



**Executive**  
11<sup>th</sup> December 2006

**Report from the Director of  
Housing and Community Care**

For Information

Wards Affected:  
ALL

**One Stop Service Annual Performance Report  
April 2005-March 2006**

Forward Plan Ref: HCC-06/07-17

**1. Summary**

- 1.1. This report gives a summary of the Annual Performance of the One Stop Service (OSS) in the period April 2005 to March 2006. It outlines key performance issues and trends and sets out the actions that the Service will be undertaking during 2006-7.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. Members are asked to note the report

**3. Detail - Overview of the One Stop Service**

- 3.1. The One Stop Service organisation consists of:
- Six Local Offices (formerly known as One Stop Shops). This includes a small Welfare Benefits take-up team
  - The Telephones and On-line service (formerly known as the Contact Centre).
  - A support team responsible for overall management, local customer service standards, quality assurance, performance monitoring, financial control, personnel admin and IT.
- 3.2. The service has a staffing establishment of 157 staff located across six Council buildings. This includes an additional ten staff that joined the One Stop Service when it took over responsibility for the Revenues and Benefits front-office at Brent House and a further seven posts that were created through Department of Work and Pensions funding.

- 3.3. Brent Council was the first London Borough to set up one-stop shop Local Offices and over the past decade has won 7 major external awards in addition to 4 consecutive Charter Marks. However, as discussed later, changes will be needed if service levels are to be maintained in the face of tight financial pressures and changes in demand.
- 3.4. Each Local Office provides a drop-in service whereby members of the public can call in at any time during opening hours with any enquiry, request for service or complaint relating to the Council's services.
- 3.5. Brent Council was also one of the first London boroughs to establish a call centre. The Telephones and On-Line Service now operates from a 60-seat call centre in Brent House. It is open from 8.00 AM to 8.00 PM each weekday 9.00 AM to 1.00 PM on Saturdays. During 2005-6 it received 736,000 telephone calls and over 11,000 on-line or emailed enquiries. It also dealt with 200 enquiries that came in by letter.
- 3.6. It has a modern Automatic Call Distribution system (ACD) which routes calls to the appropriate members of staff and which provides call monitoring and management reporting facilities. It includes a dedicated Gujarati line, although the number of calls to this has dropped substantially to only 300 a year and its future is subject to review.
- 3.7. Both the Local Offices and the Telephones and On-Line Service have on-line access to all key Council systems to enable effective enquiry handling, service request processing and to provide accurate and timely customer information.
- 3.8. The Assistant Director, Customer Service, Housing & Community Care chairs the Council's Customer Service Steering Group, responsible for developing and implementing best practice in customer services throughout the Council. She also chairs the Customer Services for London Group, whose aim is to encourage good customer service practice across the London Boroughs.
- 3.9. The One Stop Service worked with the following partners:
- Deaf Customer Surgeries. The aim of these surgeries was to improve access for the deaf community by providing a British Sign Language interpreter at each local office. However, take-up was very poor and only seven people were assisted during the year. Consequently, a new sign video facility has been launched at Brent House and Willesden. There is also a link to Adults Social Services at London Road. This operates via an internet link between the local office and a signer who is based at Significant's (the service provider's) office.
  - Victim Support surgeries were held to improve access to support services for victims of crime. Surgeries were held weekly at Kilburn and monthly at the Town Hall. In total the Kilburn office assisted 20 people and the Town Hall assisted 6 people.
  - The OSS hosted weekly DWP surgeries at the Kingsbury location. Pensioners were given advice on State Retirement Pensions and other benefits. The surgeries were well attended and over 20 pensioners were assisted each month.

#### **4. Detail – Service Demand and Trends**

##### **4.1. Overall Service**

- 4.2. The One Stop Service remained a very busy and in demand service in a year when organisational changes had a significant impact upon it. Despite the challenges faced, the service maintained a high level of customer satisfaction and is the central focus of the council's excellence in customer service delivery.
- 4.3. Demand increased, mainly as a result of the demand transferred when the Revenues and Benefits counters were integrated with those of the One Stop Service in Brent House. Demand for the Telephone and on-Line service continued to increase. The underlying trend is a shift from face-to-face contact to telephone and on-line access.
- 4.4. The time to process enquiries has been increasing over the last five years. This is principally due to frontline now staff having greater empowerment to deal with complex enquiries involving eg Housing Benefits and Council Tax enquiries which were previously dealt with in the 'back office'.
- 4.5. The implementation of the document desk at Brent House has shown that queues can be managed better by filtering document related enquires to a dedicated area. This approach will be implemented in the largest Local Offices.
- 4.6. Significant improvement was made in telephone performance with more answered calls and a reduced number of abandoned and engaged calls, although the targets set had not yet been achieved.
- 4.7. The number of justifiable complaints dropped by 28%, although the complaints received rose by 10%. Complaints as a proportion of enquiries remain low at 0.03%.
- 4.8. The OSS maintained an effective and influential presence for corporate and London-wide customer services by chairing the Customer Services Steering Group and the Customer Services for London Group.
- 4.9. Two changes took place in 2004-5 which added significantly to the numbers of enquiries handled by the Local Offices and Telephone and On-line Service. These were:
- In November 2004, the document desk function at Brent House was transferred to OSS. The first full year of recording 2005-06 produced an additional demand of 11,600 enquiries.
  - In September 2005, following the integration of the Generic and Revenues and Benefits main counters at Brent House an additional demand of 12,300 was recorded. Demand has increased at Brent House by 30% in the 7 months to 31st March 2006.
- 4.10. Other factors affecting demand were:
- As a result of OSS and R&B customer service integration, Saturday morning demand transferred and a revised, wider service is now available at Brent House.

- Continuing major works programme by BHP resulting in a decrease in demand through less general repairs enquiries and complaints due to property upgrades.

4.11. The underlying demand for face-to-face contact in the Local Offices declined slightly, although this was heavily outweighed by the increases resulting from the additional workload that was transferred to the One Stop Service.

4.12. The demand for telephone and on-line access increased significantly, telephone demand increasing by 5.7% and email/on-lines increasing by 39%, albeit from a low base.

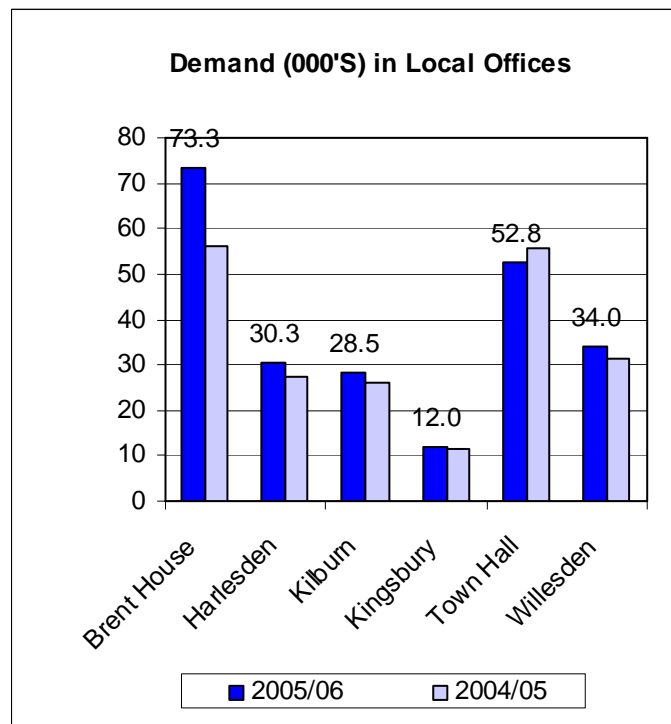
4.13. **Local Office Demand**

4.14. The Chart overleaf shows the demand recorded at each of the Local Offices. Demand consist of:

- Reception enquiries. These represent 70% of the demand by volume. They are either straightforward requests for information or are to present documents and obtain a receipt.
- The main Counter which deals with the remaining (more complex) enquiries and requests for service.

4.15. As can be seen, demand at Brent House increased by 30%. This was largely as a result of the Revenues and Benefits counter in Brent House being integrated with the Local Office.

4.16. Brent House operates a separate documents desk to help reduce the waiting times at the main reception counter for customers with quick enquiries. This has proved successful and took over 30% of the Brent House reception desk enquiries. As a result, document desks will also be installed at the Town Hall and Harlesden locations in 2006-7.

