

**SCRUTINY VISIT TO THE RED ROSE HUB,
LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
8 December 2006**

Present: Councillors: Peter Baker, Geoffrey Russell, Edward Smith and Stella Walsh.

Officers: Asim Khan (Assistant Head of Customer Services), Ruth Hawes (Democratic Services) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic Services)

The Members visited the Red Rose Hub and were greeted by County Councillor Doreen Pollitt, Richard Jones, (Executive Director of Adult and Community Services) and Steve Williams, (Director of Customer Access).

The Sub-Group had conducted a tour of the Hub and then had a question and answer session with the County representatives. It was explained that Richard, Steve and Councillor Pollitt had taken over the management of the project in the last few months.

The Change Team

This is a relatively new team; some had worked for the County Council previously. Their role is an independent project team who speak to Directorates about transferring their services into The Hub, the benefits of going into the Hub and the cost of integration is built into a project plan.

Each officer in the Team focuses on a specific Directorate to facilitate integration into the Hub. The team have now developed plans and a methodology to support integrations. On average it takes six months per service, depending on the complexity of the service, if staff are redesignated and need to be trained.

There are four streams to the Customer Access Strategy. Part of the Strategy is to transfer customers onto more efficient means of delivering services and to target customers with relevant services. This included taking technology to the customer and delivering services in their own home.

Work with Directorates has involved significant culture change, as it affects long established ways of working, but as more services are integrated attitudes have changed.

Directorates are now working closely with the Change Team through the business process re-engineering exercise to ensure that the best quality and more efficient solution is reached for the service to be operated from the Red Rose Hub.

The Information Communication Technology section

It was explained that underlying technology used by the Partnership has been implemented, although there have been issues with the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. The Partnership procured a managed solution, with hardware, telephony and the Customer Relationship Management system. Several districts in the Partnership are using the Customer Relationship Management system to some degree, but with various degrees of success.

When the Partnership started all Councils were all at the starting gate, especially a Contact Centre Partnership on the scale of the Lancashire one. In hindsight the Partnership was over ambitious and has suffered as a consequence of this.

Representatives of the contractor, Northgate, were based in the Hub. It was acknowledged that at times the relationship could have been better. There are examples of thriving Contact Centres, such as Salford.

The Partnership Officer

The role of the Partnership Officer is to liaise with districts and oversee the project. There are regular Project Boards and meetings of the Joint Committee to ensure two-way communication between the partners. As the Partners get to know each other the working relationship becomes stronger and it has taken time for Lancashire County Council (Lancashire County Council) to get their team of staff in place. There is plenty of enthusiasm from Lancashire County Council officers and members for the Partnership. The impression from most districts is that the Partnership is strong.

Due to the size of the Partnership it is inevitable that Districts will progress at different rates, Lancashire County Council have a large ICT resource and where appropriate support Districts. Chorley is advanced in implementation as it has a One Stop Shop and Call Centre.

Now there is a new management team from Lancashire County Council there is an improved perception of the Partnership and the Contact Centre. Once more services are delivered from the Hub the team will go on a PR offensive, both internally and externally. There is an aim to open 24 hours in the future.

The Adult and Community Services Team

It was explained that the numerous social care offices all had slight variations in service delivery. Two years ago all of the processes were mapped. This was a huge task and involved lots of staff who were asked which services could be streamlined and which could be centralised, for example the switchboard and simple queries. More complex queries would still need to be dealt with by the back office.

Several functions have transferred to the Hub leading to a reduction in the administration staff role. One of the benefits of the process is the removal of variation in the way the service is provided, to best practice. Information is held on a Corporate Information Database that acts, not as a script, but an aide memoir of questions and information. Information given by the customer is then sent to the relevant back office by the system. A virtual white board has been developed to enable a customer services advisor to see if a social worker is in the office or not and advise their customer accordingly.

The system is due to go live in January 2007 for the first four offices, although offices are now using the virtual white board. It is acknowledged that the biggest stumbling block has been the need to develop a system to meet the needs of Adult & Community Services and being the first to undertake it for twenty-one area offices. It has been a massive culture change and a learning curve.

The approach has been to integrate the biggest service first; in hindsight it might have been better to start of with simple services. Lancashire County Council provides around six hundred services, some simple in nature, others like social care are much more complex. By March 2007 twelve or thirteen more are scheduled to go live.

The Training Room

The Members spoke to some delegates from Adult and Community Services who are currently in training. The officers are looking forward to going live and highlighted that the service for the customer will be better as previously the offices had all

worked differently. The training has been intensive - six weeks in total. It is positive that the training has raised issues that need to be resolved before going live and developed the training for the next set of delegates. Future delegates will be able to sit in on live calls.

The Contact Centre

There are currently four teams each on banks of desks who deliver a mix of services, including the switchboard. Each team concentrates on two or three services at a time. There are thirty Full Time Equivalents with eighteen part time staff who cover lunch breaks and peak times. This will increase over time when more services are integrated and in January upstairs will be full. Downstairs is currently the nursery bank but will be live workstations in time.

There are currently seven hundred entries on the Corporate Information Database. The aim is to give customers access to all services at one point, for example if a call is in relation to a blue badge the customer will be asked if they would like a fire safety check, or if a customer has just turned 65 they would be asked if they would like information about social services. The system transfers any relevant information to the back office meaning that the customer will not have to repeat it.

The customer advisors have a really good broad knowledge of Lancashire County Council services. The training is service specific; advisors practice on calls and have a mentor. Advisors build up knowledge on services and training takes around 6 months for full productivity. The training shows advisors where to look for information enabling them to deliver a number of services. The Contact Centre filters out calls requesting information enabling back office staff to get on with complex enquiries. The importance of keeping information up to date was noted.

Calls relating to schools transport have transferred into the Contact Centre. Previously four members of staff dealt with the calls and struggled at peak times, now twenty-three members of staff are able to deal with the calls.

The Members each listened to a live call.

Question and Answer Session

The report is a summary of the discussion between the Members and Officers present.

Councillor Pollitt has chaired two of the Partnership Joint Committees since becoming part of the management team. The meeting is essential to update the Partners and is an opportunity to talk together to resolve any problems. The Partnership is progressing but is at a difficult point.

On timescales it was advised that the contractor would be presenting a final and best offer on 12 December 2006, after which Partners will undertake individual reviews with a decision scheduled for mid to late January. It is important to get the best solution for Lancashire County Council and the Partners. Up to this point in the Partnership the focus has unfortunately been frustration with technology issues rather than service provision as it should be.

The Partnership had bought a managed service, not just the Customer Relationship Management system. When the Partnership first wrote the specification and took out the contract there was not a complete understanding of what the Customer Relationship Management system needs to deliver. After the experiences gained the specification has been updated.

The contractor had bought out the company that had originally won the contract, SX3, and has tried to implement a piece of software that was not their own. The current proposal from the contractor is considered by Lancashire County Council to meet 72% of the requirements, although the version will not be available until March. Due to experience Lancashire County Council are now cautious.

Concerns were acknowledged about the continuity of service to the customer if the Partnership pulls away from the current contract. Work will be undertaken with Districts on how to mitigate this risk, in particular, without damaging the Partnership relationships and to keep the Partnership together.

The methods of measuring customer satisfaction are by monitoring calls; a recent audit on the quality of the service shows a very high level of customer service. There have been no complaints about the Contact Centre, although there is a need to reduce the number of abandoned calls and the waiting times by having the right number of staff at the right time. The Lancashire County Council Management Team are keen to show the credibility of the Contact Centre to give Directorates confidence to integrate their services.

The importance of keeping Partners abreast of developments and supporting their implementation was stressed. There is a full time officer who keeps Partners up to date, in particular on the ICT front. It is felt that there is a strong sense of partnership amongst the Partner districts, although there are different levels of development. It is up to the districts on how fast they progress and the lack of consistency shouldn't be a problem as long as the underlying systems are working as they should.

There is a need to regain sight of the original vision behind the Partnership. The recent White Paper and two-tier working means there are lots of opportunities to provide better services for the customer by working together. The original aspiration was about providing each other's services and making efficiencies.

The challenge for Adult and Community Services has been that the current service is not user friendly. The service has now been built round the customer by changing the business processes and moving into the Hub. The service provides around a quarter of Lancashire County Council services and equates to 45% of the budget.

Registration Services are going in, Welfare Rights and Environmental Services are already in. The Customer Access Strategy aims to have all calls being taken by the Hub in three years. It was explained that the Customer Access Team is a corporate resource and placed with Adult and Community Services as Richard is an Executive Director and leading the Partnership project.

Lancashire County Council also have things to learn from Chorley, customers want to have face-to-face contact and Chorley's One Stop Shop delivers a fantastic service. Customers want their services and are not concerned who delivers them. This is an area requiring development in the future. There will be opportunities for joint training between Chorley and Lancashire County Council in the future.

There are developments ongoing to allow customer to self-service on the web site, in fact you can already apply for school admissions online.

The Members and Officers agreed that the session had been very interesting and informative.