

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Resources, Performance And Development Overview And Scrutiny Committee

Date of Committee 19th September 2006

Report Title Warwickshire County Council Customer Service Centre and Warwickshire Direct - Kenilworth

Summary Earlier this year, Members were able to visit the Customer Service Centre in Shire Hall and Warwickshire Direct - Kenilworth. This report summarises the findings of the two visits and makes a number of recommendations on ways in which the service provided might be enhanced further.

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? No.

Background papers None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s) Applies to all Members of the Committee
- Other Elected Members
- Cabinet Member Councillor Peter Fowler
- Chief Executive
- Legal Sarah Duxbury
- Finance

- Other Chief Officers David Carter
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION NO

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee Further report to O&S in 12 months time
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Agenda No

Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 19th September 2006.

Warwickshire County Council Customer Service Centre and Warwickshire Direct - Kenilworth

Report of the Chair of Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Recommendation

That Members of the Committee note the contents of this report and endorse the recommendations made within it.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 9th May 2006 the County Council agreed the remits for its committees. It was agreed that the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be responsible for, amongst other things, Customer Service and Access. At its meeting of 6th June 2006 this committee considered a report from the Strategic Director for Performance and Development concerning the development of customer access for the County Council. In order to better appreciate this service it was suggested that elected Members should visit the Customer Service Centre and Warwickshire Direct, the one stop shop in Kenilworth. On the morning of 30th June 2006, Councillors Booth, Atkinson and Hicks visited these two locations. They were joined by Councillor Fowler, the Cabinet Portfolio holder for Performance and Development. Following the visits a short briefing session was held with officers from directorates that use the Customer Service Centre for processing at least some of their calls.

1.2 This report sets out, for the committee's information, the salient facts gathered during the site visits. Attached as an appendix are the comments provided from directorates regarding the Customer Service Centre and the way it has assisted them.

1.3 The site visits did not constitute an element of a major review of Customer Service and Access, rather they were intended as an evaluation of the progress being made in what is still a relatively new approach to service delivery for the County Council. Members may consider that a more substantial assessment of the impact of this new approach will be desirable in the future but in the meantime the opportunity is being taken here to make a number of recommendations for

improvements to the service. Members are asked to comment on the report and consider for endorsement the recommendations contained therein.

2.0 Customer Service Centre

The following bullet points are the key facts revealed during the site visits. These are included here so that Members of the committee will have a common understanding and appreciation of the services provided before consideration of the recommendations.

- The Customer Service Centre (CSC) has 31 (full time equivalent) staff. On the day of the visit there were 16 operatives on duty. Additional staff would have been working on shifts and arriving later in the day.
- In the same room as the CSC is the County Council switchboard. This operates separately to the CSC but directs calls to it. Over the long term the aspiration is to see a shift so that the majority of calls receive a response rather than being handed off to the back office. Effectively it would, therefore, become a single organisation.
- Staff turnover is quite low compared to some commercial call centres. This may be due in part to the nature of the work, which offers a degree of variety. Where staff have left this has in some instances been because, having developed an interest in a County Council service, they have moved over to that service. Those moving externally have been a career choice/promotion.
- The hours operated by the CSC are 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 4pm on Saturday
- When the CSC is closed, callers are not merely given a message to that effect. For example, people with social care issues, will if the CSC is closed, be informed via a recording of where else they may get emergency assistance if required. In some instances there is the opportunity to leave a message, the approach very much depends on the service's preference.
- The software used by the CSC has been developed by Northgate for the customer relationship management tool and MacFarlane for the telephony.
- Performance management plays a key role in the CSC. Every call is monitored. It is expected that calls will be answered within 20 seconds and that no caller should hang up because they have had to wait. Screens are placed at either end of the room displaying information such as the number of calls being handled, calls waiting, calls that have been missed and calls that have waited more than the target time. It was noted that figures for the latter two were commendably low. Callers are provided with the opportunity to leave a message rather than wait which will hold their place in the queue.
- Each call is tailored to meet the needs of the customer. The software allows different recorded messages to be used depending on the nature of the call.

