

Shared Services Contact Centre

Overview and Scrutiny



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Shared Services Contact Centre



Background

The Shared Services Contact Centre is a partnership between Lancashire County Council and 6 districts; Burnley, Chorley, Hyndburn, Ribbles Valley, Pendle and Rossendale). It is the partnership through which the Council will deliver its Customer Access Strategy, dealing with all forms of Customer Access.

Within the partnership, there are a number of centres from which services are delivered. The County Council's own Customer Service Centre is based at The Red Rose Hub in Fulwood.

The Shared Services Contact Centre is not just the key to the council's Customer Access Strategy. The aim to deliver more and more services through this

route is intended to be a key driver in service redesign and modernisation, leading ultimately to better, more cost effective and efficient services to the public.

At the meeting of full council on 23 February 2006, the following Notice of Motion received under Standing Order No 7 was Moved by County Councillor B J Whittle and Seconded by County Councillor M J Welsh:

"Concerned that the Contact Centre has not achieved the objectives established by the business plan drawn up in 2003, the County Council requests the Management Panel to establish an Overview and Scrutiny Task Group to review progress to date and the current plan for the further development of this flagship project"

Following assurances provided at the meeting that this matter would be considered by the Management Panel, the Motion was withdrawn and not put to the vote.

A report was subsequently sent to the Management Panel on 17 March 2006, where:

"The Panel considered a request for a scrutiny review of the Shared Service Contact Centre and concluded that a Task Group should be set up consisting of the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Management Panel and the Chair of the Internal Committee. It would report in due course to the new Management Committee.

The matter will be referred to the Internal Committee with a recommendation that they give retrospective

agreement to establish the Task Group."

At the meeting of the Internal Committee on 29 March 2006, the following resolution was passed:

"That the Committee noted the decision of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Panel to establish a Task Group to consider the activities in respect of the Shared Services Contact Centre and retrospectively agreed its establishment."

Membership of the task group

The following county councillors were members of the task group

Tom Burns
Wendy Dwyer
David O'Toole
Matthew Tomlinson
Jean Yates
Wendy Dwyer *replaced* Jean Yates *after the first meeting.*

Scope of the Scrutiny exercise

At the first meeting of the task group, the scope of the exercise was agreed:

- ▶ To consider all aspects that have affected the history of the project, including contractor relationships, project management, previous milestones and go live dates achieved or missed
- ▶ To understand any potential future areas of concern that may prevent the project being delivered
- ▶ To clarify exactly the objectives of the project

Methodology

Witnesses

The task group agreed to carry out a series of evidence gathering sessions in order to talk with appropriate officers and councillors.

Discussion took place individually and in groups with:

County Councillor -
Ann Brown
Paul Burgess
Jim Edney
Richard Jones
Gabby Nelson
County Councillor -
Doreen Pollitt

Site Visit

On 1 June 2006, the task group undertook a visit to The Red Rose Hub. As part of that site visit, members sat with staff and listened in to telephone calls.

Documents

The task group considered a large volume of documentary evidence, including:

- ▶ Project Planning documents
- ▶ Deloitte & Touche Business Case July 2002
- ▶ Audit Commission Report into Customer Access July 2006
- ▶ Performance Information (including financial information)

Findings

There were five main areas the task group investigated:

- ▶ Information & Communications Technology (ICT)
- ▶ Organisational Culture
- ▶ The Red Rose Hub & the Customer Service Centre
- ▶ Management & Governance
- ▶ Project Management

The findings on each of those areas are as follows

1. IT
 1. The initial contract for the ICT supplier led to the preferred bidder (ITNET) ultimately being rejected and another supplier sought, but using the specification supplied by the first bidder.

2. The contract was subsequently awarded to SX3. SX3 were later taken over by Northgate. This means that Northgate are supplying a CRM system that they did not develop, to a specification supplied by another company.
3. The CRM system (called Onyx) that is currently in use has been problematic. The private network between the seven Partners is significantly over capacity and resilience. It is unlikely that all of the capacity will ever be used.
4. Despite the high value of the ICT contract, the complexity of the project, and the concerns that surfaced about the delivery of the IT, monthly meetings with the IT contractors only begun in October 2005.
5. There are concerns about the "middleware" – the software that allows the Onyx system to work with existing council systems. The task group notes that discussions on this front are still ongoing.
6. The relationship with Northgate has not been easy or comfortable for each side. The task group understands that Northgate are one of the market leaders in this kind of software for councils, and that there are many organisations (including West Lancs District Council in Lancashire) that have a successful relationship with Northgate. However, although Northgate have aimed to be a "partner", rather than just a contractor or supplier, the council has had concerns about the resourcing and general approach taken by Northgate.
2. Culture
7. One of the major aims of the project was not just to deliver a contact centre, but to review the way the council delivered

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its services. The original vision was that services from all over the council would be reviewed to see if there were aspects that could be delivered better and more efficiently partly or wholly through the contact centre.

8. To achieve this, it was necessary to communicate clearly and effectively across the council on this vision, and to work with managers to review services.
9. The council delivers around 700 different services. It is clearly a massive task to review these, and is a process that will take years, not months.
10. The approach taken by the project has been to “cherry pick” the

services that could be incorporated most quickly and successfully. This approach has delivered some positive outcomes.

11. However, in general, there is little evidence of a comprehensive and wide-ranging attempt to change and develop the culture of the organisation, and to persuade directorates to change services to utilise the contact centre facilities and processes.
12. There have been some developments to encourage this in recent times. A “Change Team”, operating from within the Customer Access project to coordinate and work with directorates has been introduced in Spring / Summer 2006.

