

CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 12th September, 2011 at 6.00 p.m. in the Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors A. McClements (Chairman), N. England, A. Jhawar, J. Loveridge, K. Tomlinson; Scrutiny Co-optee L. Baker-Oliver.

Also Present: Councillors C. Smith, A. England; Corin Crane, Enterprise and Employment Manager; Andrew Meredith, Customer Services Manager; Peter Smith Head of Economy and Skills; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist; Tracy Clarke, Scrutiny Officer; Wendy Buckley, Democratic Services Support Officer.

CCSC-5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Cllrs K. Guy, T. Hope.

CCSC-6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CCSC-7 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was noted that Cllr Davies had offered to return to the Committee to discuss the Co- operative Council communication campaign should the members wish.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on the 25th July 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CCSC-8 FIRST POINT FOR BUSINESS

The Enterprise and Employment Manager presented the report on First Point for Business which highlighted a need for a single point of contact for businesses to effectively access Council services.

In the recent Local Economic Assessment, local businesses highlighted the need for a one stop approach.

The report detailed the range of services that the Council offers to local businesses and highlighted that although there are pockets of excellence the provision is patchy, with too many access points, differing service standards and opening hours. At any one time it is possible that 4 or 5 different departments will be dealing with the same business with no communication between them. There is a concern that this may

mean that businesses do not use the services available which may lead to unsatisfied customers or worse still a missed opportunity to help a business locate or expand in Telford.

Currently businesses contact services directly but it is felt that 80- 90% of the current calls could be dealt with at the first point of call or online. This would allow experienced officers more time to deal with in depth issues with businesses.

In order for the single point of contact to be a success it is essential that there is strong corporate leadership from a senior level to support the programme.

There are currently no financial resources available for the initial set up of the Customer Service Centre which will be reliant on the support of staff from other services such as Planning and Environmental Services to be trained as the first point of contact for businesses.

The aim of the programme is to enhance the Council's relationship with businesses by seeking to improve its customer service through:

- A commitment to user focus and citizen engagement
- Understanding our communities
- Clarity of Purpose
- Communication in appropriate ways; and
- Delivering change and improved outcomes.

To summarise the key points for consideration are

1. Identifying the need: In order to develop and deliver a customer service strategy for businesses, we need to consult with local businesses to identify their need and deliver an appropriate strategy.
2. Develop quick, focused customer service strategy for business: This needs to take a corporate approach, with strong leadership and that is owned and embedded across the organisation as a whole.
3. Develop a costed, timetabled proposal: This involves an assessment of our current resources in order to develop a cost neutral strategy with options to be considered such as shared ownership of the CRM system.

The committees experience of small businesses was that dealing with the council can be frustrating because it can be difficult to get a response back.

A number of questions were asked by the committee.

Q How will Businesses be consulted to get feedback on the Council?

A. There are currently 6 or 7 existing business networks that could be initially contacted and a further 700 – 800 businesses that could be contacted with follow up surveys or questionnaires.

Q. Is there an IT system that could be used as there are no resources available?

A. There are a number of IT systems used across the council. One Telford currently uses Evolutive which could be used but another system may be more appropriate.

An intelligent system such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) could resolve a significant number of enquiries at the first point of contact thus saving officer time. A number of options will be looked at but the final choice will be subject to the resources available and the feedback from businesses.

A further option is that this could be achieved through a staged approach.

Q. What will happen with the more detailed enquiries such as businesses with planning issues?

A. The contact centre will refer the enquiry to the relevant team and will monitor the response time to the enquiry.

Q. Are there any examples of best practice in other Authorities?

A. Research has been completed and the only examples of where a First Point Model has been used is for residential enquiries. There are currently no examples for business that have been found, so this could be the first of its kind.

Q. What kind of leadership do you envisage?

A. The programme needs to be lead from the top to ensure that this is successful.

This is about changing the culture and not just about implementing a new system.

Q. It is a good idea to have one point of contact but how far can we go with the existing resources?

A. At the moment a number of options are being considered. Once the businesses have been able to say what they want from the Council then a suitable model will be developed. This will involve completing a detailed costed plan.

Q. Is there a timetable for the programme?

A. The timetable would depend on what is needed to be delivered and there may be barriers to change. The programme could take 6 – 12 months to implement.

