

Customer *Service*



Strategic *Plan*
2008-2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY - Vision, Mission and Aim	Page 2	
Who are our Customers	Page 3	1
The Southland District		1.1
Customer Value		1.2
The Strategic Direction	Page 4	2
The Strategic Plan and The LTCCP		2.1
People First		2.3
What People First Means To Customer Service		2.4
Organisational Commitment		3
The Three Main Objectives	Page 5	4
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY	Page 6	5
Our Current Strengths		5.1
Opportunities for Improvement		5.2
IMPROVING INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE		6
Our Current Strengths		6.1
Opportunities for Improvement		6.2
BEING RESPONSIVE	Page 7	7
Our Current Strengths		7.1
Opportunities for Improvement		7.2
Measuring Success and Review of the Strategic Plan		8
Benefits of Adopting the Customer service Strategic Plan		9
Appendix	Page	8

SOUTHLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
Customer Services Strategy

VISION

To achieve customer service excellence

MISSION STATEMENT

Putting “People First” by delivering what we promise and ensuring the customer is at the heart of everything we do

OUR AIM

DELIVER WHAT WE PROMISE

Customer Service Principles

Be respectful and friendly

Show a willingness to help

Take responsibility to meet customers needs

Maintain honesty and integrity

1. **WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?**

OUR KEY CUSTOMERS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southlanders, Ratepayers, Residents, Businesses • Maori (including Tangata Whenua, Iwi) • Visitors / Tourists • Organisational Staff • CEO and Executive • Interest groups - Sports clubs etc • Volunteers • Police • Education and Health providers • Environmental groups • Council tenants • Contractors / Suppliers / Consultants • Media • Council controlled organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Boards, Wards, Committee members and CDA's • Major local organisations • Investors • Internal Departments • Mayor • Councillors • Utility providers • Road Safety Southland • Venture Southland • Rural Fire • Civil Defence • Other Local and Regional Authorities • Professional service providers i.e. Lawyers, Architects, Property Agents, Developers • Lobby groups • Government agencies

1.1 **The Southland District**

Southland District Council covers a large geographic area with 55.5% of residents living in the rural area and 44.5% living in towns.

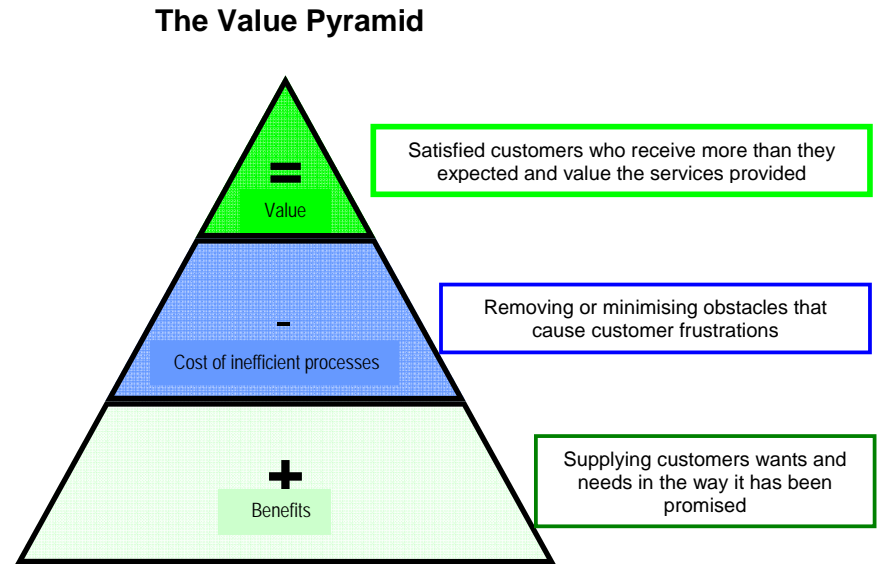
Community spirit and involvement is strong across all parts of the District with a significant proportion of residents taking on volunteer roles for interests such as sport, their children, the community and social groups.

A large number of our residents in the more isolated areas favour face to face contact or prefer to phone their local branch of Council and this is where the Area Offices are an essential and valuable link for customers across the district and are the true face of the Southland District Council.

The Area Offices and libraries promote public good merely by their existence providing customers with a vital connection and allowing the Council to keep in touch with its communities.

1.2 **Customer Value**

We want people to recognise and value the excellent services we provide, to be confident that services are good value for money and to feel that their voice is heard.



