

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

6 JUNE 2011

CUSTOMER SERVICE APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME PROPOSAL

REPORT OF HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report is being presented to Committee at short notice following the conclusion of a review which was prompted by the impact on customer service of staff leaving the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to take up 1team opportunities elsewhere in the Council.

The proposal provides opportunities for school leavers to take-up customer service apprenticeships with the Council. To enable the offer of apprenticeships to school leavers in this academic year a decision will need to be made before the end of this academic year, which is in July 2011.

The 1Team initiative has been successful in providing a flexible staff resource to the organisation by offering internal development opportunities. This success has in turn highlighted the need for a pool of staff with a flexible approach, a good knowledge of the Council and a well developed range of skills.

The core role of the Customer Service Centre team is to provide access to information and council services for our customers, however, the CSC has also become known as a staff development pool for the organisation.

Staff turnover is higher in this area than elsewhere in the Council and this is generally due to CSC staff moving on to take up opportunities in other departments.

The experience of working on the frontline dealing with a wide range of customer enquiries means that CSC staffs are already equipped with good core knowledge and skills and often require a minimum of training when they arrive in their new teams.

In recognising the value of this development role, the resource pool will need constant refreshing to continue to provide consistent service levels to customers and to encourage the start of a career path through the organisation for staff.

The review of recruitment and development in the CSC included investigating the national apprenticeship scheme where a number of employer benefits of participating in the scheme were identified:

88% of employers employing apprentices believe that apprenticeships lead to a more motivated and satisfied workforce.

83% of employers employing apprentices rely on their apprenticeship programme to provide the skilled workers they need for the future.

The business case for employing apprentices is robust with a number of advantages for the Council; by going down this route Winchester City Council will be:

- Supporting young people
- Giving school leavers much needed work experience and training
- Ensuring a skilled workforce for the future
- Planning succession

The proposal is that that a current vacancy for 1 FTE is filled by employing 2 school leavers as apprentices through the national apprenticeship scheme for a 12 month fixed term period.

Subject to satisfactory performance, apprentices will then be able to apply for vacancies arising internally and if successful be replaced with more apprentices.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the Committee support the employment of two customer service apprentices in the Customer Service Centre as a pilot scheme to be reviewed at the end of 12 months.
- 2 That an additional temporary 1 FTE be approved on the establishment for the 12 month period.

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##### DETAIL:

##### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposal to pilot a customer service apprenticeship scheme in the Customer Service Centre.
- 1.2 The proposal is to employ 2 apprentices, aged 16 – 18 yrs, for a 12 month period to fill a current vacancy in the customer service centre at no additional cost.
- 1.3 Although both head count and establishment in the CSC will increase, there will be no salary cost implications to the Council; this initiative will have no material effect on the budget.
- 1.4 The scheme, if approved, will provide a work based training programme designed around the needs of the Council. It will lead to nationally recognised qualifications and valuable work experience for the young people in the area.
- 1.5 Training for nationally recognised customer service qualifications for 16 – 18 year old apprentices is fully funded by central government.
- 1.6 The scheme will help to provide a planned development programme designed to improve engagement, loyalty and developing staff skills and experience for future opportunities within the organisation.
- 1.7 The CSC has traditionally been a development area for staff moving on in the Council. Over recent months the 1Team initiative has recruited a large percentage of experienced CSC staff leaving the centre struggling to achieve business targets.
- 1.8 This scheme would ensure that the centre will be able to plan to provide consistency of service as staff move on in the organisation. This will be achieved by offering apprentices the opportunity to apply for permanent vacancies, subject to performance, and then recruiting another apprentice to repeat the process.
- 1.9 The pilot, if successful, could be rolled out across the organisation.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

2 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS  
(RELEVANCE TO):

2.1 Economic prosperity, working with schools and colleges to develop the workforce of tomorrow.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

3.1 Increase Customer Service Centre headcount and FTE by one at no additional salary cost. Employing 2 apprentices will have the same salary cost as one customer service advisor.

3.2 Apprentice training costs for 16 – 18 year olds are funded by central government through the national apprenticeship scheme.

4 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1 No additional risks identified

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

File held in Customer Services

APPENDICES:

None