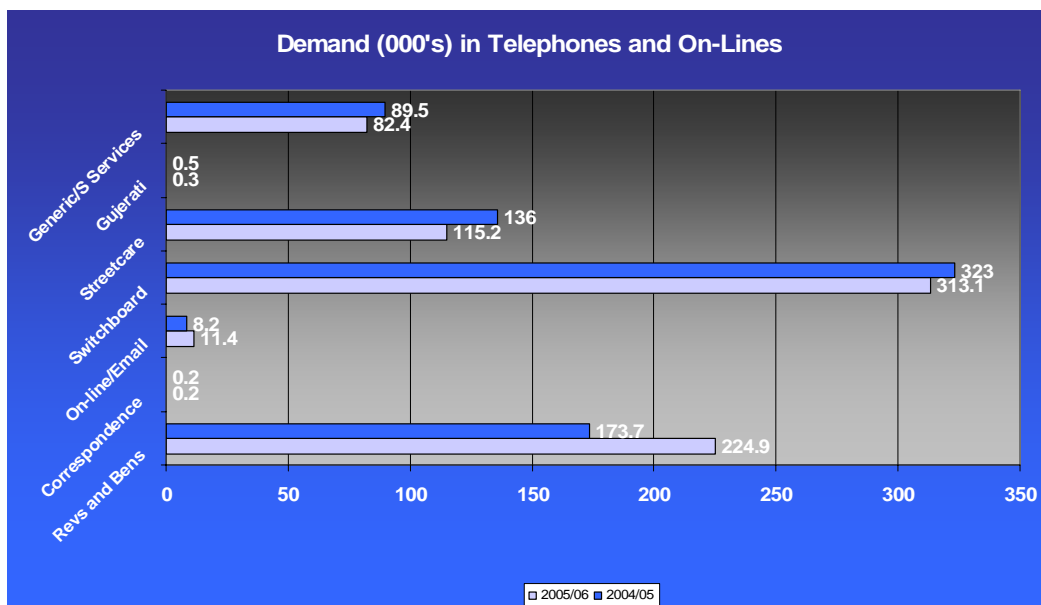


4.17. The Table below shows the top five enquiry types for the Local Offices during 2005-6:

Reception – Information Requests		Main Counter – Service Requests	
Enquiry Type	% of Reception Enquiries	Enquiry Type	% of Main Counter Enquiries
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit	37%	Housing and Council Tax Benefit	57%
General Enquiries	13%	Council Tax	18%
Council Tax	9%	Brent Housing Partnership	9%
Housing	10%	Environment & Culture	7%
Brent Housing Partnership	5%	Adult Care	3%
<b>Total Top 5</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>Total Top 5</b>	<b>94%</b>

