

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting4th December 2008

1. Title of Item/Report

Access to Services Programme - Progress Report and Future Plans

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that described the progress that had been made to date with implementing phase 1 of the Council's Access to Services strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in November 2006. It also made recommendations for consolidation of contact centre performance and the future development of the programme.

In January 2006 Cabinet approved a vision for the way that the Council's customers might access its services in the future. The vision centred on making it as easy as possible for customers to request a service or obtain information about Council services. In November 2006 Cabinet approved a plan of action for turning the vision into reality. The plan included the transfer of enquiries and requests for service relating to several key front line services to a newly formed Customer Services team, the creation of a corporate contact centre, a multi-service centre at Thornaby and a pilot community access point in Tesco at Ingleby Barwick.

The Contact Centre opened at the end of January 2008. This new initiative saw the first point of contact services for Taxation, Benefits, Care for your Area, main switchboard and telephone payments coming together in a single, purpose built location equipped with modern technology. The range of services provided by the contact centre had since been extended to include Pupil & Student Support calls and a 6-month trial for Private Sector Housing calls.

To create the new Customer Services Team, staff were transferred from single-service customer facing teams spread across the Council and were trained so that they became multi-skilled and able to deal with calls for two or three different services. In addition 7 staff had completed NVQ level 3 in Customer Services, with a further 7 on schedule to complete NVQs by March 2009. The contact centre achieved ISO9001:2000 certification in June 2008 and the Customer First Stage 2 standard in October 2008.

Through part-time contracts and the use of a rota system, the contact centre had been able to deliver extended opening hours for key services and operate the Community Access Point in Ingleby Barwick Tesco at no additional costs.

The results of the recent IPSOS MORI survey indicated that the Access to Services and Customer First programmes had a positive effect on customers' satisfaction with the quality of service and customer care they received when they contacted the Council, with all measures at their highest level recorded. The satisfaction of service percentage details from 1998 to 2008 were presented within the report. The report also detailed performance for contact centre, call handling, service demand, speed of answer, abandoned calls, complaints and customer satisfaction.

Performance had improved since the contact centre had opened and this was attributed to:-

- * Staff becoming multi-skilled and able to deal with a greater range of queries;
- * Staff becoming more familiar with the technology;
- * Better use of part-time contracts to cover the busiest days and times;
- * Lower call volumes after the traditionally busy months of April and May for Taxation and Benefits.

It was explained that whilst the extended opening hours had generated positive feedback from customers that had used the service, it was indicated that it was taking time for customers to become accustomed to the new hours of operation. The situation would continue to be monitored and it was recommended that the decision about how/if the extended hours scheme continued, after the pilot ends in January 2009, be delegated to the Corporate Director Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities.

With regard the community access points it was reported that even with in-store publicity, change of opening hours, promotions in Stockton News and local Ingleby Barwick newsletters, take up of the service had been disappointing.

A review of the Ingleby Barwick service is currently being undertaken, which will inform a decision about a possible change in venue or change to a fortnightly or monthly service. This would include consultation with residents and ward councillors, and trying new methods of promotion.

It was recommended that Cabinet receive a further report in February 2009, detailing the results of the review of the trial Community Access

Point at Ingleby Barwick together with any recommendations for changes to the service arising from the review, and decisions be delegated about the setting up of any alternative trial Access Points, to the Corporate Director Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities.

With regard Access to Services Phase 2 it was reported that in October 2008 the contact centre began a six-month trial answering calls on behalf of the Private Sector Housing service. The trial had been successful and was expected to become a permanent arrangement when it concluded. The trial was introduced in response to a request for assistance at a time of staff shortage and fluctuating call volumes.

Cabinet was asked to approve the following list of services for review as potential services for phase 2 of the Access to Service Programme and to agree to delegate the decision as to which (if any) of these front-line services subsequently moved into the contact centre to the Corporate Director Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities and the appropriate Corporate Director and Cabinet Member for the service(s) concerned:

- Environmental
- Transport (e.g. Dial a Ride, Schools)
- Street Lighting
- Welfare Rights
- Electoral Services
- Car Parking
- Blue Badges
- Concessionary Fares
- Family Information Services
- Adult Education

It was proposed that the Stockton multi-service centre be the second centre to open. This would allow the amalgamation of the existing reception points dispersed around Municipal Buildings, 16 Church Road and Gloucester House into a single location in central Stockton. The "Workwise" project, due to recommend an outline business case to Cabinet in March 2009, include a review of the Council's office accommodation. The review had provisionally identified space, suitable for the multi-service centre that would become available on the ground floor of Municipal Buildings when Tristar Homes move out early in 2009. Tristar Homes had secured a lease for Stratford House from which they would deliver the choice based lettings scheme for allocation of empty properties, with an estate agent style service delivery that was easily accessed by customers. The Housing Options service which delivered the Council's homeless service was currently based at 16 Church Road,

but would be co-locating to Stratford House (rather than to the Stockton multi-service centre) to ensure a one-stop enhanced housing options service provision.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The contact centre performance information included in the report be noted.
2. The results of the extended opening-hours pilot be noted and the decision about the continuation of the scheme after the pilot ends in January 2009 be delegated to the Corporate Director Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities.
3. A further report be received in February 2009, detailing the results of the review of the trial Community Access Point at Ingleby Barwick together with any recommendations for changes to the service arising from the review, and the decisions about the setting up of any alternative trial Access Points be delegated to the Corporate Director Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities.
4. Subject to a successful completion of the 6 month trial period, the front line service for Private Sector Housing be delivered through the contact centre.
5. The list of services that have been identified, at paragraph 33 of the report be agreed for further analysis and review as potential services where the first-line of customer contact might be delivered through the contact centre as the Access to Services Programme develops in the future. The decision as to which (if any) of these front-line services subsequently move into the contact centre be delegated to the Corporate Director Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities and the appropriate Corporate Director and Cabinet Member for the service(s) concerned.
6. The second multi-service centre to be developed be the Stockton multi-service centre and subject to the outcome of the review of office accommodation tied to the Workwise project (which will report to Cabinet in March 2009), this be located within the ground floor of Municipal Buildings.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The Vision for Access to Services was approved in January 2006 with the objective of making it as easy as possible for the Council's customers to

access services through a range of different access channels. The recommendations represented a controlled approach to the extension of services delivered through the Access to Services programme and venues from which services were delivered, at the same time as allowing consolidation and enhancement of contact centre performance.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Nelson declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of the item as he was a Member of Tristar Homes Board.

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not Applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Not later than Midnight on Friday, 12th December 2008

Proper Officer
08 September 2008