

	AGENDA ITEM NO.
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Report Cover Sheet

Name of Meeting:	EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	11 th MARCH 2008
Report Title:	STAFFING STRUCTURE IN THE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE
Summary of report:	Members to agree to the revised staffing structure in the Customer Service Centre.
For Further Information Please Contact (report author):	Andrew Jones 6830 andrew.jones@warwickdc.gov.uk
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Policy Framework:	No
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budgetary framework:	No
Wards of the District directly affected by this decision:	All
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan?	n/a
Is the report Private & Confidential	No
Background Papers:	None

Consultation Undertaken

Below is a table of the Council's regular consultees. However not all have to be consulted on every matter and if there was no obligation to consult with a specific consultee they will be marked as n/a.

Consultees	Yes/ No	Who
Other Committees	n/a	
Ward Councillors	n/a	
Portfolio Holders	Yes	Norman Pratt
Other Councillors	n/a	
Warwick District Council recognised Trades Unions	Yes	Unison
Other Warwick District Council Service Areas	No	
Project partners	Yes	Warwickshire County Council
Parish/Town Council	n/a	
Highways Authority	n/a	
Residents	n/a	
Citizens Panel	n/a	
Other consultees	n/a	

Officer Approval

With regard to officer approval all reports must be approved by the report author's relevant director, Finance Services and Legal Services.

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Relevant Director(s)		Karen Pearce
Chief Executive		Chris Elliott
CMT		All
Section 151 Officer		Mary Hawkins
Legal		Simon Best
Finance		Lorraine Henson
Final Decision?		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

1.1 To agree to the revised staffing structure of the Customer Service Centre (CSC) as detailed in section 4 of the report.

2. REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 On 11th, December 2007, the Executive agreed that the CSC should relocate to Shire Hall, Warwick as part of a phased approach to the integration of District and County Council CSC's.

2.2 The first part of the integration project requires a change to the grades of the posts on the CSC establishment. This is necessary so that any concerns that staff working for Warwickshire County Council are being treated more favourably than their colleagues from Warwick District Council is immediately removed. It is an approach that has proved successful in One Stop Shop Programme.

2.3 Given the training demands on the CSC, there is a recommendation to replace an Advisor with a Senior Customer Service Advisor whose role will be to provide on-going coaching for Customer Service Advisors as well as being the link between back-office service areas and the CSC for more specific technical training.

2.3 Since December 2007 discussions have been ongoing with the Trades Unions and this report is the culmination of the consultation process.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED

3.1 Members could decide that CSC grades should not be revised, however, this would provide a significant impediment in trying to deliver a joined-up CSC.

3.2 Members could decide that there is no need for a Senior Customer Service Advisor, however, the professional opinion of the CSC Manager is that there is not the capacity to provide the necessary ongoing training and support from within the Centre's current team.

4. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

4.1 Revenue

4.1.1 The cost of the changes is revenue neutral and is shown in the table below:

Number of staff	WDC Grade	WDC Cost (incl on-cost)	WCC Grade	WCC Cost (incl on-cost)	Total Cost to WDC
17.72	G	21,200	4 (Advisor)	22,000	14,200
1	G	21,200	5 (Trainer)	24,800	3,600
2	F	25,600	6 (Team Leader)	27,400	3,600
1	D	38,100	PO11* (Manager)	42,200	4,100

* Grade needs to be determined by evaluation panel

4.1.2 The aggregate cost of £25,500 can be met by the deletion of 1.2 FTE Customer Service Advisors and the introduction of a revised technology for dealing with

Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit calls which between them account for 30% of the Centre's activity.

- 4.1.3 The deletion of an Advisor will be more than compensated by the introduction of the Senior Customer Advisor whose role will be to undertake the Centre's training/coaching. At present this function is spread between the whole CSC which is not only inefficient but leads to inconsistency in knowledge and skills transfer.

4.2 **Capital**

- 4.2.1 There are no capital costs as a consequence of these changes.

5. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 The relocation of the CSC contributes to Corporate Strategy objective CS7 to "Improve the efficiency of service delivery to the council's customers". This will be achieved as customers will no longer need to be transferred between organisations.
- 5.2 The proposal forms an integral part of the council's Building on Excellence programme as it frees-up accommodation at Riverside House for the CCTV service to move from the Town Hall.

Background

The Warwickshire Direct Partnership

The Warwickshire Direct Partnership came together in 2003 with a Vision, “to exploit the benefits of partnership working in delivering a customer experience that is high quality, consistent, cost effective and provides convenient access to well-managed services.” The partnership consists of the first and all second tier councils in Warwickshire. With the aid of a Government grant, the partnership purchased Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and telephony systems provided by *Northgate Information Solutions* and *Macfarlane Telesystems* respectively to help deliver the vision by managing customer contacts (regardless of the access channel used) at a single integrated point.