- Staff fall into two categories Admin. Support Assistants (ASAs) and Customer Service Advisors (CSAs). ASAs are on scale 1/2 whilst CSAs are on scale 3/4. ASAs work in the evening following up on the work that has come in during the day. An example of this is the processing of applications for blue disabled parking badges.
- CSAs undergo 2 months of training. This is carried out on a one to one basis. Individuals are trained to go live on a service for a period of time. Once they are comfortable with that service the next module of training is delivered. It can be seen, therefore why it is important to retain staff once they are trained.
- Each operator has a skills set. These skills are recorded on the telephony system so that in filtering a call the operator can determine who best to send the call to.
- Recruitment is a problem. Given the nature of the job and the complexity and sensitivity of the issues being handled it is clearly important to ensure that the right calibre of staff are recruited.
- The recruitment process commences with a telephone interview. The candidate who is successful at that stage then undertakes a role play exercise followed by the preparation and sending of a memorandum, an in-tray exercise and a face to face interview.
- The CSC was piloted in 2002. At the time of its opening it had 12 desks. Its services were confined largely to “Vintage”, a limited number of libraries, care assessments for some districts and disabled parking badges for one area.
- The next major development scheduled is the opening of the CSC at Kings House, Bedworth. It is anticipated that recruitment at Kings House will be easier than in Warwick.
- On 23rd May 2006 the CSC began handling calls for Highways. Prior to this, calls went direct to Highways HQ at Budbrooke. This service is still bedding in. Once all parties have a clearer understanding of demand for the service it will be process mapped and re-engineered.
- Since taking over responsibility for Highways calls the CSC has witnessed a 30% increase in calls. This may be due to the fact that Budbrooke’s limited line capacity meant that calls were being lost. Additionally the old system could involve duplication and unnecessary delay and expense. For example, a complaint regarding a highway would be received by the switchboard, and then forwarded on to Budbrooke. A message would be taken, put on a form and then forwarded electronically on to the relevant area office. The area office would then print the form out and act upon it. Under the evolving new system it is expected that a CSA will take the call and process it for action almost at the press of a button.
- Demand at the CSC fluctuates throughout the day and week. Monday morning is the busiest time with Tuesdays after bank holidays also very busy. Pilots have been undertaken to operate the CSC on bank holidays over the

Christmas holiday. Limited services were offered due to a lack of staff in the back office and service specific targets/deadlines.

- Some calls are too complex for the CSC to handle. In these instances they are redirected to the appropriate officer in the directorate. The required point of contact resolution is 80% of calls.
- People calling libraries believe that they are speaking to a member of staff in an actual library. In reality they are speaking to a CSA. The 13 libraries including the principal libraries in the county are currently covered by this arrangement. CSAs handle a variety of calls relating to general book and information enquiries. At present they do not handle reservations or PC bookings. This is being looked into. Bookings such as these are being web-enabled. This means that a CSA can access this facility just as a member of the public can.
- For reasons of confidentiality or due to the complexity of the issues involved, some services have been wary about using the CSC. Adult Care was initially cautious to see CSAs dealing with clients. However, experience has showed that the CSC can manage this.
- Consideration is being given to the CSC's ability to take calls in the event of a major emergency.
- One of the issues that the CSC has had to address is when there is uncertainty where responsibility lies. For example, discharges from hospital. In one instance a hospital wanted to discharge a patient into the community. It would only do so when it was satisfied that social services were in a position to provide a suitable level of care for the individual at home. This was referred to Adult, Health and Community Services as the individual requiring support was in the community, the initial position was that the care should be provided by the hospital. However this was not the case.