Q. It is important to develop a profile of businesses and their needs. What does the Local Assessment show?

A. Advantage West Midlands funded the research which highlighted 3 key issues

1. Access to Finance
2. Access to Council Services
3. Access to Procurement between Businesses

Q. Did any of the research identify the need for a one stop approach?

A. Businesses tend to call known officers who they deem to be reliable. At times it has become evident that not all of the relevant information is passed onto prospective businesses, which leads to confusion and lost opportunities. An example is that the social enterprise project in Donnington was not aware that they were eligible for 90% discount on their rates and were initially dissuaded from setting up.

Q. How will the Contact Centre be staffed as they will need to have a good understanding of business needs to ensure that they give out the correct information.

A. A potential model is that there could be six people in the Contact Centre who would be trained to deal with the majority of routine enquiries and refer complex calls to the appropriate officers and then review enquiries 48 hours later. The One Telford team are already business focussed but there would need to be an ongoing CPD programme to ensure that the team have adequate legislative and Best Practice knowledge.

Q. What job satisfaction will there be for the staff?

A. It is not advocated that the staff are just in a Call Centre as this leads to a high turnover of staff. The staff will be trained to meet with businesses and have face to face contact.

Q. Do you identify the business needs first or the level of funding? The problem could be that there is a chance that you raise the expectation of the businesses but then cannot meet these expectations.

A. There initially needs to be contact with the businesses and they need to be provided with a range of options to consider but this can be marketed as a programme that is being developed.

The model would need to make savings so we would need to consider the cost savings in officer's time.

Q. How will the programme be measured?

A. Within the project, milestones will be set and these will be monitored to check that they are achieved. The measures will need to be qualitative and at the moment they still need to be identified.

There are currently around 10,000 Business calls a year. With a CRM system we would be able to monitor how many calls are being referred to individual service teams and how many are dealt with at the first point of contact.

Q. Who will be responsible for overseeing the project?

A. The Governance structure will need to be developed. Furthermore, a strong project board will be needed to oversee the delivery of the project and the attainment of key milestones.

Q. The Enterprise and Employment Manager asked the members if they had any feedback on the Businesses they work for.

A. A member replied that having worked with a small business, the Council's reputation could be better. There had sometimes been confusion about services and also businesses are not always called back and updated.

The cabinet member said this was an early paper that needs to be considered and further expanded.

- All council departments need to be working together to make this a success and part of the key to this is internal conversation.
- Support needs to be provided to small and medium enterprises, potential investors and new start up who may currently find it difficult to find out who to contact.
- The paper also needs to address firms potentially relocating in Telford. The one point of contact is ideal because businesses can be assured that someone will get back to them.

Q. Where do start up businesses currently get their support from?

A. The funding has been cut from Advantage West Midlands and Business Link so One Telford is already getting enquiries from start ups.

At 7.10pm the Cabinet Member left the meeting.

The Members discussed the information that had been given and made a number of points.

- Concerns were initially raised that there is no benchmarking available from other authorities. This could also be considered a positive because this could give the Council an opportunity to lead the way.
- The cost and the resources required for the project.
- The programme leadership, which needs to be strong and have the support of each Council department.
- The performance measures which need to be decided. This includes both quantitative and qualitative measures.

It was agreed that further scrutiny was necessary and that the Committee would make recommendations to Cabinet that the Council sets up a single point of contact for businesses based on the First Point Model.

RESOLVED

- **That the Committee would make recommendations to Cabinet to set up a single point of contact for businesses to access Council services.**
- **That a report and wording for the recommendations would be drafted by the Scrutiny Team and circulated to the Committee for comment and approval.**

CCSC-9 Information requested at the previous meeting had been provided

There were no further questions but with regards to the Co-operative Council Communications Strategy the Chairman suggested that a clear guide for both Members and the Public would be beneficial.

Furthermore, it was noted that Members would have the opportunity to ask questions at the Scrutiny Management Board the following day.

CCSC-10 Forward Plan

The Committee noted the next meeting of 10th October is a Special Interest Meeting to discuss the Concessions in Leisure.

The meeting ended at 7.28p.m.

Chairman:

Date: