>
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<td>• introduce (or reinstate) an explicit award for achievement in frontline customer service (for example, customer service team of the year).</td>
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Appendix B

Acknowledgements

Getting the membership of the Review team right was key to delivering a useful output within the tight timescales. It also ensured that the Review consulted widely and was aligned with key pieces of work in this area.

Two groups of people were set up. The first, the steering group, represented those with national expertise in the field of customer focus. This group had a clear brief to give direction to the Review, consider the wealth of information that already existed and ensure that the recommendations and outputs were focused on delivering real improvements on the ground. In short, to find the few things that, if done well, would make the biggest difference to the customer experience.

The second, the practitioners’ group, was drawn from local authority practitioners and was designed to ensure any findings were realistic, credible and applicable. This group translated the knowledge and research of the steering group into practical tools and solutions that will help local authorities to make real improvements to the services they offer customers.

The Review has also been supported by staff from Communities and Local Government and Kettering Borough Council.

I, David Cook, would therefore particularly like to thank (in no particular order):

Allen Graham – deputy chair (Rushcliffe Borough Council); Tony Redmond (Local Government Ombudsman); Ben Page (Ipsos MORI); Alison Hopkins (Consumer Focus); David North (Tesco); Mark Norris (Local Government Association); Mick King (Local Government Ombudsman); Ossie Hopkins (Institute of Customer Service); Paul Blantern – chair of the Practitioners Group (Northamptonshire County Council); Siobhan Coughlan (IDeA); Lesley Seary (London Borough of Lewisham); Kim Silcock (Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council); and Ian Strachan (Kettering Borough Council).

I would also like to thank (again in no particular order):

Dan Paul (Gateshead Council); Deborah Haynes and Emma Reynolds (Tesco); Emma Peake (Cabinet Office); Lindsay Craig (London Borough of Lewisham); Deborah Snow and Jackie Scott-Low (Kettering Borough Council); Stuart Hoggan, Claire Cooper, Jen Staermose-Johnson, Stuart Young, Amanda Stevens, Alexandra Boniface, and Sheena Leng (Communities and Local Government); and anyone else who has been involved in the Review. And finally, I would like to thank my mum!
Getting it right, and righting the wrongs