During the course of the last four years, Warwick District Council has made a significant investment in the CRM and telephony systems. The systems have enabled the authority to develop a corporate CSC and joined-up OSS's with the County Council. Whilst there have undoubtedly been issues as the CSC has sought to establish itself, the problems have not been due to the technology but as a consequence of the desire to achieve the vision described above i.e. free-up the time of the back-office staff; provide a consistent front-office service; and dramatically reduce the number of calls that are abandoned because no one is available to take the call.

Despite significant demands (New waste proposals, Decriminalisation, Council Tax enforcement) on the CSC, the following performance has been achieved during the last six months:

Enquiries dealt with at first point of contact –	86%
Percentage of calls answered in one minute –	85%
Percentage of calls abandoned –	8%
Percentage of customer calls answered through the CSC –	70%

However, this should not mask the significant ongoing issues which are explored in greater detail below.

The same technology deployed in the CSC is also available at the OSS's and members have received a number of reports about the success Warwickshire Direct – Kenilworth is proving to be and also the continued growth of enquiries at Warwick Connection based in Warwick Library. Therefore the excellent relationships developed through the work on the OSS's, encouraged District officers to examine whether there was a potential for closer working with the telephone service.

Drivers for Change

Whilst the spirit of partnership has been one important driver, there have been other important issues which officers have needed to be cognisant of. These are reproduced below in full from the business case:

Central Government Agenda – “The current mood in Government is that shared services are the way forward for local government. It is considered that the joining-up of services can lead to considerable efficiency savings. The current Joint One Stop Shop initiative based in Kenilworth is a proven example of how the District & County councils can work together.”

Accommodation Needs – “WDC has limited accommodation and it is recognised that the CSC working environment is not ideal. The current Joint One Stop Shop initiative based in Kenilworth freed-up property costs at a saving of £80,000.”

Capacity to Deliver the Service – “There are a limited number of advisors available to take calls. Joining with another organisation provides the potential to increase capacity.”

A Joint Service

In developing the CRM system the partnership has a product which supports a central countywide property database maintained by the boroughs and districts for use by all the partners and enables the delivery of services on behalf of other partners. The system allows a consolidated “view” of the customer right across the partnership regardless of which partner the customer contacts.

It is possible for a customer to contact the County Council and then when a subsequent enquiry is made at the District Council, that customer’s complete contact history can be viewed. This provides the opportunity for the customer to receive the complete “Council” service.

This service could be developed in a “virtual” way, however, it is considered that the aim of providing the greatest benefit to the customer would be compromised and so a physical move of staff is advocated.

This approach is proposed having learned from the development of the integrated OSS, as a key factor has been for staff of both organisations to consider that they are equal partners in the project. This was achieved by unifying the employment terms and conditions of the staff from the outset. Whilst this approach is not advocated in the first instance for CSC staff, further consultation will take place following co-location.

Ongoing Issues

As indicated earlier the CSC experiences ongoing difficulties. This is partly due to the fact that it is a new service in the process of taking the calls from the “back-office” Service Areas, however, there are issues which will not resolve themselves even when the transfer of calls is complete unless the way the service is delivered is tackled. These issues have been identified as follows:

1. Knowledge required to deliver the service – By the time the transfer of calls is complete, the customer service advisors will need to answer enquiries for more than 40 different Services. As the transfer of calls has progressed it is clear that the team is not able to retain all the knowledge necessary to assist the customer.

Whilst certain tools are available to assist with service delivery such as scripting and the website, the nature of many local authority services requires access to the back office system and the specific details of a case. These type of enquiries will never be resolved by simple scripting and so a good understanding of many back office services is always going to be necessary.

If the authority is to tackle this issue it must limit the amount of knowledge that an advisor needs to digest.

2. Staff turnover and recruitment exercises – Over the last year the Centre has experienced staff turnover rates of over 50%. Not only does this have a demoralising effect on the team but it means that managers are devoting a considerable amount of their time to recruitment thereby distracting them from service development and improvement. Whilst Customer Service Centres do suffer from retention difficulties, the industry average is more in the region of 30% and therefore it is clear that steps need to be taken to encourage staff to stay.

The reasons for staff leaving are often diverse but a constant theme is the issue mentioned at point 1. It is interesting to note that despite extensive research, no other District Council appears to have progressed at the speed of Warwick and therefore solutions have to be designed from scratch.

A potential solution is to create career grades for staff and limit the number of services that need to be delivered. However, given the limited number of advisors the District can call upon, this could only be done in conjunction with a bigger organisation.

3. Initial and Ongoing training – As a consequence of points 1 & 2 the training investment required to skill staff is significant. This is not only training provided by Team Leaders in the CSC but also back office colleagues. Members will appreciate that with staff retention difficulties mean that training is a never ending task with the training programme having to be started every other month. This is not sustainable and leads to considerable de-motivation for managers.

The training issue can be tackled with the help of a training/coaching resource which will need to come from current staffing budgets, however, it is not a solution in isolation and must be linked to the issues described at points 1 & 2.