

Best Value toolkit: Customer focus



Prepared by Audit Scotland
July 2010

Contents

Introduction	2	Auditors' evaluations	5
The Audit of Best Value	2	Best Value toolkit: Customer focus	6
The Best Value toolkits	4		
Using the toolkits	4		

Introduction

The Audit of Best Value

“Achieving Best Value is about ensuring sound governance, good management, public reporting on performance and a focus on improvement”

The duty of Best Value applies to all public bodies in Scotland. It is a statutory duty in local government, and in the rest of the public sector it is a formal duty on Accountable Officers.

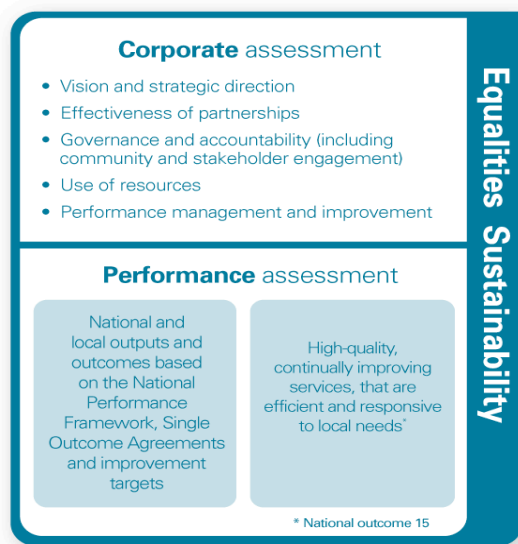
Best Value has already been a powerful force for improved performance and accountability in local government, and it will play an important role in supporting the Concordat and the development of Single Outcome Agreements between the Scottish Government, councils and their partners, and in streamlining and coordinating the scrutiny of public services. It also has the potential to underpin the National Performance Framework and the ‘management scorecard’ elements of Scotland Performs.

On behalf of the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland has identified a set of principles that form the basis for a consistent approach to the audit of Best Value across the public sector, although its application will differ to reflect factors such as the different accountability regimes and reporting arrangements in place in different sectors. This will enable us to apply a consistent set of expectations across all the bodies that we audit, and to reflect and support the reality of partnership working between organisations.

The Best Value toolkits are a key part of the practical application of the BV audit. They provide an evaluation framework that will help auditors to reach robust judgements on how public bodies are delivering Best Value. However, they cannot generate Best Value judgements on their own. They cover only part of the process. Judgements about Best Value also involve consideration of service standards and performance, outcomes and how effectively continuous improvement is being achieved. The framework through which the various elements of the Best Value audit are brought together to arrive at an overall conclusion on the extent to which an organisation is achieving Best Value is outlined below:

Exhibit 1

Framework for a BV audit of a public body



Source: Audit Scotland

As the diagram demonstrates, Audit Scotland's approach to the audit of Best Value entails both corporate assessment and performance assessment elements. The former focuses on how an organisation plans and conducts its business and manages its resources while the latter looks at the quality of those services and the outcomes for service users.

Audit Scotland is committed to ensuring that Best Value auditing across the public sector adds value to existing arrangements, is risk-based and builds on our existing knowledge of individual public bodies, and that of our scrutiny partners. Specifically we aim to:

- report on the delivery of outcomes for people who use services
- protect taxpayers' interests by examining use of resources
- put an increasing emphasis on self assessment by public bodies with audit support and validation
- work collaboratively with other scrutiny bodies to ensure our work is aligned and prevent duplication.

The Best Value toolkits

The Best Value toolkits are a series of audit diagnostics, which will help reviewers to establish the extent to which public bodies' arrangements are designed to achieve, and are actually delivering, Best Value. They have been developed to support the corporate assessment process around the five corporate assessment areas noted in Exhibit 1, and the two cross-cutting themes of equalities and sustainability. However, as each toolkit also incorporates a series of questions on the impact of the area under review, they will also provide some evidence to support the assessment of service performance and outcomes.

The Best Value toolkits have been developed as audit tools in consultation with specialist practitioners, and representatives of public bodies and professional groups.

The toolkits take the form of structured key questions, with a matrix of possible levels of performance, ranging from basic to advanced practice. The matrices cannot of course capture all of the ways in which a public body may address the requirements of Best Value, so there is clearly scope for auditors to exercise balanced judgement and for public bodies to respond flexibly in demonstrating how the key areas of challenge are addressed. Individual evaluations are made about the level a public body has attained in each question or area. However, these have not been weighted and it is not intended that these be used to determine an overall scoring for any toolkit. They are designed to contribute to sound professional judgements, not to replace them.

Using the toolkits

The toolkits are designed for application by Audit Scotland's auditors when carrying out Best Value audits of public bodies. In practice, the toolkits will be applied as part of an audit process, whereby the auditor makes enquiries, seeks supporting information and forms conclusions based on the evidence obtained.

Audit Scotland recognises that bodies may find the toolkits helpful in carrying out general organisational reviews or specific service reviews and are therefore available in the Audit Scotland website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk. It should be stressed however that public bodies using the toolkits do so at their own discretion. The toolkits are designed principally as audit tools that are part of

Audit Scotland’s overall Best Value audit methodology and are not expressly produced for self-assessment purposes.

