

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

Friday, 19 January 2007

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Richard Sherras, Jeff Fenton and Philip Mousdale

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Andrew Birchall, Hasina Khan 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. A question was added and the Members agreed the order and who would ask each question.

4. FEEDBACK SESSION WITH COUNCILLOR RICHARD SHERRAS (RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL)

The Sub-Group met with Councillor Sherras from Ribble Valley Borough Council who had been heavily involved in the Lancashire Shared Services Contact Centre from the beginning.

Councillor Sherras brought a paper he had written in 2003 that outlined the background to the project, the benefits and alternative courses of action. This document is appended to these minutes.

The discussion with Councillor Sherras is summarised at minute 7 "Review of findings and conclusions".

5. FEEDBACK SESSION WITH PHILIP MOUSDALE (PENDLE BOROUGH COUNCIL)

Members received feedback from Philip Mousdale, the Executive Director for Community Engagement, from Pendle Borough Council.

The discussion with Mr Mousdale is summarised at minute 7 "Review of findings and conclusions".

6. **FEEDBACK SESSION WITH JEFF FENTON (RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL)**

The Sub-Group met with Mr Fenton, Corporate Services Manager, from Ribble Valley Borough Council.

The discussion with Mr Fenton is summarised at minute 7 "Review of findings and conclusions".

7. **REVIEW OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

What stage are you at in implementation and what are you plans for the future?

At Ribble Valley there is a small contact centre delivering a limited number of services and three customer facing reception points with a limited number of customers. There is a wish to reduce this to one reception point.

The population is 50 thousand whereas Chorley is over 100 thousand. The needs of the customer are different in the two authorities. The Call Centre delivers the waste management service and there are plans to integrate other services.

The Council is committed to the project, although it is a huge culture change. There is a need for investment from the Council to make substantial progress.

Pendle expected to be further down the road with implementation and have been frustrated by the delays. The amount of work required to transfer services into the Contact Centre was underestimated and the issues with the Customer Relationship Management system added to the delays.

There are currently 18 seats in the Call Centre and 5 members of staff on reception points, with a mix of full and part time staff with a low staff turnover. Planning Services were due to go live in the Call Centre - this had been a large task. Part of the partnership Pendle Borough Council has with Liberata includes a new development in Pendle to house the One Stop Shop and Call Centre scheduled to be completed by September.

How do you think the Partnership is progressing?

For Ribble Valley the Partnership is progressing slowly. There is support for the concept and vision, but making it work is a challenge. Ribble Valley is predominately rural and there is potential for a mobile One Stop Shop, although this would be expensive. The benefits of developing the services that could be delivered by telephone and the internet are significant.

The issues surrounding the Customer Relationship Management system and resulting delays had not helped with those who were cynical about the Partnership. It was felt that when this is in place the Partnership will progress.

Pendle felt that the Partnership was stalled at the moment due to the Customer Relationship Management system issues, although there was goodwill from Partners to resolve the issues. The new management team for the project at Lancashire County Council had moved the Partnership along. It would be difficult to have each of the Partners at the same stage of implementation.

Is the Partnership delivering the efficiencies as anticipated?

At Ribble Valley there are currently no identifiable cashable efficiency savings arising from the Partnership although the potential advantages for customer service are enormous.

The teams within the Authority are small so there isn't scope for cashable efficiency savings. Geographically the Council covers a large area so there is significant scope for non-cashable savings in improvements to the service to the customer.

For Pendle efficiencies relating to the Partnership have not yet been realised, however there have been non-cashable efficiencies made through working differently and the provision of a better service to the customer. Pendle have been spurred on by the Partnership and found the networking aspect useful. Once the Customer Relationship Management system is in place the prospects for the achievement of efficiencies are significant.

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

The issues seemed to start when the original software company, SX3 were taken over. Software systems have to be adaptable, especially when there are so many different Councils involved. It must be accepted that a system will not deliver everything and compromises must be made.