Delivering what is promised and promising what we can realistically deliver will meet the customers' expectations and is the very basis of customer service

Benefits – Costs = Value; From the customers perspective unnecessary and inefficient processes are seen as a cost and therefore dilutes the value they receive. Increasing customer satisfaction and providing a valued service requires continual improvement by gathering information on the customers changing wants and needs and improving processes or removing imminent obstacles. The value philosophy has been incorporated in this Strategic Plan.

“Captive customers” have no choice about who they deal with, but they should not be taken for granted as they do have a choice about the attitude they bring to the interactions. We want to be a healthy prosperous district and by being a dynamic and progressive council we will attract investment, tourism, immigration and retain talent and skills. Our customers deserve the best service we can provide and the payoff will be improved relationships, and the pride and pleasure given and received.

2. THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The purpose of this Strategy is to set the future direction for achieving and maintaining customer service excellence and sets out a plan of action demonstrating how to turn this vision into reality. The Customer Service Strategic Plan covers the period 2008 through to 2011. The customer service direction is guided by the changing needs and expectations of Customers, Council and individual departments within the Council.

The Customer Service Strategic Plan has been developed by the Customer Services Manager, Janet Thomas with input from the Customer Service Focus Group. Information was gathered through visits to areas offices, discussions and questionnaires from Staff, Community Boards, CDA's and external and internal customers and feedback received during the consultative period. (See appendix 1) Areas identified as opportunities for improvement have been incorporated and known barriers to the delivery of good customer service such as stress, heavy workloads, lack of quality systems, training issues and resources have been taken into consideration in this document (See appendix 1). Ownership of the strategic plan will remain with the Customer Services Manager.

2.1 The Strategic Plan and the LTCCP

The Customer Service Strategic Plan supports the Southland District Council's Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) and the Organisational Business Plan its activities and actions and the joint initiative community outcomes of "Our Way Southland", (in particular Outcome 1 - Southland is a great place to live and Outcome 5 - Strong, effective leadership taking us into the future).

Providing quality services and increasing customer satisfaction is of the utmost importance to the Southland District Council with each activity in the LTCCP having numerous Key Performance Indicators and reporting components on customer satisfaction with regard to timeframes, levels of service, quality of work, costs, accessibility, value for their rates dollar, appearance, choice, cleanliness, healthiness, maintenance, Council decisions, consultation, response to requests, contact, communication, performance and representation.

2.2 People First

Southland District Council's guiding principle of "People First" is the foundation of the customer service focus and there needs to be a collective commitment to the "people first" culture throughout the organisation and this strategy promotes and expresses that commitment and provides sound practical direction in achieving that goal.

2.4 What People First Means To Customer Service

PEOPLE FIRST = putting the customer at the heart of everything we do

We believe that by putting our customers first we will enable the Council to become an outstanding service organisation

3. ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

Customer service is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation and there needs to be a strong commitment from each person including senior managers and supervisors to embrace the customer service strategy across every aspect of service delivery and revitalise the people first culture throughout the organisation.

The organisation in turn is responsible for supporting staff and minimising barriers which will enable the delivery of quality customer service.