Any organisation using the toolkits to inform their own corporate or service-based self-evaluation processes will need to consider the local context when applying them, and also the indicative rather than conclusive nature of the findings when interpreting the results. The toolkits were designed to elicit contextual information and provide evidence for arriving at professional audit judgements. They are not intended to be, and cannot be, used in a “tick-box” fashion.

The Best Value toolkits are generic in nature, in that they are not specific to any one type of public body or to any one sector and are designed so that they can be applied to all public bodies. Auditors will require to be sensitive to the differences between organisations both in terms of different sectors and varying scales of operation.

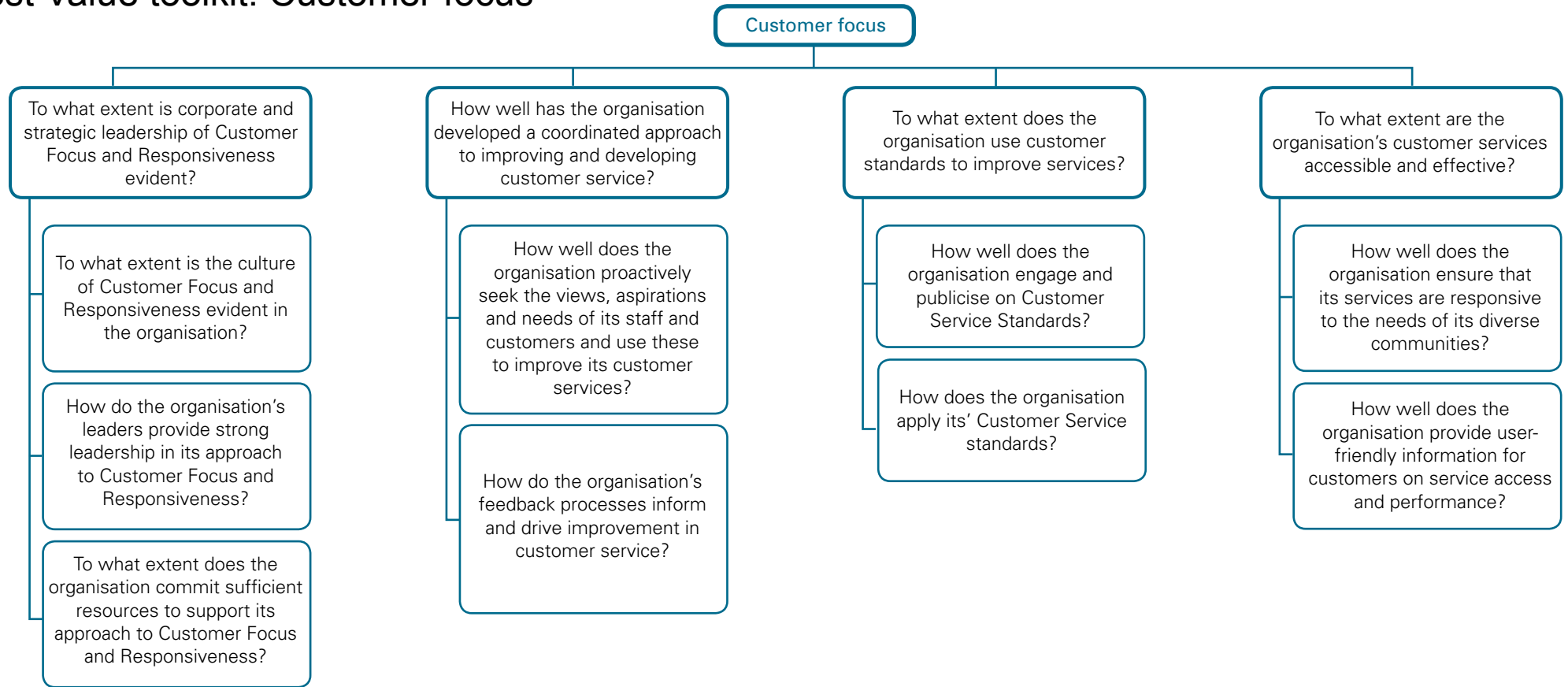
This toolkit forms part of a suite of audit products that will be applied, over time, to support a structured, evidenced based, judgment on an organisation’s approach to the use of the resources with which it has been provided and its achievement of Best Value.

Auditors’ evaluations

The toolkit takes the form of a series of questions based on identified good practice. It then offers four sets of descriptors, these being:

Does not meet basic requirements	An organisation may not yet demonstrate the basic practice level in any particular category.
Basic practices	Minimum acceptable standards, which would be sufficient to allow an organisation to demonstrate sound performance.
Better practices	As basic, with some elements of good or even best practice, but not on a consistent basis.
Advanced practices	Consistently demonstrating good or best practice and contributing to innovation.

