

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

FIRST POINT FOR BUSINESS

**REPORT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To make recommendations to the Council's Cabinet for the establishment of a single point of contact for businesses to Council services.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members recommend:

- 2.1 **That Cabinet endorses the principle of establishing a First Point single point of contact for businesses to access Council services.**
- 2.2 **That a further report with detailed costings will be brought to Cabinet for approval by summer 2012.**
- 2.3 **The development and implementation of the model is led at senior level within the organisation and with Cabinet members as an Early Adopter project.**

3. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 3.1 Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee, 12th September 2011.

4.0 SUMMARY

- 4.1 Members of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee identified the suggestion for the establishment of a single point of contact for businesses to Council services as an item for the 2011/12 work programme.
- 4.2 A Special Interest Meeting was held on 12th September for the Committee to consider a number of areas:
- What and how Council services are currently provided to businesses, how accessible they are and how the relationship with businesses is managed

- The views of businesses on accessing Council services
 - The benefits that a single point of contact service would bring to businesses, the wider economy and the Council.
 - The issues that would need to be considered in establishing a single point of contact
 - The resource implications
 - How the impact of a single point of contact model could be measured and monitored.
- 4.3 Members considered the “First Point for Business” report of the Enterprise and Employment Manager and heard the views of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Economic Development, the Head of Economy & Skills, the Enterprise and Employment Manager and the Customer & Registration Services Manager.
- 4.4 This report summarises the key issues discussed at the meeting, and the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations.

5.0 KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 It was acknowledged that the Council has a crucial role to play in providing efficient and effective services that support the needs of local companies and potential investors, and that enhance the reputation of the Council and the opportunity to work co-operatively with the business community.
- 5.2 The Council currently delivers a wide range of services to businesses, including collection of business taxes, economic development support, procurement opportunities, licensing and regulations services, trading standards, parking services, health & safety, food safety and environmental services.
- 5.3 The Local Economic Assessment had highlighted access to Council services as a key issue for businesses, and the need for a “one stop shop” whereby businesses would have a single point of contact and could be confident they would receive the services they need. There was further anecdotal information from businesses that supported this view, and indeed a member of the Committee made similar observations from their own employer.
- 5.4 Currently, businesses contact the relevant service area directly depending on what they need, which means they may be dealing with a number of service teams or individuals at any one time with inconsistent standards of customer service.
- 5.5 Client information is not shared between service areas so that one service team may be unaware of what another is doing and communication may be fragmented. This can be inconvenient and frustrating for the client, and result in a negative perception of the

Council as a customer-focused organisation. Furthermore, crucial information about a business' needs may fall through the net, and the opportunity to help a business expand or locate in Telford and Wrekin may be lost along with valuable market intelligence which the Council could use to help shape its offering. Data on the number of incoming enquiries, service performance and outcomes is not currently monitored, and the cost of lost opportunity is not projected (although it was acknowledged this was very difficult to measure).

- 5.6 The economic downturn had heightened the need for business support, especially as it was coupled with the withdrawal of funding for Business Link and other regionally funded support organisations. The need to support existing businesses, potential investors, the voluntary sector and start-up businesses was acknowledged.

6.0 THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

The Committee considered the suggestion in the *First Point for Business* report that the Council looks to develop a one-stop-shop for businesses, and explored some of the key considerations for its development.

- 6.1 A key element would be to involve businesses in the development of the model to ensure that whatever is put in place meets their needs. The Committee wanted to know how businesses would be consulted, and it was suggested that initial consultation could be carried out with the Council's 6 or 7 business fora, and further follow-up and testing of ideas could be done by questionnaires or surveys with wider business networks. The precise details of the consultation would need to be worked out, but Members were assured that the model would be business-led. The Committee was concerned that business expectations could be raised unrealistically, and officers responded that this could be managed by consulting on a range of options.
- 6.2 The most significant barrier to progress was agreed to be funding as there would be clear budget implications. A potential operating model was for a customer service centre within "One Telford" which would aim to resolve around 80-90% of enquiries, with complex enquiries referred to specialists in the relevant service area. This would make more efficient use of resources across the organisation. An assessment would need to be done to determine the current level of time and resource spent by each service unit on business support, and a model developed to provide long-term funding through rationalisation. It was recognised that all service areas are under extreme budget pressure and there may be resistance to a cost-sharing model.
- 6.3 Leadership and governance arrangements were discussed. The Committee felt strongly that the work should have strong corporate leadership from the top of the organisation to ensure its success. This was especially important given that there may be resistance around

shared costs, and the system and culture would need to be embedded across the organisation. When First Point was developed, a project board had been set up as a reporting mechanism to oversee delivery of the project plan and attainment of key milestones. Similar arrangements could be set up, but more detailed thinking needed to be done on the governance arrangements.