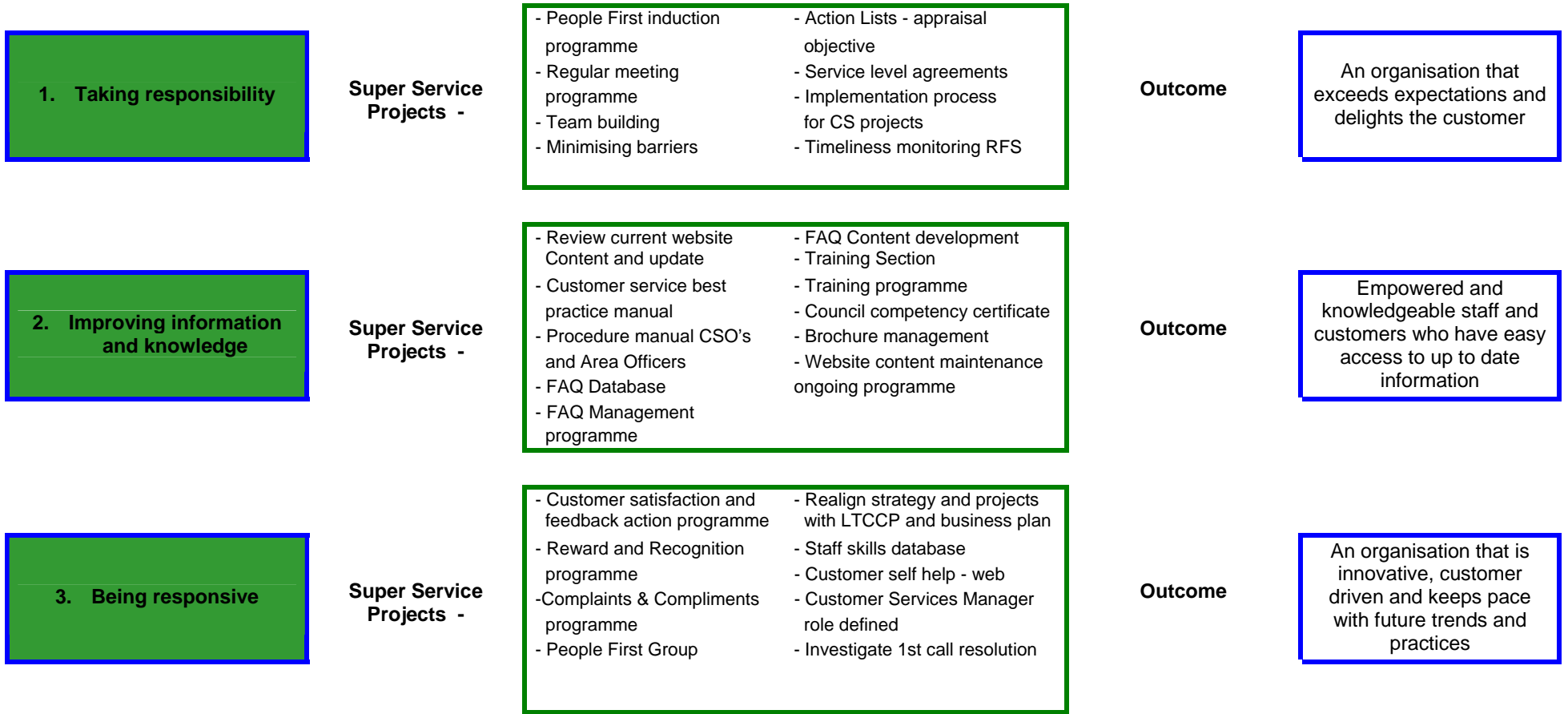
We will reinforce the commitment by:

- Induction and on going training - to promote the Organisations vision and principles, bring about change to the culture and set clear guidelines and expectations.
- Clear customer service standards and a consistent application of principles. This will be reinforced by not tolerating poor service and reflecting that, in a consistent approach, through the performance management system.
- Providing staff with the correct resources and knowledge for the job and ensuring systems are in place throughout the SDC that improve service delivery.
- Reflecting the Customer Service Strategic Plan, its projects and outcomes in other relevant strategic plans across the organisation, the LTCCP, Business Plan and associated documents.

4. THREE MAIN OBJECTIVES

The three main objectives of The Southland District Council Customer Services Strategy are the three key areas identified through our research for improvement.

1. Taking responsibility, 2. Improving information and knowledge. 3. Being more responsive. An action plan containing a series of super service projects for the initial years have been identified to address these objectives. More detail on the projects are found in - The Super Service Plan (Appendix 2), Project Priorities (Appendix 3), Super Service Budget (Appendix 4), Super Service Timeline (Appendix 5)



OBJECTIVES

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IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPER SERVICE PROJECTS

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CUSTOMER OUTCOMES

“Together we can achieve the extraordinary”

We will encourage personal responsibility to ensure customers wants and needs are met in the way it has been promised.

All staff are responsible for the delivery of customer service and we want to encourage a culture that inspires the desire to strive for customer service excellence, while ensuring the customer is at the heart of everything we do, because - ***the customer is the reason for Council’s existence.***

Reinforcing the “people first” culture and understanding the Organisation are important links to achieving our vision; which should start at time of induction, leaving new staff in no doubt of expectations and the importance the Organisation places on customer service. Supporting our staff, and having the correct resources for the workload, encourages increased professionalism, morale, motivation, staff retention and will see the organisation become an employer of choice with potential staff beating down the door to join us.

Smooth, timely transfer and accessibility of information between departments is imperative to meet legislative time frames and improved monitoring and accountability of timeliness and work quality will enhance service delivery.

Making the extra effort and taking responsibility to help the customer as much as we possibly can will satisfy customers as well as help and support busy colleagues. Diversity in the workplace should be encouraged and supported by the Organisation as it is essential for reflecting and understanding the community we serve.

5. 1 **Our current strengths:**

- Southland District Council have extremely conscientious, knowledgeable, staff who work hard to meet deadlines and keep the team running.
- The guiding principle of “people first” is well known throughout the organisation and community.