3.0 Warwickshire Direct – Kenilworth and Library

- The name “Warwickshire Direct” was arrived at following consultation with the Citizen’s Panel. More work is being done on the branding with the Communications Team.
- The colours used were selected carefully so as not to offend.
- The word “welcome” features prominently.
- It was noted that nowhere on the front of Shire Hall does it say “Warwickshire County Council”.
- The Warwickshire Direct project was funded by Warwick District Council and Warwickshire County Council.

- Staff come from WDC and WCC. To the public there is no distinction between them.
- A great deal of training has been done to get all staff up to the required level of knowledge. Training on all Warwick District Council services is complete whilst training on Warwickshire County Council services is still evolving as services are phased in.
- Comments were made about the signage within the library. It was noted the signs over the main desk would benefit from being repositioned to make it clear where clients should go. In addition, a promotional screen mounted on the ceiling was not conspicuous enough, being well out of people's eye line.
- Although users of the library and the one stop shop facility use the same queue it was rare to find that this caused any problems.
- A "drop box" was sited close to the results of the customer survey. Concern was raised that people might not realise that they could drop their books in there. It was suggested that the word "drop box" should be changed to make its purpose clearer.
- It was also noted that the visitor might feel that they had merely entered a library rather than somewhere they could access other services.
- WDC services handled include Council Tax, housing benefits, home choice, lettings, special waste collections, pest control, recycling and planning. In the case of the latter, people can only view plans.
- WCC services are handled in much the same way as in the CSC. Extensive use is made of web-based forms especially where services available on Northgate back at the CSC, are not available at Kenilworth.
- No major cash payments are made. Council Tax and housing rents can be paid through the Post Office across the road so there is no need to introduce this additional complication. Payments for planning applications are received
- A pensions advice service used to be provided on Thursday but this has stopped.
- Citizens' Advice Bureau will shortly be holding surgeries on Thursdays.
- One very positive outcome is that the facility is open for five extra hours per week at no extra cost to the authority.
- Bus passes are available from the facility and to date 1500 have been issued.
- The facility is supported by two separate broadband links. Whilst the majority of computers in the one stop shop utilise the County Council's broadband network, one computer dedicated to revenues and benefits and Council Tax is connected to Warwick District Council. This is because these (revenues and

benefits and Council Tax) are not yet web-enabled. It is anticipated that when they are included on the district council's web site the need for the second broadband link will cease.

4.0 Observations

- 4.1 At your meeting of 6th June the performance management framework (PMF) for the CSC and Warwickshire Direct was discussed. Members may recall that performance is assessed largely but not exclusively on a quantitative basis. There is evidence that the CSC and Warwickshire Direct approach are serving to improve peoples' quality of life. This is derived from customer satisfaction surveys and comparisons with other authorities' performance. However, Members may consider that some measure of value for money may be needed as well.
- 4.2 Members and officers acknowledged the benefits to all parties of a visit to the CSC. Not only did those working in the centre relish the opportunity to explain their work but officers and Members felt that by seeing the facility in operation they had a greater appreciation of the services available to the public.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Strategic Director for Performance and Development review the performance management arrangements for the CSC and Warwickshire Direct, retaining the quantitative and customer satisfaction elements whilst adding a dimension that takes account of value for money.
- 5.2 That the Strategic Director for Performance and Development be requested to produce annual reports to the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out performance against agreed targets and providing examples of ways in which the CSC has served to improve peoples' quality of life
- 5.3 That consideration be given to all new members of staff being afforded the opportunity to visit the CSC as part of their induction process.
- 5.4 Allied to 5.3 (above) that the Strategic Director for Performance and Development be requested to produce a leaflet for circulation to staff and Members which explains the work of the CSC and the way in which it can assist them and their customers.
- 5.5 That as part of the branding and marketing exercise currently being undertaken by the Performance and Development Directorate consideration be given to the production of a clear and prominent sign to be located on the front of Shire Hall proclaiming that it is the home of Warwickshire County Council.
- 5.6 That the Strategic Director for Performance and Development and his officers give consideration as to how the video screen mounted on the ceiling of

Warwickshire Direct could be relocated to a more prominent position in the eye line of people entering the facility.

