

CABINET

21 JUNE 2006

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

12 JUNE 2006

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE – PHASE TWO

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

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RECENT REFERENCES:

PS205: Customer Service Centre Post Implementation Review, 5th December, 2005

CAB1005: Customer Relationship Management Software Procurement - Award of Contract, 19th January, 2005

CAB960: Customer Service Centre Progress, 17th November, 2004

CAB793: Reception Areas First Phase – Improving Customer Service Through Establishing a Contact Centre, 11th February 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The first phase of the Customer Service Centre opened in June 2005 and is reasonably well established. Phase II will continue the progress towards meeting the Government's IEG targets, which include specific targets for dealing with 80% of enquiries at first point of contact, as well as contributing towards the Council's (and Government's) efficiency requirements.

Phase I services were incorporated into the Centre at the same time, in order to form the critical mass needed for the Centre to start. A more moderate approach will be taken towards Phase II with a programmed inclusion over the coming year of further services being deployed into the Centre. Phase II will include aspects of Parking; community services; electoral registration; recruitment and recycling. Following this, further aspects of Parking followed by Taxes then Benefits will form Phases III to V of the project.

Additional staff will be needed within the Centre during the transition period when additional training will be required on the new services. Existing staff will need to have their time released in order to learn the new processes and staff will be required to train them in the

particular service areas. It is suggested that two additional Customer Advisors may be needed for the transition period for Phase II. This will require additional budget, estimated to be £30,000 in the current year, for which a virement is sought.

Staff and union consultation will be undertaken through discussions with individual officers and teams affected by the proposals. Unison has been informed and will be consulted throughout this process.

Within City Offices there is little public activity (either telephone or reception) between 17.00 and 18.00 and a more efficient rota system could be introduced if the opening hours were reduced slightly. It is proposed to reduce the opening hours by 30 minutes per day by closing at 17.30 instead of 18.00.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To Cabinet:

1. That approval be given to the continued expansion of the Service Centre as detailed in this report.
2. That a virement of £30,000 be approved for 2006/07.

To Personnel Committee:

3. That the establishment of the Finance Directorate be increased by two FTEs.

CABINET21 JUNE 2006PERSONNEL COMMITTEE12 JUNE 2006CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE - PHASE TWOReport of The Director of FinanceDETAIL:1 Introduction

- 1.1 Improving customer service has been a key priority in the Council's Corporate Strategy since 2004. Specifically, and as part of a wider programme of seeking to offer better, more accessible and more responsive services, the Council proposed to *establish a dedicated customer service unit responsible for dealing with all enquiries and complaints effectively.*
- 1.2 The first phase of the Customer Service Centre opened in June 2005 dealing with frequently asked questions, complaints; environmental health; housing; licensing; and planning, building control, estates and transportation.
- 1.3 The second phase was expected to cover benefits and taxes; car parking; community services; and electoral registration.
- 1.4 Phase I of the Centre is reasonably well established. There have been some initial difficulties (referred to in the post implementation review, PS205 refers). Early technical problems have been resolved. Some difficulties remain with staff absences and turnover – these are likely to continue but an expanded Centre should be better placed to provide cover for such absences.
- 1.5 Phase II will continue the progress towards meeting the Government's IEG targets, which include specific targets for dealing with 80% of enquiries at first point of contact, as well as contributing towards the Council's (and Government's) efficiency requirements.
- 1.6 Phase I included improving back office systems and some BPR (Business Process Re-engineering) in the service areas brought into the Centre. Phase II continues the focus on achieving the vision of improved customer service throughout the Council and assists in addressing the challenges arising from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Other work is continuing that expands this philosophy to the outlying parts of the District with the first dedicated telephone line into the Centre from Alresford Town Council.
- 1.7 It is recognised that, as with Phase I, leadership and support from all levels – Members, Senior Managers and Staff – is critical to achieving success. This was much in evidence for Phase I and directly affected the ease with which the transition was made and the Centre became operational. It is equally important during Phase II to build on the solid foundations already laid. Expansion of the Service Centre will

help to drive the wider change in culture that is sought to make the Council a more customer focused organisation as well as contributing significantly to the Council's efficiency programme.

