

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting16th December 2010

1. Title of Item/Report

EIT Task & Finish Review of Customer Services & Taxation

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that presented the findings of the task and finish EIT Review of Customer Services and Taxation. The review had been conducted to identify options for efficiencies, improvement and transformation within Customer Services and Taxation, which is part of the Resources Service Grouping.

The task and finish approach required reviews to be carried out over a shorter timescale and consequently the review focussed on service provision and identification of options for future service delivery and configuration, in particular:

- Identification of smarter ways of working through use of new technology and re-allocation of duties within teams/merger of teams to enable a service re-organisation; and
- Review of the discretionary rate relief policy to ensure that relief was targeted in a way that meets Council priorities.

Customer Services and Taxation are essential services that were being delivered efficiently and effectively and recording high customer satisfaction. However there was scope for efficiencies that would contribute to the Council's value for money programme. Customer Services was a relatively new service area and still in transition as the Access to Services Programme was not yet fully implemented and legislative changes would impact in the future. A phased approach to the implementation of efficiencies in this area would allow new arrangements to settle and a full evaluation of resource requirements to take place in the medium term, thereby reducing the risk of an adverse effect on performance if changes were introduced too soon.

This review identified potential savings of minimum £157,700 per annum, spread over a phased implementation:

Following Cabinet approval, the next step would be to develop a detailed

implementation plan.

The scope of the review and the options for efficiency savings were considered by the Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee on 26th October and 7th December and they were supportive of the recommendations.

RESOLVED that:-

1. Customer Services and Taxation be re-structured, the new structures to be in place by 1st June 2011 with estimated savings of £133,000 per annum.
2. the consultation exercise around the above restructure also include proposals for standardising the disparate contractual arrangements for Customer Service Officers.
3. a further review of Customer Services and Cashiers be undertaken in 2012/2013 by which time new technologies will be embedded and the new Stockton multi-service centre will be fully operational, thus enabling a more accurate assessment of the staffing resources required to run the service.
4. the revisions to the discretionary rate relief policy described at paragraphs 7 and 8 of this report be adopted with effect from 2011/2012 with a projected saving of £24,700 per annum.
5. The introduction of a trial scheme to “re-cycle” cases that have been returned by the Council’s main bailiff to an alternative bailiff.
6. work continue to exploit the potential of new technology to improve customer service in particular, further work be undertaken to develop a business case with regard to the introduction of SMS texting for inward and outbound interactions between Customer Services and residents.
7. the monthly Community Access Points currently held at Tesco stores in Ingleby Barwick and Durham Road cease, and (subject to agreement with store managers) be replaced with occasional promotions for specific events.
8. a channel access strategy be develop and rolled out which will outline the broad principles for the ways in which the Council will deliver its services through a range of accessible contact channels that provide value for money and will include a channel migration strategy designed to encourage customers to use cheaper channels, where appropriate.

9. opportunities for partnering with other Councils continue to be explored and evaluated as the impact of changes to the Benefits Service on any possible future partnering arrangement become clearer.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The recommendations were in line with the principles of the EIT programme and will enable the service to develop and improve, maintain high performance and high customer satisfaction whilst achieving the efficiency savings target for the review, which is £154,500.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Beall declared a personal non prejudicial interest in the item entitled EIT Review – Customer Services and Taxation as he was associated with the Charity Eastern Ravens Trust.

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

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

Midnight on Friday 24 December 2010

Proper Officer
20 December 2010