5.7 That the receptacle in Warwickshire Direct - Kenilworth currently labelled as "drop box " be re-named to make it clear that it is intended for the return of books and other media loaned from the library.

5.8 That the signage displayed in Warwickshire Direct, Kenilworth be reviewed so as to a) eliminate the possibility of confusion arising over where clients should go for service and b) broadcast the services available to visitors other than those of a library

5.9 That the Strategic Director for Performance and Development gives consideration to the production of a leaflet promoting the services available to people at the Warwickshire Direct, Kenilworth. Such a leaflet being circulated to households in the Kenilworth area as an insert to "Warwickshire View".

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Members and officers involved with the site visits of 30th June considered that they were of mutual benefit. Members were impressed with the way the new customer access service is being developed and it is hoped that the recommendations above will be used to good effect, further enhancing the service.

COUNCILLOR DAVID BOOTH

Chair of Resources,
Performance and
Development Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Shire Hall
Warwick

18 July 2006

The following comments are those made by directorates that utilise the CSC. They are included to further enhance Members' understanding of the impact of the CSC on the services we provide.

A. County Highways

County Highways are the latest group to work with the Customer Service Centre (CSC), the telephone lines being switched over on the 24th May 2006. Prior to this a dedicated County Highways Customer Service Centre with a maximum of 4 staff had been running at WCC's Budbrooke office handling all the external calls received on the telephone lines diverted from the 5 Area Offices and the advertised County Highways contact number. Call details were entered into Public Enquiry Manager, the customer module of Exor's Highway Management Information System (HMIS) and thence electronically to the appropriate member of staff.

A Service Level Agreement for County Highways has been drafted and the details are currently being finalised so that the CSC can be an effective first point of response to customer contact where requests for information or service provision are made for Highways or Street Lighting services.

The CSC has set up a 4 person County Highways team running on the same lines as the former customer service centre in terms of how the contacts are recorded and the hours that the lines are open. This is to allow for an initial bedding in period so that direct statistical comparisons can be made. The next stage will be the integration of PEM/HMIS into the Northgate operating system used throughout the CSC. This will involve process mapping of all the different classifications of highway calls with the aim of being able to resolve the maximum number of calls at the first contact. It is intended that as well as the CSC having the information to answer queries, standard letters and application forms for various items will be issued directly.

Whilst it is still early in the relationship, it is encouraging to see the level of professionalism displayed by the CSC staff. The development of the service provided is seen as a vital part of Highway's plan to increase customer satisfaction.

Mervyn Hancox – Environment and Economy

B. Adult Services

The former Social services Department was one of the original departments to become part of the CSC and so had the advantage of being involved in its planning and development. The objectives from the partnership were:

- to achieve consistency in preliminary screening so that customers in the North of the county would receive the same response to a request for a service as those in the South and
- to enable the scarce resource of social workers and occupational therapists to be reserved for those tasks needing their skills. It was felt that other people, differently trained could make the initial decision about eligibility for services.

These objectives have largely been achieved. The only problem encountered concerns the difficulties that callers have in being able to get through to a Customer Service Advisor. It is a long time since it has been possible to provide the level of service desired.

When the Customer Service Centre opened for business in 2002, one of the first tasks it took over from the Community Teams was the issue of Disabled Persons Parking Badges. As with other services the transfer was incremental until the issue of all badges, including renewals, was transferred in 2005. Care Services Efficiency Delivery (part of the Department of Health) recently conducted research into efficiencies which might be made in the issue of these badges. Their report recommended the use of a Contact Centre and the processes introduced are in line with those recommended.