- 6.4 There was a discussion about ICT and the need for a client relationship management system. Several databases were in use across the Council. The CRM system used by First Point for residents is an intelligent, decision making system which would optimise the use of ICT to create efficiencies, but there would be a cost attached to using this. The One Telford database, Evolutive, could provide a cheaper short term option. The key point was that the appropriate solution would be developed within the resources available, and this could be a phased approach to spread costs.
- 6.5 The Committee asked how performance of a one-stop-shop would be measured and monitored and were informed that work would need to be done to develop performance measures. Quantitative measures could be used (volume of calls, response times, reduction in avoidable contacts, improved information management etc.) but the Head of Service emphasised that the qualitative impacts for businesses were important and the Telford Business Partnership Board would be involved in developing meaningful measures and providing customer feedback on service quality and outcomes.
- 6.6 The Cabinet Member emphasised that the report was an early paper which needed further discussion internally.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee fully supported the proposal to establish a “one-stop” service for businesses as a way to improve the quality of service provided by the Council to businesses, to help retain and attract business investment in Telford and Wrekin and to enhance the Council’s reputation and relationship with the business community consistent with the Co-operative Council approach.

The Committee heard that examples of this approach had not been found in other authorities, and felt that there could be an opportunity for Telford & Wrekin to gain national recognition for pioneering this way of working.

The Committee has therefore made the recommendations below which are set out in Section 2 of this report.

- **That Cabinet endorses the principle of establishing a First Point single point of contact for businesses to access Council services.**

The Committee felt that there was a need to provide a “one-stop” service to business customers as well as residents for the reasons set out above.

- **That a further report with detailed costings will be brought to Cabinet for approval by summer 2012.**

The Committee will be involved in the further development of the model and fully costed proposals. Members were concerned to look at the business model, the costs, financial implications and impacts on service areas, staff and training issues, the technical infrastructure, governance arrangements, consultation and feedback from businesses and performance monitoring measures.

- **The development and implementation of the model is led at senior level within the organisation and with Cabinet members as an Early Adopter project.**

The Committee wanted to see strong strategic leadership for the proposals to secure the involvement and commitment of service areas across the Council, to drive the project forward and overcome any potential resistance. As an Early Adopter project, the project would be led at Interim Chief Executive level.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

There are no specific equal opportunity issues arising from this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

LEGAL COMMENT

If the Council is to implement a “**First Point for Business**”, consideration must be given to the legal functions and processes which need to be maintained. Services such as Planning, Licensing and Environmental Health have prescribed procedures to allow them to perform their legal functions. This is currently administered by staff who in many cases are professionally trained and in any event are fully familiar with statutory requirements and approved processes. In some cases, the communication between businesses and officers could either form a key part of an application (such as a planning application) or could be in relation to a matter that results in enforcement action which could result in scrutiny of the Council’s procedures in court.

When setting up “**First Point for Business**” consideration should be given to what will happen to the administration of statutory functions as this does form a significant part of the interaction which the council has with local

businesses. If there is to be any transfer of functions internally from the officers currently undertaking those assistance and advice roles to “First Point” then there needs to be an appreciation of the risks involved. Provision for both appropriate training and internal systems of communication must be in place to ensure that these functions are properly maintained.

It is advisable to have detailed consultation with the Council’s regulatory services during any development process for this service and further legal input can be provided if required.

LINKS WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report link to the Council’s emerging priorities to deliver better customer service, joining together with our partners, and around education and skills.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

As described earlier in this report, there is an opportunity to develop a model of good practice in Telford & Wrekin for providing services to businesses to retain and attract investment in the borough.

There is a risk that the lack of resources could be a barrier to progressing the project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs associated with developing and implementing a “First Point for Businesses” contact point need to be worked up in detail. Any additional costs identified of operating a “First Point of Contact for Businesses” will not be funded through the current budget strategy and consideration will need to be given as to how to cover the extra costs to the Council.

WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are no ward implications arising directly from this report.

Report prepared by Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist, Tel: 01952 383114