

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE
13 December 2004****Report from One Stop Shop Service Director**

For information

Wards affected:
All

**Report Title: One Stop Shop Annual Performance Report
March 2003 - April 2004**

Forward Plan Ref: Cor-04/05-70

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This covering report introduces the attached detailed report, which provides members with performance information for the entire One Stop Shop service for the period April 2003 to March 2004 which includes achievements, challenges and development initiatives.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report, the broad role that the One Stop Shop performs which includes customer care standards organisational leadership, performance, challenges and service priorities for 04/05 and determine further or additional information requirements.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The key change to the service during this period was that the Revenues & Benefits customer service telephone team joined the One Stop Shop Contact Centre as a result of the Revenue & Benefits Best Value Review recommendations. This merger has impacted upon management time because the service was failing when it transferred back in house and inherited resource levels at the end of the EDS contract have determined the standard and level of service that can be provided and the rate of progress that can be made to improve the situation. Improved working relationships have however resulted in a robust Improvement Plan being agreed and implemented and generally speaking overall performance is beginning to improve.

3.2 Demand & Performance

- 3.2.1 This year shows that the historic year on year trend of increasing demand for the One Stop Shop service has been arrested and for the first time we are able to report a stabilised take up trend. 809,900 enquiries were dealt with, a variation of 15,000 compared to last year (824,457) however, 6,460 of this is accounted for by a change in recording procedures (see below) giving a reduction of £8,540 compared with last year. Revenues & Benefits telephone demand has now transferred and 197,600 enquiries were dealt with (in addition to the One Stop Shop overall demand) this has increased by 10,200 enquiries, which may reflect repeated call attempts. The combined figures total 1,007,500 enquiries dealt with by the One Stop Shop compared to an overall 916,757 during the previous year when only 6 months of the Revenue & Benefits service was covered by the One Stop Shop.
- 3.2.2 This stabilisation is a positive outcome and to some extent reflects improvements in base services in such areas as Housing Benefit, Council Tax and Housing Repairs (some of the highest areas of demand).
- 3.2.3 This is the first year of full electronic recording of performance statistics as a result of the introduction of our new Customer Relationship Management 'E Shop' software in 2002. This has enabled the production of more accurate performance data.
- 3.2.4 It was reported last year that the transition from manual to electronic recording would require a change in collection procedures and staff assimilation and adaptation which could result in initial discrepancies. This has been the case and an adjustment of 6,460 has been made to account for human error in manual recording during the previous year and changes to recording procedures. Overall there has thus been a reduction of 1% in total demand. Annual variation in demand for the One Stop Shop service occurs for a number of reasons such as changes to corporate or service area priorities, initiatives or problems. The increased accuracy and reliability of performance data for managers will enable improved service efficiency, planning and development during the next 3 years.
- 3.2.5 The Shop 'drop in' service accounts for 23% (232,604) of overall demand and Brent House is the busiest location with 53,000 enquiries followed by the Town Hall with 51,800. Kilburn demand increased by 141% because the shop increased opening hours and relocated from Kilburn Library to Dyne Road as a result of the agreed recommendation of the Housing Best Value Review. The new Kilburn service is locally convenient and has attracted customers from Willesden and possibly Harlesden. Kingsbury experienced least customers and as a result a recommendation was put to members to reduce the service to part time opening during 2004/05 in order to improve the service provided across the other 5 locations. Housing Benefit, Housing Resources and Council Tax enquiries remained the highest 3 areas of demand in the Shops.
- 3.2.6 Average waiting times improved, reducing by 3 minutes against last year's performance as did interview times.

- 3.2.7 The Contact Centre has grown this year as the Revenue & Benefits call centre team joined bringing 197,600 additional enquiries. Council Tax and Housing Benefit enquiries make up nearly 20% of Contact Centre demand now. Contact Centre demand accounts for 76% of overall demand at 774,916 (this also includes on-line demand). The busiest Contact Centre teams in order of demand are, Switchboard, Revenue & Benefits, Streetcare and the Generic team. The top ten enquiries to the Generic team vary slightly each year but General Information, Social Services and Council Tax remain within the top five.
- 3.2.8 Answer rates vary across the teams with a good standard of performance in all areas except for Council Tax and Housing Benefit. Some aspects of Customer service in this area remains poor, however a jointly agreed Improvement Plan has been developed and is being implemented as a priority in close working partnership with BFS and Capita. Challenges faced include replacing the majority of temporary agency staff with permanent staff and improving the quality for enquiry handling. The level of staffing resources inherited at the close of the EDS contract and subsequently transferred to the OSS have proved to be insufficient and every effort is being made to secure additional resources to turn the situation around.
- 3.2.9 On-line enquiries continue to show a year on year increase in demand. 7,550 e-mail/on-line enquiries were received which is up by 11.9% (1,056) this year. Council Tax, Streetcare and General enquiries account for the top 3 areas of demand. Written correspondence continues to decrease.
- 3.2.10 Public awareness of the 'extended hours' service between 5pm and 8pm on weekdays has grown and demand was 15,422 an increase of 8% (over 1,000 calls). The Cashiers Line (credit card payments) demand increased by 27% and £1,233,374 Council Tax was collected, a revenue increase of 10.7% compared to last year.

3.3 Customer satisfaction

- 3.3.1 Ratings remain high. 11.7% of shop customers returned a 98% combined very good/good service rating which exceeds the 95% target. 130 customers were involved in a 'snap-shot' survey 99% rated the service very good to satisfactory. Whilst the overall number of complaints received about the service is just 0.02% (165) of all enquiries, complaints levels have increased by 40% (60% regarding R&B) and this is directly linked to Council Tax & Housing Benefit telephone customer service joining the One Stop Shop. 165 complaints were received and 27 were not upheld. 44 were partially upheld. 78 were fully upheld. The remainder are still pending or were withdrawn. The complaints have provided valuable management information which is used to improve the service.
- 3.3.2 The One Stop Shop dealt with 850 complaints on behalf of other service areas. This demand remains static.

3.4 Staffing

3.4.1 Staff turnover improved this year as only 9.6% (13 frontline staff) left the service compared to 14.6% the previous year. There were 5 maternity related absences – this trend remains static. A total of 19 staff were recruited to cover turnover, secondments and promotions. The Town Hall team and two individual members of staff achieved staff awards through public nomination at the annual ceremony. Attendance levels were affected by an increased number of staff on long term sickness absence. One member of staff was dismissed under the Council's Incapability procedure due to unacceptable sickness absence. 24 additional former R&B staff transferred into the One Stop Shop.

3.5 Budget

3.5.1 The service performed well with a 0.9% (45k) budget variance and returned a salary and accommodation under-spend caused by delays in progressing the management restructure and the Contact Centre relocation. An additional Revs & Bens telephone team budget of £705k was transferred to the One Stop Shop as telephone customer service returned in-house.

3.6 IT: E-Shop

3.6.1 The new EShop system was upgraded and work to facilitate and implement this took up most of the year. Numerous teething problems were experienced. Revs & Bens Viewstar access was also problematic during the year. The IT team co-ordinated 27 external visits and 36 requests for information about the One Stop Shop in Brent as it is still a leader in the field. These were mostly in relation to E- Shop and the Contact Centre where many other local authorities are developing similar operations and require support systems.

3.7 Welfare Benefits Take Up Service

3.7.1 This discretionary service achieved 1,603 appointments booked and 1,038 conducted (given missed and cancelled appointments). 1,480 benefit application forms were submitted (48% increase this year). An estimated £2,003,778 in previously unclaimed benefits income was generated for local people which is an increase of 23% compared to last year. Since its inception in November 2000, over £6 million in benefit income has been achieved. Harlesden was the busiest service followed by Willesden. The most popular claims were Disability Living Allowance 23%, Attendance Allowance 13% and Income Support 10%. The over 60 year old age group made most use of the service followed by the over 50's. Ethnicity was evenly represented. 33% of customers were housing tenants, 29% were owner occupiers and 14% were Housing Association tenants.

3.7.2 The service has been affected by staff turnover and reliance upon temporary agency staff has caused problems this year. Permanent staff should be recruited next year.

3.8 Equalities

3.8.1 More accurate customer ethnicity reports enabled better comparisons to 2001 census information and workforce statistics. Black category customers make

good use of the service and take up figures exactly reflect the borough 'black' population. White & Asian category customers make less use of the service compared to the borough population figures and customer take up this year is consistent with last years figures. Comparing staffing representation to customer take up, staff ethnicity broadly reflects customer demand. Good progress has been made against DDA access requirements.

3.8.2 Working in partnership with both service areas and external organisations has continued especially regarding the new Brent Housing Partnership ALMO arrangement and BFS Revenues & Benefits customer service which have remained key priorities. One Stop Shop involvement has proved critical to the success of both these major projects.

3.8.3 Considerable progress has been made regarding raising customer service standards and awareness across the Council as a whole in line with Corporate Customer Service Steering Group improvement plans.

3.9 Conclusions

3.9.1 Key priorities for the One Stop Shop during the next year are: maintaining service standards, improving service effectiveness and efficiency by reducing repeat customer contact, reducing sickness absence, preparing and submitting our 4th Charter Mark application by September 2004, strengthening the quality and content of our management information through the effective use of our Customer Relationship Management E-shop system, completing the management re-organisation to increase management capacity to deliver on service objectives and development, improving the Revenues & Benefits call centre telephone performance and general R&B customer service and helping to raise customer service standards across the organisation

4.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

5.0 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications.

6.0 Diversity Implications

The service aims to ensure that frontline staff represent the diverse community served. Also, that customers are treated as individuals and diverse special needs are sensitively identified and wherever possible catered for to ensure maximum access to the service and consistent and fair treatment.

Background Papers

Quarterly performance reports 02/03

Contact Officers

Sandra Carson
Patricia McFarlane