Best Value toolkit: Customer focus



Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix – Customer focus

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
1. Leadership - To what extent is corporate and strategic leadership of customer focus and responsiveness evident?			
1.1 To what extent is a culture of customer focus and responsiveness evident across the organisation?	<p>The organisation has a strategy that outlines its approach to customer care and demonstrates how it will respond to its customers' needs and aspirations.</p> <p>Staff are aware of their own distinct roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>There is an overall coordinated approach to customer focus and responsiveness including a strategy or framework for customer care.</p>	<p>The organisation shares its experience and is recognised for innovative practice by other relevant organisations, which learn from that experience.</p>
1.2 How do the organisation's leaders provide strong leadership in its approach to customer focus and responsiveness	<p>The organisation's leaders are actively committed to the delivery of good customer care.</p>	<p>The organisation's leaders actively promote its approach to Customer Focus and Responsiveness.</p>	<p>The organisation's leaders champion its approach to Customer Focus and Responsiveness.</p>
1.3 To what extent does the organisation commit sufficient resources to support its approach to customer focus and responsiveness?	<p>There is established resourcing to support customer focus and responsiveness.</p> <p>The approach to the delivery of customer-focused, flexible services (including training and development of staff, systems and ICT and buildings or service points) is on a service by service basis.</p>	<p>There is a sustainable corporate approach to resourcing reflecting organisational priority for customer focus and responsiveness.</p> <p>The organisation has corporate training and ICT systems in place to provide a seamless experience for customers.</p> <p>It seeks ways of working with partners to improve access to its services for customers through technology, information sharing and co-location.</p>	<p>The organisation shares resources and provides services jointly with other organisations if and when appropriate to increase efficiency and improve the customer experience.</p>

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix – Customer focus

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
2. Improving customer services – How well has the organisation developed a coordinated approach to improving and developing customer service?			
2.1 How well does the organisation proactively seek the views, aspirations and needs of its staff and customers and use these to improve its customer services?	<p>The organisation engages on a service by service basis and this informs the development of their customer services and the ways of contacting the council are adjusted to meet their needs.</p> <p>The organisation has in place a planned programme of activity and associated review for its approach to customer focus and responsiveness. It regularly reviews its approach and responds to customer need, views and aspirations.</p>	<p>The organisation can provide evidence that it uses knowledge of customer needs, views and aspirations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ inform policy and strategy ▪ prioritise service improvement activity ▪ and improve customer service. 	<p>The organisation can demonstrate that staff and customers/service users are actively involved in service redesign and improvement.</p> <p>There is a coordinated approach between partners if and when appropriate to collecting and sharing knowledge about customer satisfaction and expectation that has resulted in real service improvement for customers.</p> <p>The organisation routinely lets customers know how their views have been used to improve services.</p>
2.2 How do the organisation's feedback processes inform and drive improvement in customer service?	<p>The organisation gathers, analyses and uses customer feedback on a service by service basis to provide services that are flexible and focused and delivered in a way that is convenient to the customer.</p>	<p>The organisation proactively uses an understanding of customers' needs to improve services and can evidence positive impact on customer service.</p>	<p>The organisation can evidence positive impact on customer service as result of analysing customer feedback.</p>

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix – Customer focus

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
3. To what extent does the organisation use customer standards to improve services?			
3.1 How well does the organisation engage and publicise on Customer Service Standards?	The organisation has customer service standards and/or Customer Charters that are made available to customers. These are typically available on a service by service basis.	The organisation systematically and effectively communicates and publicises what standard of corporate customer service they will provide across all services.	The organisation actively seeks to review its customer service standards through consultation with its customers – reporting publicly on this process and addressing issues raised. It undertakes benchmarking with organisations recognised as leaders in this field.
3.2 How does the organisation apply its' Customer Service Standards?	The organisation has set measurable targets for customer service.	Standards are applied corporately and consistently throughout the organisation. The organisation routinely monitors its performance against customer service targets and how it intends to address areas of dissatisfaction.	The organisation regularly reports its performance against targets to the public. This forms a key element of the organisation's public performance reporting approach.

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix – Customer focus

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
4. Accessibility – To what extent are the organisation’s customer services accessible and effective?			
4.1 How well does the organisation ensure that its services are responsive to the needs of its diverse communities?	<p>The organisation provides services through different channels to meet customers’ preferences.</p> <p>It is committed to providing accessible services for people with diverse needs</p>	<p>The organisation provides easy to contact services, via a range of channels.</p> <p>This approach is based on research that has established how customers want to access its services, including the provision of services out with normal working hours.</p>	<p>Based on reliable information about diverse communities and their needs, the organisation has been successful in tailoring its services to be responsive.</p> <p>It has developed new shared approaches with its partners if and when appropriate to maximise the impact for these communities.</p>
4.2 How well does the organisation provide user-friendly information for customers on service access and performance?	<p>The organisation provides clear information on how to access services.</p> <p>All information is made available in a range of languages and formats.</p>	<p>The organisation actively promotes its services to ensure that it is easy for all customers to access its services.</p> <p>There is evidence that an increased proportion of people who need services are taking them up and that an increased diversity of customers is accessing the organisation’ services.</p> <p>The organisation regularly reviews the effectiveness of its approach and explores new and alternative ways of publicising access to its services.</p>	<p>The organisation actively involves customers/service users in the review, design and provision of information on its services.</p>

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You can also download this document at:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



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