
JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRANSITIONAL BOARD
CUSTOMER ACCESS TASK GROUP
INTERIM REPORT – 30 May 2008

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update the JOSTB on the work of its Customer Access Scrutiny Task Group.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. In respect of the customer access arrangements provided in Wiltshire:
 - a) To identify current service access arrangements, standards and performance;
 - b) To identify desired customer access arrangements, standards and performance for the new Wiltshire Council;
 - c) To identify any anticipated issues or problems associated with the transition to the new Wiltshire Council; and
 - d) To identify and recommend to the Implementation Executive preferred customer access arrangements for the new Wiltshire Council.

MEETINGS

3. 9 April 2008 - Scoping the Review
 J Rogers (WCC Customer Focus Lead)
 The Task Group considered Mr Rogers' presentation 'Improving Access to Services'.

- 6 May 2008 - Witness Interviews
 F Coleman (WCC Customer Care Manager)
 A Doulton (Project Consultant)
 M Edwards (NWDC Customer Contact Centre Manager)
 H Lovelock (KDC Reception and Advice Team Manager)
 W Martin (WWDC Customer Services Manager)
 J Mundy (SDC Customer Service Manager)
 J Tavener (NWDC Head of Customer Relations and Customer Contact Centres Project Lead)

- 3 June 2008 - J Rogers (WCC Customer Focus Lead)
 The Task Group will consider Mr Rogers' draft proposals prior to its submission to the Implementation Executive on 17 June 2008.

4. Members of the Task Group will attend to Customer Access seminar on 22 May 2008 as an information gathering exercise.

EVIDENCE

5. The Task Group has so far considered three primary sources of information:

- a) John Rogers (WCC Customer Focus Lead) gave a presentation on the Customer Access project. The starting point is to provide a customer-centred approach to the delivery of Wiltshire Council services. A proposed charter of customer service ideals has been created, outlining its expectation of customers and staff. This was followed by an analysis of what needs to change to achieve this, centres of excellence that already exist and should be built upon and finally the problematic challenges of service delivery in some areas given the large rural characteristic of our county. Mr Rogers' Customer Focus project is considered to be on target and meeting its deadlines.

Key Issues

- The need for all officers not to see themselves as specialism-driven but as a single culture with a personal responsibility towards the customer.
 - While IT facilities need to be extensively utilised to extend the Council's 'opening hours' those who may not have such access must be equally well-served.
 - New Council web-site to emulate retail sites with 80% of the customers' needs signposted from front page.
 - The facilities for Customer Access (face-to-face facilities, web-site, email and telephony) must be in place by 01.04.09 and be uniform across the County.
 - The Wide Area Network and telephony is scheduled for completion by the end of 2008.
 - Email access to departments will not be individuals' addresses but generically named.
 - The need to find a balance between bringing people to the service versus the service to the people was identified.
 - The role of multi-agency partnerships was considered.
 - Three model authorities – E. Riding, Leeds and Sheffield - were described in greater detail to better understand the variety of service delivery. Authorities in Warwickshire, Malvern and Ashford were also considered.
- b) Angus Doulton's (Consultant) brief was to produce a baseline of Wiltshire's customer focus and access to service against a national framework that gives rise to a prioritised set of strategies for the implementation of a first-class customer access service in Wiltshire under the new council. His proposals include both generic solutions to create uniformity in style between the five authorities and also specific solutions to meet the more unique requirements of isolated areas. Mr Doulton continues to work closely with the Customer Focus group in their work to build a new customer-led service.

Key Issues

- Mr Doulton's research shows that the volume and complexity of work carried out by District Councils was high and that there is a fear that centralisation would impair service delivery to out-lying areas. The ability to deliver some services from a local point would be highly desirable.

- The five authorities do not cover Wiltshire completely; however, Salisbury District Council is the most progressive in taking services out to the smaller towns.
- c) Witness interviews were conducted to ascertain the current position of Customer Services across the five authorities, to better understand what is already done well and to consider any barriers to access to service. The Customer Service Managers from each authority were consulted. The main outcomes of these interviews were that each Customer Service Manager has an excellent understanding of the problem areas of their own authority and also an understanding of works really well. There is a strong working partnership between the Managers and they have a clear picture of the future customer access arrangements. Their main desire now is to initiate the creation of the new service that will include team-building and training and the installation of various IT solutions to allow for a joined up service.

Key Issues

Current strengths include:

- The District Customer Service Managers have worked together for several years and consider there to be a strong will to work together.
- A strength of Wiltshire County Council is the single telephone number to the County Council, answered by a person rather than an IRV.
- Kennet District Council has been considering where their customers come from in order to supply service locally, through libraries, etc.
- Salisbury District Council follows a peripatetic-style of service delivery due to the rural nature of the district and this could be followed in other hard-to-reach areas. This operates through a staff rota.
- Salisbury District Council has a well-defined career structure for its customer service officers.
- At North Wiltshire District Council, the facility for delivery of Revenues and Benefits, Homelessness and planning are well-served by the Reception area and staff.
- Also at North Wiltshire District Council, customer satisfaction is being monitored on the web-site, kiosk and telephones to gain instant feedback from the customer
- West Wiltshire District Council have very successfully used a Welcome Officer to signpost customers.

Current weaknesses include:

- The Wiltshire District Council County Reception requires a redesign and to establish a better liaison with service areas. Visitors arriving for meetings at County Hall are well-served; however, the 'off-the-street enquiries' need substantial improvement with possibly a separate service area to deal with confidential issues.
- Currently, Salisbury's offices are insufficient with queues reaching from the reception area into the street. A similar situation occurs with their telephones.
- West Wilts District Council has good facilities but a poorly located building.

- There will always be a requirement to deliver services Face 2 Face thus necessitating generalised agents to deliver service.

CONCLUSIONS

6. The working relationships developed between the Consultant, Customer Focus Lead and the Customer Service Managers have provided the Customer Access project with a strong platform to deliver transition and transformation of its service and the project delivery is on target with respect to its set timescales.
7. The project has reached a stage where the key personnel wish to begin implementation of the proposals to ensure that the combined service is in place and robust prior to 1 April 2009.
8. An early implementation would help the on-going issues of staff retention and training.
9. The Customer Access Strategy will be submitted to the Implementation Executive on 16 June 2008 after being considered by the Customer Focus Task Group on 3 June 2008.
10. The Customer Access Task Group is keen to continue its role in monitoring service delivery during the transitional stages.

RECOMMENDATION

The JOSTB is asked to:

- **endorse the interim report of the Customer Access Task Group**
- **approve the Customer Access Task Group to continue its role of holding the Transitional Customer Focus Project Board to account**

Customer Focus Task Group:

A Lake - Chairman (KDC), J Broom (SDC), G Carr (WWDC), S Doubell (NWDC), M Groom (WCC)