



**One Council  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
8 February 2011**

**Report from the Director of  
Strategy, Partnerships and  
Improvement**

For Action

Wards Affected:  
ALL

**Future Customer Services Project Update**

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report updates on progress with the Future Customer Services project (previously known as Reshaping Customer Contact). As part of the One Council programme, work has been carried out to identify opportunities for service improvement and efficiencies in delivering customer contact services. The detail below sets out current service issues and outlines plans which are being put in place to deliver improvements and efficiencies.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the contents of this report are noted.

**3.0 Detail**

***Current arrangements and issues***

- 3.1 Customer contact across the Council is currently managed through a combination of One Stop Services and through direct delivery by service units. We currently have face to face service delivery operating from 30 sites across the borough and telephone contact through over 140 published telephone numbers.
- 3.2 There are a number of issues with the current arrangements which can lead to poor communication with our customers and inefficiencies in the way that we deliver services. The following issues have been identified as areas which the Council needs to address in order to deliver improved services more efficiently:

- a. Arrangement for customers accessing services is complex and can be confusing; customers may have to contact several service units before getting to the right place and there are inconsistencies in the way in which different service areas operate. This can lead to customers perceiving that they are dealing with several organisations instead of one single coherent organisation.
- b. Customers are not always able to have their enquiries resolved when they first make contact with the Council. Front line staff are not always empowered to fully resolve enquiries and frequently enquiries are passed to service delivery areas to resolve which builds in delay.
- c. Customers cannot usually have enquiries relating to different service areas resolved in one contact and frequently have to contact separate service areas for responses, even if the enquiry relates to the same or a similar issue.
- d. We currently have high levels of telephone calls abandoned (13% in One Stop Services and 20% across service units) meaning that customers have to contact us more than once before they get through to the person who can resolve their enquiries.
- e. We have very high levels of face to face contact which can be inconvenient for customers and costly to the Council but only 1% of transactions via the web which is the most convenient, cost effective means of communication.
- f. The impact of the current arrangements can mean that customers are not easily able to navigate their way around the system and can be frustrated in their attempts to access services. The resultant impact for the Council can lead to poor perception of services and does lead to inefficiency.
- g. Many on line services are not fully automated and require manual input from customer services and finance staff to complete transactions.

### ***Delivering improvement and efficiencies***

- 3.3 Plans are being put in place to address these issues and to enable customers to receive an improved, consistent level of service across all service areas and access channels.
- 3.4 In order to achieve the required improvements the following plans are being put in place:
  - a. The telephone numbering system will be rationalised, and over time we will reduce from 140 published numbers to approximately 10 numbers which will be in logical groupings, providing the full range of Council services.

- b. In the long term, face to face contact will be delivered from the Civic Centre and Willesden Green but in the meantime we will reduce face to face contact from 30 sites and concentrate all face to face contact at a limited number of sites, yet to be determined.
- c. Development of our web capacity will continue, and we will review which services we can deliver through an increase of on-line information, applications and payments. These developments will be carried out where we believe that there is a real desire from customers to communicate electronically, enabling them to complete their transactions without needing to visit or telephone.
- d. We will develop on-line services to enable increased automation, so that transactions can be completed without further manual input.
- e. Enquiries will be resolved at the earliest opportunity and this will be achieved by establishing specialist customer services teams and generalist customer services teams to deliver services face to face and by telephone. Generalist teams will manage straight forward transactions, whilst specialist teams will deal with more complex issues. Staff will be multi skilled across both generalist and specialist provision and will be empowered to take appropriate action without making referrals to service delivery.
- f. Staff will have broad roles, enabling them to work across two or more service areas and there will be flexibility of customer care staff across all channels. This will enable us to respond to demand flexibly, and will optimise the use of staff time.
- g. We will establish a corporate independent unit which will be responsible for the overall management of all customer services across the Council. The unit will be responsible for: ensuring that resource planning and workload management, placing staff at the right place at the right time; ensuring that staff have the appropriate training to enable them to work across a range of services; setting and monitoring service standards, not only in relation to the performance of customer contacts but on overall service delivery and collating and using information to enable the continued improvement of the service.
- h. Appendix 1 sets out the overview of how we will be structured to deliver customer services in the future.