The other service provided by the Customer Service Centre is that of screening those who are referred for a service to ensure that they are eligible for the service they request. This is done by means of a computerised script which tells the Customer Service Advisor whether the person is eligible or not. If the person is eligible, the information is transferred to a computerised client record system and thence to the appropriate Community Team for action. For those who are not eligible, the Customer Services Advisor still inputs the information to the client record system but the request is not transferred to the team. The Customer Services Advisor will offer to send a copy of the assessment and will give the caller information about other agencies that might help.

The CSC also receives calls for other agencies, as people are not sure who provides which services. These people would have spoken to someone in the Community Team. Now these calls are processed by the CSC

The CSC also takes calls about people who are requesting either more help or a different kind of help. Again, the Customer Services Advisor takes information to establish the eligibility of the person and about the service requested and the changes in circumstances which have brought about the need for more help. This information is input to the client record system and, for those who are eligible for the help they request, the information goes to the Community Team. Quite often, the information provided by the CSC, when read in conjunction with information already available on the system, enables the worker in the team to implement the changes without further recourse to the referrer. As with new referrals, those who are not eligible for our services are given information about other agencies that might help.

The CSC is to be involved in providing access to the low level support services which are currently being developed for people who are not eligible for services from Adult Services.

One Stop Shops will help callers to determine their own eligibility for services by taking them through a script which will then go to the CSC for screening and further action.

Benefits

- Because all referrers are taken through the same initial assessment process, which is scripted, people needing a service, wherever they live, receive a consistent response.
- People who are not eligible for a service from Adult Services are consistently given information about other agencies which might be able to help them.
- People who are not eligible are offered the opportunity to be sent a copy of the assessment, which then tells them why they are not eligible.
- People who ring, mistakenly thinking that Adult Services provides the help they want, are given the correct number to call.
- Because Community Teams receive only requests for help for people who are eligible for services, they are able to process these requests more quickly.
- The process we have developed ensures that appropriate Governmental and Departmental targets are met.
- Different ways of accessing Adult, Health and Community Services are being developed. The involvement of the CSC ensures that consistent messages are given.

Barbara Walters – Adult, Health and Community Services

C. Library & Information Service

The Library and Information pilot went live in December 2002, dealing with calls routed direct to five libraries: Rugby, Bedworth, Water Orton, Lillington and Stratford. (One from each division to reflect on library bands) It is quite unusual for a CSC to start with library calls and it is thought that this was a first. Trading Standards and Social Services came on board after that.

The CSC now handle calls for 13 libraries, covering the following:

Item renewals
 Book enquiries?
 Enquiries about joining the library
 Internet access in libraries
 Details of items on loan
 Library opening times
 Other information about libraries

Accurate statistics are not yet available but it is known that the CSC currently handles around 9000 calls a month for the 13 libraries involved.

The service went mainly for tasks that would reduce duplication eg renewals. This has taken some of the pressure of local libraries enabling them to improve other services to customers. Some customers don't like it that they can't get through to their local library and there have been some isolated issues around the quality and staff knowledge of call handling.

The benefits for the service are as follows:

- Relieves pressure on frontline staff
- Enables staff to concentrate on developing the service

- Provides extended service-longer opening hours
- Trained and knowledgeable CSC staff give consistent excellent service
- Helps meet e-government targets

For the future, the LIS needs to ensure that a service level agreement is in place and that a staff member has responsibility to monitor this for the full benefits of the service to be realized. It is also important that the service takes ownership of service as the CSC is dealing with its customers. Finally there is a need to develop a business case for new services to be taken on board by the CSC.

Ayub Khan – Adult, Health and Community Services

D. Community Protection and Warwickshire Car Clear

Warwickshire Car Clear is a partnership project between Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service (WFRS), Warwickshire Police (WP) and the five Warwickshire District and Borough Councils. The project is the result of a successful bid to the ODPM (DCLG) Arson Control Forum, led by WFRS.