2 Further Services within the Centre

- 2.1 Phase I services were incorporated into the Centre at the same time, in order to form the critical mass needed for the Centre to start. A more moderate approach will be taken towards Phase II with a programmed inclusion over the coming year of further services being deployed into the Centre.
- 2.2 There is a significant piece of work to be completed for each area before transfer: this includes staff consultation, process mapping, scripting (programming), staff deployment and training. For some areas, other factors have to be considered, such as the scheduling of computer system upgrades or annual work programmes such as Billing.
- 2.3 Earlier reports highlighted aspects of the following services for inclusion in Phase II: benefits and taxes; car parking; community services; and electoral registration. In addition, the procedures for handling Complaints, included in Phase I, will be reviewed and streamlined. Aspects of Recruitment can also be included. With proposals for increasing recycling, the Centre will also be dealing with initial enquiries as this service expands.
- 2.4 Services that are next to be included within the Centre fall into two types – small areas that require some business process review and little computer system integration and larger areas that require significant business process reviews and systems integration. Recruitment within IT for a Business Analyst was unsuccessful at the first attempt and this means that the small areas requiring modest process review will be undertaken first and larger areas will be progressed subsequently.
- 2.5 The areas suggested for inclusion next within the Centre are thus:

Service	Commentary
Allotments	Initial enquiries.
Complaints	Provision of a dedicated corporate complaints handling system to replace various databases currently used across the authority. Allocation of cases within Lagan to individual Complaints Champions in service areas. Complaints measurable and able to be tracked corporately across all service areas. Ensures used by all services to approved standards.
Electoral registration	Initial enquiries and despatch of forms for register and postal votes.
Museums	Initial enquiries and despatch of leaflets.
Parking	Initial enquiries until computer system upgrade completed in August.
Pitch bookings	Recording of bookings

Recruitment	Provision of generic information and despatch of application forms. Information entered via e form to reduce HR administration input to data base.
Waste recycling	Alternate Weekly Collection hotline into a campaign group within Centre; management information easily available.

2.6 (Lagan is the computer software system in use by the Centre - the CRM (customer relationship management) system).

2.7 Following this, the remaining services planned for Phase II will be included: that is, further aspects of Parking followed by Taxes then Benefits. These will form Phases III to V of the project.

3 Anticipated Timescales and Service Delivery

3.1 A draft project plan has been compiled for the next stage of the expansion of the Centre. This suggests services are transferred as follows:

	Service	BPR	Scripting	Testing & Training	Anticipated Go live date
Phase II	Waste recycling	May	June	July	August
	Complaints	May	August	September	September
	Parking	May to June	July	September	September
	Electoral Registration	June	July	September	September
	Recruitment	June	August	September	October
	Allotments	To be determined once the above services are operating successfully within the Centre.			
	Pitch bookings				
Museums					
Phase III	Parking	July-August	October	November	December
Phase IV	Taxes	To be determined once work on integrating Parking within the Centre is underway.			
Phase V	Benefits				

3.2 The timescales for Phases III to V are indicative only.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

4.1 The continued expansion of the Service Centre supports the aim of *Customer focus – putting customers at the heart of our work*.