It is felt that the new Management Team for the project at Lancashire County Council are moving the Partnership on. Communication within the Partnership is key for success. From the beginning there was a failure on all parts to appreciate the enormity of the project.

What are your views on the vision for Lancashire County Council and districts to deliver each other's services?

The vision to improve the service to the customer is excellent and should be focussed on. The potential for services to be available during the evening and weekend would be excellent for customers. There are great advantages to two-tier working, especially in light of the recent White Paper.

It is not practical for Districts to deliver each other's services, but the Hub could deal with overflow calls on behalf of Districts. This is where the Customer Relationship Management system is so important. When this is in place the Partnership will progress.

The vision for the Partnership is being redrafted, it is important that the shared information aspect of the original vision is not lost.

The integration of services into the Contact Centre is complex. The priority currently is for Councils to deliver their own services, and then to take on the delivery of additional services.

How do the Joint Committee meetings operate? Is the quorum a help or a hindrance?

There has been an issue of changing membership from a Councillor point of view. This lack of membership continuity and background knowledge of the project has caused issues.

There had not been many decisions for the Committee to take. It is positive that Chorley are leading aspects of the Partnership previously left to Lancashire County Council. There is a need for a continuous membership, with senior Councillors from each District, and clear agendas to engage members and for the meeting to be effective. The quorum is positive, but shouldn't hold up decision-making. The potential for a majority to make the decision should be there.

How do you measure customer satisfaction with the services received?

Ribble Valley undertake an annual survey of a sample of customers to measure the statutory indicators.

Liberata manage customer services on behalf of Pendle Borough Council. Further work would be done on customer satisfaction in the future and there had been a reduction in complaint numbers.

Conclusions

Implementation

The Partner Councils are at different stages of implementation and each have a different customer base, needs and priorities.

The impact of the Partnership has included a change in organizational culture and the Partners have had different levels of success in integrating services into their Contact Centres, due to the size of the Authority, the demographics and corporate commitment.

Progression of the Partnership

The Partnership is progressing, although the delays have been frustrating.

Each Authority has shown their focus on service to the customer and commitment to the Partnership.

The Customer Relationship Management system is key to the future of the Partnership.

Delivery of efficiencies

No cashable savings have been realised as part of the Partnership although there have been efficiencies relating to the improvement in the service to the customer.

The potential for efficiencies is relative to the size of the Council, i.e. Pendle have a higher potential for efficiencies than Ribble Valley.

The Customer Relationship Management system is key to the delivery of efficiencies, for example, a customer notifies the Contact Centre that they have moved and the request is actioned at the first point of contact and the information is cascaded throughout the whole Council.

If some Authorities can evidence efficiencies it may spur other Partners on.

Management of the contract

In the early stages the contract was not managed to its full potential. The new Management Team for the project at Lancashire County Council is moving the Partnership forward. Communication between all Partners and the contractor is key to the success of the Partnership.

The Partnerships vision

The aspiration behind the vision is excellent, but difficult to achieve. It would be unrealistic for Districts to handle the overflow calls for each other, although it is realistic for overflow calls from Districts to be routed via the Hub.

The aspiration for Districts to deliver County services within their area should be pursued as there are significant efficiency and customer service benefits with this.

Joint Committee meetings

The inconsistent membership and unclear agendas mean that this meeting has not been as effective as it needs to be going forward.

The meeting needs to be driven and perhaps change the quorum to a majority vote system.

The Officer Board seems to work effectively.

Measurement of customer satisfaction

This is an area where each of the Partners will develop in the future. There may be a role for Chorley to suggest the way forward here.

8. THE WAY FORWARD

The Partnership needs to have a clear refocused vision and strong project management. The Partnership is not just about the technology, and is dependent on the Customer Relationship Management system to deliver its aims. Training for staff is a key point and needs to be considered further in the future.

The Sub-Committee would be receiving feedback from Councillors Edgerley and Walker on 26 January 2007.

Chair

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