4.18. **Telephone and On-Line Service Demand**

4.19. The chart below shows the demand for each of the services within the contact centre.

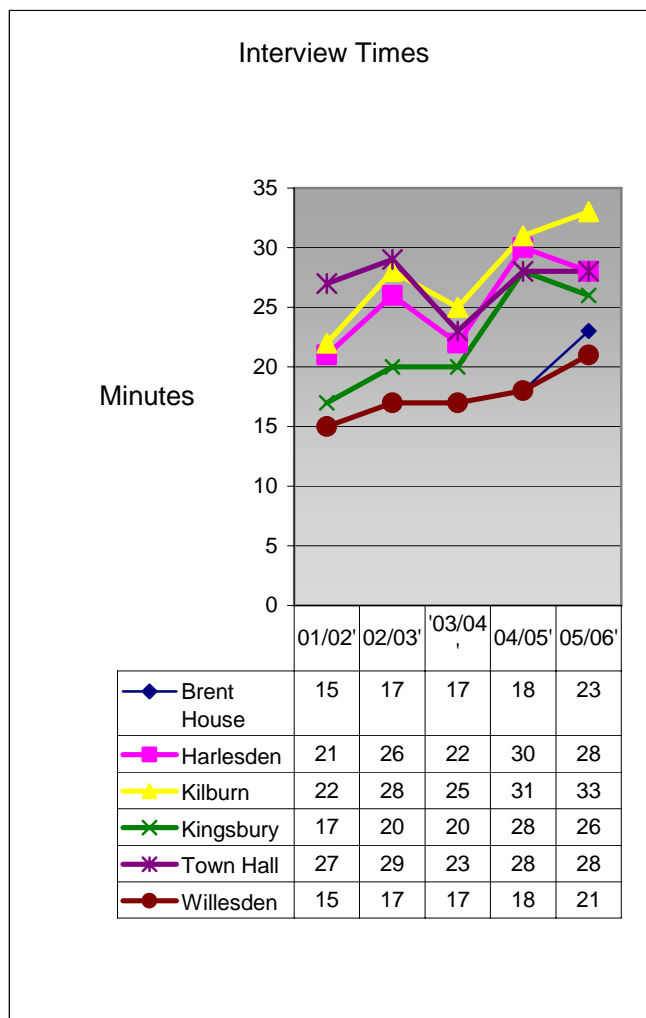
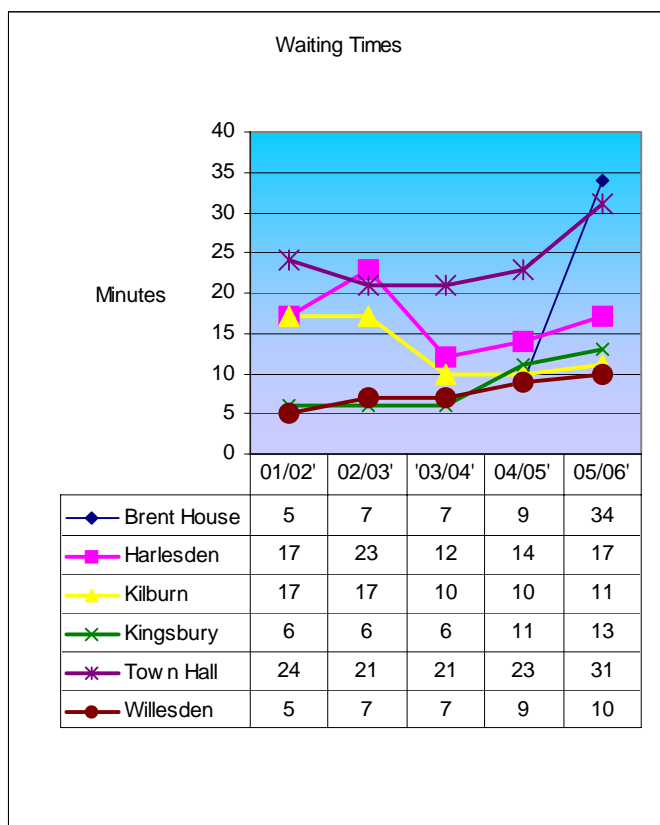


- 4.20. Overall, the number of calls increased. This was due to an increase in Revenues and Benefits calls - other areas saw a slight reduction in calls during the normal working day, possibly as a result of the growing and more comprehensive website service offered by the council and marginal increase in extended hours demand.
- 4.21. Although a small percentage of the total, on-line and email enquiries continued to grow as a popular method of contact and increased by 39%.
- 4.22. Contact by correspondence was unchanged after a sharp decline in previous years.
- 4.23. The Gujarati line is staffed to take calls as opposed to recording messages but the demand for this line has reduced 40% from 500 to 300 in the last year. Such a large reduction if continued into the next year will require a review of the existing arrangements.
- 4.24. Included in the above are calls during the extended hours (from 5.00 PM to 8.00 PM) In 2005-6 these totalled:
- 7,200 for StreetCare (increased from 5,900 in 2004-5)
  - 4,700 for the Generic line (no change from 2004-5)
  - No calls for Cashiers as this line was replaced by an automated payment service in March 2005, (There had been 4,400 calls in 2004-5)

## **5. Detail - Performance**

### **5.1. Local office Main Counter Waiting and Interview times**

- 5.2. The two charts below show the trend in waiting times and interview times in each of the Local Offices since 2001-2. As can be seen, after a general improvement until 2003-4, the position in recent years has declined. As discussed below, there are some special factors that have contributed to this, although some is undoubtedly due to pressures to reduce costs and hence staffing levels.