5.2 **Opportunities for Improvement:**

- We will advocate personal responsibility and encourage initiative and a problem solving approach, supported by effective systems.
- Ensuring departments are resourced correctly.
- Ultimately our people are the key to the success of this strategy we will endeavour to create an environment which fosters, respect, team work and good communication, ensure Council has the right people by recruiting positive, enthusiastic people who have a “can do” attitude.

“We will empower our people with knowledge”

Customers today expect an accurate answer at their first point of contact, whether that is in person, by telephone or by the website. Customers tell us they want staff to take more responsibility for solving their problems and solving them quickly. We will support staff and aid first call resolution by providing the knowledge and technical systems to perform their job, we will ensure consistent standards, provide up to date information, training, and opportunities for staff development.

Clear customer service standards are essential for consistent delivery of service by every member of Council. These standards will allow better monitoring of performance and give clear expectations.

The internet is becoming one of the most important methods of information transfer. Customers can personally access information whenever and where ever they want. With improvements the website will reduce the amount of time staff spend answering frequently asked questions or information enquiries and provide an excellent avenue for educating and empowering our customers.

6.1 **Our current strengths:**

- The foundation has been laid at Southland District with the implementation of excellent technology which can be built on to keep pace with modern trends.
- Our customers are motivated and willing to access other avenues to find information.

6.2 **Opportunities for Improvement:**

- To provide easily accessible, up to date knowledge and information to staff, that would also be accessible to the public through the website.
- Develop a good training programme, accurate records and provide mandatory training for skills deemed essential to the organisation.
- Assess, promote and better utilise the Southland District Council website to enable greater self service options to all our customers.
- Develop and implement across the organisation common customer service standards
- Ensure knowledge is retained in the organisation

“We will provide a responsive service that learns from the changing needs and expectations of customers”

Good communication and continual improvement is the key to providing a responsive service. The customer voice must be heard to understand their ever changing needs and expectations. The recognition of success or failure is a key element to measuring how well Council is doing. Customer complaints are opportunities for improvement we do not want to miss.

Recognising excellent performance, innovation and going the extra mile reinforces the vision to strive for customer service excellence and when that reward or recognition is valued by the recipient it improves morale, self esteem and the workplace.

Web based customer self help is the way of the future. Empowering customers to help themselves by completing their own service requests and providing information on processes will improve the quality of documentation received for RMA requests and encourage realistic expectations of the process and timelines.

7.1 **Our current strengths:**

- Southland District Council's customers are generally satisfied with Council and its services and are well represented by Wards and Community Boards.
- Significant investment and major improvements have been made in our telecommunications network and workflow systems with the implementation of the Zeacom telephone system and GEAC Pathways, with both systems having excellent reporting and monitoring capabilities.

7.2 **Opportunities for Improvement:**

- Develop and embed a corporate complaints policy with procedures to ensure our customers are provided with clear and accessible avenues to raise any issues and that all areas of the Organisation are fully aware of their requirements in responding. It will ensure that reporting mechanisms are in place to allow service performance to be efficiently analysed.
- Pathways and Zeacom provide an excellent opportunity to present a complete picture of customer service delivery for each department if the reporting and monitoring tools associated with each were used to their full potential.
- Introduce a customer satisfaction and feedback programme with the focus on making improvements.
- Innovation and excellent work will be recognised and rewarded.

8. **MEASURING SUCCESS AND REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

Success of the Customer Service Strategic Plan will be measured through continuous monitoring of feedback, improved delivery, timeliness and quality of service, increased knowledge and improved relationships, morale and staff retention.

Review of the Strategic Plan will be on an annual basis; with quarterly progress reports on the super service projects.

9. **Benefits Of Adopting The Customer Service Strategic Plan:**

- Increased customer satisfaction and improved customer relationships.
- An Organisation that values its customers and gives a consistently high level of service delivered to common standards while recognising diversity and individual requirements.
- Informed customers who have realistic expectations and understand the services Southland District Council provides.
- A responsive service that learns from the changing demands of customers and implements improvements and manages services accordingly.
- A pleasant work place that rewards and retains staff.
- Enhanced personal and organisational reputation.

Conclusion

The three key areas identified from research (see appendix 1) as opportunities for improvement, have been used as the three main objectives in the Super Service Plan (appendix 2) which is the plan of action that will turn this strategy into reality.

The Super Service Plan contains 28 projects that focus on:

“Improving customer experience by doing the simple things well.”



APPENDIX