The three overarching aims of Warwickshire Car Clear are:

- To reduce the number of abandoned vehicles within Warwickshire
- To reduce the number of deliberate vehicle fires across Warwickshire
- To speed up the abandoned vehicle removal process and facilitate a unified process between the Districts and Boroughs

The project also incorporates a further partnership with a private sector removal company who for a substantially reduced fee remove any 'cleared' abandoned vehicle within an average of four hours from most locations within Warwickshire.

Background & History

Although the project went live on 14th June 2004, the WCC Customer Service Centre was involved in the development of the Car Clear process from early 2004. The Car Clear implementation team approached the CSC to see if it would be interested in becoming a delivery partner in the project as the benefits of using an established and professional team that could receive phone calls over longer operational hours than our 9-5 office hours were clear.

The CSC assigned a nominated a team leader who worked to develop a robust process for call operatives, source the Car Clear Hotline number, implement physical infrastructure and re-route calls after 8.00pm and before 8.00am to the WFRS Control Centre. This process additionally included developing the physical IT elements.

Service Delivery

The CSC receives and processes all calls to the 0800 16 99 00 hotline, from members of the public. Calls are then actioned and passed to either the relevant district/borough council or Warwickshire Police. Initially calls were followed up with

faxed information/instructions, but with the recent IT developments this is now automatically achieved via e-alerts.

For calls that relate to vehicles outside of Warwickshire, CSC team members have a list of numbers relating to the relevant agencies and callers are given this information.

WFRS and the Car Clear are delighted with the quality of service received and professionalism of the CSC team members. A nominated staff member attends all Car Clear stakeholder meetings and fully contributes towards the onward development of the project. The CSC also provides timely reports and staff are more than happy to source additional information as needed.

Project Development

Since the implementation of Car Clear, all initial processes have been reviewed and improved according to both partner and customer need. Recently an electronic form has been developed which is automatically e-mailed to the relevant agency/organisation. The service and ability to report an abandoned vehicle has been piloted in libraries and soon the technology will be available in the planned one-stop shops.

Benefits

- CSC has sufficient resources to answer calls within the WCC Customer service standards timescales.
- High quality of service.
- Consistency of approach.
- Project able to benefit from IT developments in the CSC.
- Contributes towards the WCC 'One Stop Shop' vision.
- Statistical, performance, trend analysis and quality of service monitoring is undertaken.
- Callers are often redirected quickly if they have contacted the number incorrectly as CSC staff have an abundance of information at hand which our staff may not have access to.
- CSC offers longer operational hours than our office hours.
- No breaks in CSC service, i.e. to accommodate breaks, annual leave, training days, multiple calls, etc.
- Professional input into the Car Clear process and service.

Success

Since its inception in June 2004 Warwickshire Car Clear has clearly made an impact on reducing Deliberate Vehicle Fires (DVF's) in Warwickshire.

There has been a 26% reduction in deliberate vehicle fires during the same period of the 2002-2003 baseline, which is above the 20% reduction set as the target for the project to reach by April 2006.

The Warwickshire Car Clear Hotline – 0800 16 999 00 received over 4,028 calls in its first two operational years (June 2004-June2006), resulting in 1,784 reports of abandoned vehicles.

The project removed over 883 abandoned vehicles from hotspot areas and community safety risks.

Future Plans

The Directorate is looking to strengthen its links with the CSC and is looking at integrating some of its key front line services into the CSC. Some of these services require relocation from the current control facility when it migrates into a Regional Control Room in 2009 and will thus require the CSC to offer a 24/7 facility. These services include:

- Fire Safety Information
- Home Fire Safety Check Bookings
- Help on Call – Community Alarms

In addition to the migration of front of house enquiries detailed above we are also hoping to improve the technological systems 'back office' technology/communications between the CSC, WFRS, Warwickshire Police and the five District/Borough Councils. This will ensure that the customer receives the best service possible, that partners can track vehicles in the system and improve efficiency as vehicles will not be entered into the system twice.

Vikkii Chamberlain – Community Protection