- 4.2 The corporate aim is fulfilled in part by the Service Centre but it can only be realised fully if all parts of the organisation contribute to it. This can require a cultural change for some but is also aided by specific process measures, such as:
- Introducing a comprehensive programme of customer care training for all staff which covers a range of training and development activities designed to improve the quality of customer care given across all areas of the Council
 - Monitoring telephone response times against corporate targets
 - Reviewing how telephones are answered when staff are absent - arranging cover or using voicemail as necessary
 - Discussing with managers specific issues that arise from operating the Service Centre
 - Introducing a programme of business process reviews to make processes more efficient and customer focused where relevant.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 For Phase II of the project there will be few external cost areas. The process review work and scripting will be carried out by in-house staff within IT with the aid of staff from service areas and the Service Centre. There are no immediate additional costs for software systems, licences or integration.
- 5.2 The area of cost to be considered relates to staffing, including training.
- 5.3 Until the process review work has been completed it is difficult to say how many additional staff will be required. What is clear is that additional staff will be needed within the Centre during the transition period when additional training will be required on the new services. Existing staff will need to have their time released in order to learn the new processes and staff will be required to train them in the particular service areas. It is suggested that two additional Customer Advisors may be needed for the transition period for Phase II. It is suggested that recruitment is undertaken to fill these posts and that the position be reviewed as the process review work is undertaken. Recruitment will include considering the secondment of staff from areas being transferred – this might apply particularly to Parking staff who will be affected by Phase III when it gets underway. There may be a need to provide back-fill for staff in service areas for the more significant areas of work.
- 5.4 Recruitment could be temporary or permanent depending upon the market and can be done quite simply by advertising internally and locally, including through the job centre. The process would require an increase in approved establishment until such time as equivalent reductions can be made in other service areas. It will also require additional budget, estimated to be £30,000 in the current year. This would have to be found by virement from other budgets from those areas affected by the transfer. The details of the virement need to be established and the Director of Finance will undertake this in conjunction with other relevant directors. The long term plan is to create a more efficient service for dealing with customer enquiries and to realise savings that will be available to support other aspects of the Council's Corporate Strategy. Savings have been assumed and included within the budget as part of the Council's efficiency programme and these will be monitored closely and reported to Members periodically..

5.5 In addition to the Manager, the Service Centre has an establishment of 12 FTEs filled as 11 Customer Advisors and 1 Team Leader. Subsequently, approval was given to increasing the number of Advisors to 12 and an additional Team Leader post was established. However, this latter post has remained unfilled as it has been intended that recruitment should be from subsequent areas to be transferred into the Centre. This has meant that the Centre Manager has been undertaking supervisory duties and has not been able to give as much time as he should to developing the Centre. It is now intended to proceed with recruitment to this team leader post and this will be done initially by ring fencing posts within Parking that will be affected by the transfer of this service into the Centre. There will be similar opportunities for staff in other areas later in the process as the Centre expands.

5.6 There will be cost and staffing implications associated with Phases III to V and these will be reported to Members in advance of progressing each Phase.

6 Staff Consultation

6.1 Staff and union consultation will be undertaken through discussions with individual officers and teams affected by the proposals. Unison has been informed and will be consulted throughout this process in accordance with the Council's relevant policies and procedures. Further reports will be brought to Members as appropriate.

7 Service Centre Opening Hours

7.1 The opening hours for the Council's main public receptions are as follows:

City Offices 08.00 to 18.00 Monday to Friday

Avalon House 08.30 to 17.00 Monday to Friday

Parking Office 09.00 to 16.00 Monday and Wednesday to Friday; 09.30 to 16.00 Tuesday; 09.00 to 13.00 Saturday

7.2 Within City Offices there is little public activity (either telephone or reception) between 17.00 and 18.00. Whilst the staff who on duty are able to occupy themselves with some work (such as dealing with emails) there is not a great demand for their service. Because of health and safety requirements, two members of staff are on duty. This is not an effective use of the advisors' time and a more efficient rota system could be introduced if the opening hours were reduced slightly. It is proposed to reduce the opening hours by 30 minutes per day by closing at 17.30 instead of 18.00.

7.3 The initial parking enquiries that will be handled by the Centre will not be dealt with on Saturdays and it is proposed to open the Centre on Saturday mornings once the more substantial parking service has been transferred in December.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Working papers held in the Finance Directorate