### ***Timetable for implementation***

3.6 The transition from the current arrangements, to the new ways of working will take place between February 2011 and May 2012. Services will be transitioned in four phases as set out in Table 1 below.

- 3.7 The initial phase of the transitioning will involve the design of structures, processes and systems, improving technology, multi-skilling and training of staff and improving performance management.
- 3.8 Further planning and work will be needed from June 2012 onwards to ensure the smooth transfer of customer services to the Civic Centre Services and Willesden Green.

**Table 1: Transition phases for services to new customer contact arrangements**

Directorate	Transition Phase			
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Customer & Community Engagement	OSS Operations (incl. Contact Centre & Local Offices)		Registration and Nationality	
Regeneration and Major Projects		Economic Development	Planning (Statutory Land Use)	Strategic Property and FM
Finance and Corporate Services		Housing Benefits		
Housing and Community Care	Adult Social Care: Commissioning Access & Assessment Care Mgmt & Review Learning Disability	Housing Needs		Private Housing Services
Environment and Neighbourhood	Streetcare	Health, Safety and Licensing		Highways and transportation Parks and Cemeteries Trading Standards
Children and Families		Integrated Extended Services ( Including Early Years) Student Support (including Schools Admissions)	Integrated Service SEN and disabled Crisis intervention and support team Localities	Commissioning Services BACES School Improvement Service Care planning and Children in Need Placements

**Risks**

- 3.9 This project is strategically aligned to other projects within the overall One Council Programme. There are specific dependencies relating to other

reviews and transformations which present risks to this project and these include the Civic Centre, Willesden Green, Staffing and Structure Review (Wave 2), Adult Social Care (Customer Journey and Provision for Learning Disability) and Children's Social Care Transformation.

- 3.10 The Civic Centre and Willesden Green projects present the opportunity to provide an improved customer experience as well as the opportunity to maximise efficiencies through the reduction of management overheads and the implementation of new performance management disciplines.
- 3.11 The other projects listed in 3.9 all have an element of process redesign and savings associated with staff reductions, which may overlap with this project. At this stage it is not possible to quantify the extent of the overlap and therefore the extent to which savings projections for this project may be affected.
- 3.12 The implementation of new processes and systems and a new staffing structure has the potential to destabilise services. To minimise this risk, services will be phased in to the new working arrangements over time, to enable some level of piloting before moving to the next phase.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The project will need significant investment to deliver improvements and efficiencies. The current One Council Programme financial summary assumes a one-off investment of £2.6m to deliver annual savings of £3.5m once the new service is fully operational. Investment costs are a combination of project management, Human Resource and process change management, and IT investment. Savings arise from channel migration (more people using the web), reduced inefficiency (a lower number of unnecessary contact with the council if queries are dealt with first time), and more effective use of staff resource (removal of duplication and higher levels of staff utilisation).
- 4.2 Details of the timing of the costs and the savings are currently being finalised as part of finalisation of the business case.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

None

#### **6.0 Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 During the implementation process the impact on service users will be evaluated. The project aims to deliver improved services across all services and through all channels and this is expected to benefit all service users and stakeholders.
- 6.2 Development of the web will enable those more able to self serve, to do so at their convenience and will enable the Council to resource face to face and telephone contact for those who are vulnerable or less able to self serve.

6.3 We will continue to take on board the views and issues being expressed through our consultant exercises, including the Citizen's Attitude Survey.

## **7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)**

7.1 In the initial phase of the project we will establish a new structure for the delivery of customer services management and operations. It is expected that all staff currently placed within the One Stop Service will be affected. In other service units we will need to identify those posts which have an element of front facing customer services and these post holders may be affected.

7.2 We are expecting that the staffing structure will be reduced by up to 140 full time equivalent posts and that approximately 500 staff may be affected. The restructuring of services and resultant impact on job roles and numbers, will be managed in accordance with the Council's Managing Change Policy.

7.3 Delivering the efficiencies is partially dependent upon the rationalisation of overheads through the economy of scale in management overheads, running costs and accommodation. We will evaluate the options for minimising the number of sites, from which face to face contact is delivered in the period leading up to the opening of the Civic Centre and Willesden Green.

### **Contact Officers**

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### Future Customer Services Governance Model