- 5.3. Waiting times at Brent House rose significantly following the integration of the Revenues and Benefits front desks which operated with temporary, transitional operational arrangements. This is because the average waiting time for the dedicated Revenues and Benefits desk was 59 minutes, which is significantly more than that for the other desks.
- 5.4. Waiting times at the Town Hall rose from 23 minutes in 2004-5 to 31 minutes in 2005-6. As a result two new interview desks were installed at the Town Hall in February 2006 and are expected to improve performance in 2006-7.
- 5.5. The time to process enquiries has been increasing over the last five years. This is principally due to frontline staff empowerment to deal with the increasingly complex enquiries involving Benefits and Council Tax enquiries supporting greater back office efficiency.
- 5.6. **Local Office Performance Indicators**
- 5.7. As can be seen from the Table below, all Local Office performance targets, with the exception of waiting times at Brent House, are being equalled or bettered. However, performance has declined compared with the previous year. In part, this reflects the increase in numbers of enquiries and pressures on staff and budgets.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Waiting Times	80% seen within 20 minutes	80%	84%	On target
Waiting Times BH only	*30 minutes	34 minutes	9 minutes	4 minutes worse than target
Interview Times	30 minutes	26 minutes	27 minutes	4 minutes better than target
Customers completing comment cards	20%	24.9%	31.6%	4.9% better than target
Customer Satisfaction-comment cards – local offices	95%	98.5	98.8%	3.5% better than target
Customer Satisfaction-Surveys – local offices	95%	99%	97%	4% better than target

\*revised from 20 to 30 minutes in February 2006

#### 5.8. Telephone and On-Line Service Performance Indicators

5.9. The Table below shows the performance targets for the Telephone and On-line service over the past two years.

<b>Indicator/Team</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>2005/2006</b>	<b>2004/2005</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Enquiry Line</b>				
Generic & Social Services	80% answered by officer within 15 secs	73%	71%	7% below target
StreetCare	75% answered by officer within 15 secs	74%	60%	1% below target
Switchboard	95% answered by officer within 15 seconds	97%	97%	3% better than target
Extended Hours	80% answered by officer within 15 seconds	70%	65.5%	10% below target
Gujarati	n/a	59%	100%	n/a
On-line and email enquiries	100% within 1 working day	87%	57%	13% below target



Indicator/Team	Standard	2005/2006	2004/2005	Comments
<b>Enquiry Line</b>				
Housing Benefits	70% answered by officer within 15 seconds	50%	21%	20% below target
Council Tax	70% answered by officer within 15 seconds	48%	20%	22% below target
<b>Customer Satisfaction Survey</b>				
Generic & Social Services	95% either satisfied or very satisfied	94%**	95%	Considered on target, allowing for the small sample size
StreetCare	95% either satisfied or very satisfied	94%*	78%	

\* based on 42 interviews, \*\*based on 33 interviews

- 5.10. Overall, customer satisfaction targets were met, the number of calls answered increased by 0.5%, while abandoned and engaged calls reduced over the year.
- 5.11. The Switchboard exceeded its speed of response target of 95% by 2%, although other areas did not achieve the set target because staffing shortages and temporary cover hindered performance. However, there were significant improvements compared to the previous 12 months.
- 5.12. All emails to the Telephone/On-line Service get an automated acknowledgement. The One Stop Service aims to provide the customers with a response within 24 hours of receipt.
- 5.13. The volume of emails continued to rise rapidly and the response rate within target improved by 30% to 87%. In the early part of 2005-2006 there was a backlog of emails as the method of processing them proved to be too slow. A review was carried out and a new software package (Eptica) was installed in May 2006. This is expected to enable email and on-line targets to be met in 2006-7.
- 5.14. **Welfare Benefits Take-up**
- 5.15. The Welfare Benefits service was re-launched on 1st April 2005 after being suspended from 1st September 2004 to 31st March 2005 due to difficulties in retaining temporary staff. It booked a total of 671 appointments for 2005/2006. An estimated total benefit of £423,000 was obtained.
- 5.16. Since the Welfare Benefits initiative began in November 2000 it is estimated that over £6.5million has been raised in benefits.

## 5.17. **Complaints**

5.18. As shown in the Table below, the number of complaints increased by 10% during 2005-6. However, this still represents only 0.03% of all enquiries.

