

# **Corporate & Customer Overview & Scrutiny Panel - Partnership Sub-Group**

**Friday, 26 January 2007**

**Present:** Councillor Peter Baker (Chair), Councillors Hasina Khan, Geoffrey Russell and Mrs Stella Walsh

**Also in attendance:** Councillors John Walker, Dennis Edgerley and Paul Morris (Deputy Chief Executive).

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Andrew Birchall and June Molyneaux.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest by Members relating to the items on the agenda.

## **3. CONSIDERATION OF QUESTIONS**

The Sub-Group discussed the questions proposed at the meeting held on 5 December 2006. Several questions were added and the Members agreed the order and who would ask each question.

## **4. FEEDBACK SESSION WITH COUNCILLOR DENNIS EDGERLEY, PREVIOUS EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CUSTOMERS, POLICY AND PERFORMANCE**

Members received feedback from Councillor Dennis Edgerley, Previous Executive Member for Customers, Policy and Performance

The discussion with Councillor Edgerley is summarised at minute 6 "Review of findings and conclusions".

## **5. FEEDBACK SESSION WITH COUNCILLOR JOHN WALKER, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CUSTOMER, DEMOCRATIC AND LEGAL SERVICES**

The Sub-Group met with Councillor Councillor John Walker, Executive Member for Customer, Democratic and Legal Services.

The discussion with Councillor Walker is summarised at minute 6 "Review of findings and conclusions".

## 6. REVIEW OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### How do you think the Partnership is progressing?

The Partnership has not progressed at the pace it was anticipated to and has not delivered, as yet, what Chorley wanted from it. The project is a huge undertaking.

All of the Partners are at different stages of implementation, Lancashire County Council have faced resistance to change from their Directorates and there have been significant problems surrounding the Customer Relationship Management System. At Lancashire County Council the system is being used to signpost members of staff to information and to collect information.

Chorley have made excellent progress, the Contact Centre is open from 8 until 6, has produced some back office and will produce significant efficiency savings once the Customer Relationship Management System is in place. The improvements in customer service have been fantastic with generic staff dealing with queries at the first point of contact.

The Partnership is at a difficult point. The meeting to decide the way forward on the Customer Relationship Management System has been postponed until February. The decision will be the best solution for the Partnership going forward.

Lancashire County Council have integrated around a quarter of their services into the Hub, the largest services have been integrated first.

At Chorley the Partnership has had Member and officer support from the beginning, not all Councils have had this.

### How do the Joint Committee meetings operate?

The officer Board works well and can take decisions with its terms of reference, but the way the Committee works needs to be reviewed. It is an opportunity to discuss issues but there needs to be more buy in from the District Partners. There aren't many decisions to be taken. Conflicting timetables mean it is difficult to get everyone together.

It might be helpful to have just one senior representative from each Council on the Committee.

The quorum is good as it ensures that all Partners have a vote on any decisions.

The lack of attendance from some Districts is disappointing as it shows a lack of commitment to the project.

### What have been the main concerns regarding the management of the contract?

The original contractor (SX3) was bought out by Northgate, meaning that Northgate staff were working on an SX3 product. The contract management from Lancashire County Council has changed twice. Factors such as these created contract management issues.

The new Management Team for the project at Lancashire County Council have moved the Partnership along and are looking positively to the future. Lancashire County Council have their own specific needs relating to Social Services and have developed a Corporate Information Database to deal with this.

Going forward the Partnership the contract management should involve the Partners more, rather than being left just to Lancashire County Council.

### What are the benefits of being in the Partnership?

The cost to the Council would be significant to purchase the telephony, hardware and software outside the Partnership. The potential for additional opening hours, in the evenings and at weekend are significant benefits.

The way forward is through shared services.

Is there anything that could have been done to avoid the problems that have been faced?

Some of the risks that were identified prior to the project have happened. In a Partnership of this size some problems have to be expected.

If Chorley had not gone with the Partnership we would have faced problems, but different ones.

Going forward Chorley is leading the officer Board and is actively working on a more realistic refocused vision for the Partnership.

Issues are being identified and solutions being pushed forward.

Is there any evidence of efficiency savings arising from the Partnership?

There have been some savings, but the real savings are dependent of the Customer Relationship Management System. There is a need to move customers onto the efficient channels of service provision, such as the Internet. The system will allow customers to check the progress of their enquiry online.

Previously there were three reception points and a cash office. The closure of the cash office produced efficiency savings.

The Customer Relationship Management System will allow the Customer Service advisors to proactively offer customers' services based on the information held about them.

When services are transferred into the Contact Centre the business process re-engineering and systems integration reduce the back office costs.

Previously there was no way to monitor the number of calls to the departments of the Council. The technology enables this and will drive the number of staff needed in the Contact Centre.

What is your perception of the vision to deliver each other's services?

The vision is excellent. It is a shame that not all of the Districts in Lancashire came into the Partnership. The potential for greater access for customers to services and at a cheaper cost has to be good.

The vision is being refocused, as it was over ambitious when the Partnership was set up. Lancashire County Council is looking at information gateways in Libraries, depending on local circumstances.

What is the vision/objectives going forward for the Contact Centre and the Partnership?

Currently a sample of customers is asked about their satisfaction with the service. If there is an increase in the rate of abandoned calls more customers could be asked about their satisfaction and to highlight the reason for the increased need for service.

Shared services are the way forward. A bid has gone to Government Office North West on two-tier working with those Authorities not bidding for unitary status in line with the White Paper.

There are opportunities, via the Customer Relationship Management System, to deal with complaints more effectively.

Authorities that are not as advanced in implementation can learn from those that are.

Other points

There is potential for joint training, with each Partner sending representatives to be trained and then for those representatives to train staff at their own Authority.

At times when the numbers of abandoned calls is high Chorley still receives high levels of satisfaction from customers. If calls were to overflow to the Hub there would have to be ensured the same level of customer service.

## **7. THE WAY FORWARD**

It was AGREED to consider the web cast showing the discussion by the Executive Cabinet at Lancashire County Council on the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on the Shared Services Contact Centre at the next meeting of the Sub-Group.

Chair