

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THE FUTURE OF DUTY DESK SYSTEMS & CUSTOMER SERVICES **at SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

INTERIM REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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PART I

FOR INFORMATION

1 Purpose of Report

At Overview & Scrutiny Committee (1st July 2010), lengthy questioning revolved around the Customer Service offering within the Council. A resolution was passed that the Strategic Director would report back to the Committee on 9th September 2010 on progress of "Performance Reporting Gold Project SBC_16 (Improving Customer Service)" as detailed in the regular Performance Report.

2 Recommendation

The Committee is asked to consider the contents of this high-level overview report and interim update for information and to endorse the principle being recommended by CMT to Cabinet (right first time, reduce queuing times and better use of IT and systems) regarding the future of the Council's Customer Service provision.

3 Report

The Council recognises the need to continually look for improvements and enhancements to its Customer Service provision, performance and experience.

The Council is exploring every opportunity particularly in light of budget pressures (June 2010 Budget and the likely outcome of the October 2010 Government Spending Review). It is also looking at recent advancements in technology to encapsulate new ways of working whilst putting the customer first. This is called:

"First Time, Every Time"

Throughout the process consideration has been given to different delivery models and the options for both design and future operation, including:

- Outsourcing the front end delivery, contact, duty and hub systems to an external provider
- Development of a specialist in-house contact centre where the front end, contact, duty and hub systems are brought together as one
- Enhancement of the existing operation whilst attempting to reduce costs at the same time

Senior Council staff have met to consider these three key options. A detailed business case based upon the second option is being drawn-up and will go to Cabinet. Subject to approval at that time, implementation will follow thereafter as quickly as is practicable. This will deliver a dedicated team of specialist advisors answering and dealing with all queries plus efficiency gains.

Landmark Place (My Council)

The original case for the Landmark Place (My Council) Customer Service Centre, although from a previous era, was based around delivery of a coherent, efficient and customer centric model. In addition, assumptions were made around cost savings due to streamlining of back office functions.

However, as at August 2010, the original business case savings have not materialised with the overall revenue budget for My Council running at £1.94m per annum.

In addition, first-time issue resolution is rare with “double handling” regularly occurring in the high volume areas of Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Adult Services.

Separate call centres still operate for Environmental Services Housing Needs & Housing Repairs and the Duty Desk Systems for Adult Social Care and Children’s Social Care. Feedback from users is poor with the two regularly cited problems being:

- long wait times both on telephone responses and personal queuing at the front desk
- dissatisfaction over the non-resolution of issues first time

Current offering

Visitors and telephone callers are currently handled by a generalist Council representative as opposed to a subject matter specialist. The representative is, therefore, rarely able to resolve the issue with it often being referred-on for processing elsewhere within the Council over time.

The current *modus operandi* is also dated. New methodology, technology and systems can produce substantial cost savings, particularly through synergy and the bringing-together of the front Duty Desk Systems for Housing Benefits, Council Tax, Housing and Adult & Children’s Social Care into one. Currently these operate independently and in parallel to the existing My Council operation.

What is required?

The working team proposes a new model Customer Service Centre which will:

- Have dedicated specialist advisors (specific knowledge in relevant areas)
- Use private sector efficiency models and methods
- Use and exploit modern CRM technologies

The aim will be to close the loop between the front and back offices. Back-office specialists will be physically located at the front desk (following suitable customer service training) and telephony enquiries will be answered directly by similar online specialists.

This will ensure all contact is dealt with “First Time, Every Time”.

What will be the benefits?

This new model will reduce the amount of contact made which relates to each initial enquiry (i.e. **improve value for money**). It will also provide a better real and perceived **customer experience** at the same time. Improvements in process design and a reduction in “double handling” (or even “triple handling” on complex cases) will realise **efficiency gains**.

4 Summary

- **Host a specialist in-house Customer Service entity**
- **All “Duty Desks” will move into this dedicated Customer Service entity**
- **A common customer management system (CRM) will be utilised**
- **This will provide an accessible and singular directory of services**
- **An enhanced (both real and perceived) customer experience will be enjoyed**