	<b>2004-2005</b>	<b>2005-2006</b>
Stage one complaints	233	247
Stage two complaints	4	12
Stage three complaints	0	1
<b>Total received in the year</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>260</b>

5.19. Key points are:

- Only 53% had some justification compared with 81% last year. In other words, the number of justifiable complaints dropped from 192 to 138
- The target response time for Stage 1 complaints is 15 working days, for Stage 2 it is 20 working days and for Stage 3 it is 30 working days. 86% of the responses from Local Offices and 89% of the responses from the Telephones and On-line Service were within these targets.
- 74% of the complaints received related to Revenues and Benefits. Most responses to complaints that were outside target times related to Council Tax and Housing Benefit cases as these often require an in-depth investigation.

## 6. **Financial Implications**

6.1. There are no direct financial implications. However, it should be noted that:

- The full year budget for the One Stop Service in 2005/2006 was £5.6m including a £131k grant funding from the DWP.
- The Revenue & Benefits Service Integration took effect from September 2005 and a part year budget of £227k was transferred.
- At 31 March 2006 the One Stop Service reported a break even position. There was a surplus of £6k on the DWP grant funding and this was carried forward into 2006/2007 as an earmarked reserve.
- During 2005/2006 a project to refurbish the Local office in Brent House incurred expenditure of £337k met by Capital funding.
- Capital funding of £50k was also provided to refurbish the Harlesden Local office which was brought forward into 2006/07.

## 7. **Legal Implications**

7.1. There are no direct legal implications from this report

## **8. Diversity Implications**

8.1. There are no direct diversity implications from this report.

## **9. Staffing and Accommodation Implications**

9.1. There are no direct staffing or accommodation implications from this report. However, it should be noted that:

- Staff turnover for the 157 staff employed in the service averaged 12.9% during 2005/06 which is an increase from the 10.9% during 2004/05. There were nine maternity leave absences during 2005/06, an increase of five on the previous year.
- On average it takes around three months, from closing date for applications to the date an employee commences employment. It then takes a further two to three months for comprehensive training before a customer service officer is fully operational. This time (5 months), and absences for other reasons, needs to be covered by agency staff to maintain service. This in turn impacts on performance.
- Average sickness absence has increased slightly from the previous year from 9.0 to 10.3 days sick per person per annum, compared with a target of 10 days or less.

## **10. Priorities for 2006/7:**

- The Service Plan priorities for 2006/2007 include the following key areas for targeted improvement activity:
- Customer Waiting Times. These need to be improved at Brent House, Town Hall, Harlesden and Kilburn.
- Revenue & Benefit Telephone Performance. One of the key issues is the lack of resources to cope with the volume of calls presented. The emphasis on service quality and increased empowerment for frontline staff, has meant that call durations have increased considerably. This affects our call answer rates and therefore processes and use of technology need to be reviewed.
- Call Answering Targets. The Council's target of 100% of calls answered by a person within 15 seconds is not achievable with current staffing levels. A more realistic target needs to be set, particularly as the ACD (Automatic Call Distribution) system enables all calls to be answered almost immediately with a message advising customers how long they may have to wait before an officer can take their call. Further pilots will take place during 2006/07 to assess how the use of communications technology can improve performance.
- Customer Consultation. Whilst the OSS obtains feedback from comment cards and surveys, there is a gap in the information obtained through consultation. Consequently, the OSS will proactively obtain feedback from internal and external customers to help shape service priorities.

- Working to develop and implement recommendations for the future of customer contact to enable the Council to maintain its high standard of customer services while meeting budgetary constraints and the Gershon agenda.
- Raise awareness of customer self-service facilities and options.
- Upgrading the Automatic Call Distribution System to make more efficient use of staffing resources and facilitate customer self-service.
- Assess resources and capacity available to undertake process review work to facilitate enquiry resolution definition and measurement.
- Working with BHP to implement improvements from the 2005 Best Value Service Review.
- Leading Corporate Customer Services improvement through the Customer Services Steering Group, so helping to help raise customer service standards across the organisation.
- Selection of new or upgrade Customer Relationship Management System in partnership with Information Technology.
- Equalities and Diversity. Improving data collection, analysis, monitoring and consultation to better inform service planning.
- Maintain the Welfare Benefits take up service and increasing income generation.
- Review OSS Management structure and capacity in line with departmental restructure to address resource and performance demands and issues.

## **11. Background Papers**

- 11.1. This report is a summary of the One Stop Service Annual Performance Report for April 2005 to March 2006.

## **12. Contact Officers**

- 12.1. Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact:

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