13. The Adult & Community Services Directorate has done a significant amount of work on its services. Around 60 members of staff are due to transfer to the CSC by September 07.

3. The Red Rose Hub / Customer Service Centre
14. The Red Rose Hub site was selected at least in part because it could be identified as a flagship building for a flagship service.

15. There are problems with access to the site, with limited car parking and public transport. A transport plan for the site is in place & discussions are ongoing. There is unlikely to be a “quick fix” to this issue, but several longer term options may have an

effect, including the Fulwood Park & Ride scheme.

16. The Red Rose Hub project was well managed and delivered 180 desks within deadline, by June 05. However, there were no staff to fill those seats as other aspects of the project had slipped. 16 staff begun in July 05. The original plan had been for 90 seats.
17. Customer Service Centre opened July 05. The 16 staff were deployed working mainly on the Corporate Information Database (CID), a detailed A-Z of council services, and the essential information asset for the Customer Service Centre.
18. The objective for the call centre is to deal with 80% of enquiries at first point of contact (FPOC). The figure currently is around 60%, but at 90% for better integrated services, where more intensive work has been carries out.

4. Management / Governance

19. There was no clearly identified project manager until the appointment of Paul Burgess in 2005. The decision to appoint on a secondment basis from within the council was taken by County Management Board (CMB) in June 2005.
20. There has been little or no general member involvement in the project since around 2003 / 2004. This has meant that there has been no general accountability to elected representatives during a crucial period in the project.
21. Responsibility for the Contact Centre was taken over by Richard Jones, Executive Director, Adult & Community Services on July 1 2006, and a new Management structure is now in place.

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5. Overall project issues

There was no single overall plan for the project. There was a comprehensive plan for the IT aspects.

22. The project was set up as a partnership with 6 of the 12 districts. District partners have developed different objectives for their parts of the service. There are ongoing questions about the relationship with the non-partners.

23. In addition, although the initial vision of a completely joined up contact centre service with 13 partners was forward thinking, positive and admirable, it was an aim far in excess of anything tried elsewhere in the country.

24. The task group have found that the paper trail of decisions, deadlines, advice and so forth has not always been as clean and clear as would have been desirable. Without a clear project plan, clarity over deadlines, responsibilities and so on has been harder to trace.

25. Members and officers did not appreciate the size of the project at the outset. The project has cost around £20 million, and has regularly been held up as a flagship project for the council. However, despite this, there appears to have been a lack of dedicated time and support, both officer and councillor, given to the project in its crucial formative years. Witnesses have acknowledged project is

not where it could have been at this stage of the project, around 4 or 5 years from its conception.

26. The Audit Commission have also produced a report on Customer Access. They made a number of recommendations. Chiefly, they identified the need for a clear, integrated plan for all aspects of the project with clear milestones. They also noted the need for strong communication and commitment to developing a customer oriented culture.

Conclusions

In reaching these conclusions, the task group acknowledge that a great deal of hard work has taken place on this project, and would like to acknowledge the contributions made by individual officers and teams. A number of notable successes have been achieved, including

- ▶ the creation and continual expansion of the Corporate Information Database,
- ▶ the delivery of The Red Rose Hub site,
- ▶ the creation of a dedicated team of officers in the Customer Service Centre,
- ▶ the work of the Adult & Community Services Directorate in restructuring work flows.

Progress has been made since the appointment of Paul Burgess as the Director with specific responsibility for this project in August 2005.

ICT

1. There was a lack of clarity from the Council about what was required. That lack of clarity meant that the contractor could not be clear on exactly what product was needed. However, there was scope for the contractor, especially as they have identified themselves as a partner in this project, to provide more and stronger support to help identify the council's needs.
2. The lack of clarity means we currently have a main computer system that may never do what we want it to do. The task group acknowledge the negotiations currently ongoing between Northgate and the Council, and look forward to a mutually beneficial resolution to enable the project to move forward.

Organisational Culture

3. It is clear that, whilst there are some parts of the organisation which have embraced the project, other parts have sought to avoid or ignore the project. Whilst the aim of “cherry picking” certain services and dealing with individual managers has brought some success, the project has suffered from a lack of a well communicated, clear vision, backed up with firm action to ensure all areas of the County Council are engaged.

Red Rose Hub / Contact Centre

4. The Red Rose Hub is an excellent facility, although concerns remain about transport links for staff and visitors. This aspect

of the project was delivered on time and to an appropriately high specification. However, it seems indicative of the lack of an overall plan that this site was delivered, but the staff due to work there, and the services due to be delivered, were not in place at the appropriate time.

Management & Governance

5. This project has suffered from a lack of clear and strong day to day management and leadership. Whilst all individuals involved have worked hard and sought to deliver in accordance with their understanding of what they were being asked to do, apart from the ambitious and admirable vision at the

outset, there appears to have been no regular restatement of the objectives of the project, and no driving force, working solely on the project, to make it happen.

6. The almost complete lack of elected member involvement for at least 2 years has meant that there has been insufficient accountability, and a lack of the leadership that members would have been able to provide.

Overall Project issues

7. At no stage in the project so far has there been a clear single project plan for the whole process, taking into account ICT, culture change, premises, joint working with districts, member

and public engagement, service delivery and all of the other aspects of this immensely complex task.

authority from the organisation, being answerable to the most senior officers and members.

8. The aim of the project to be a completely joined up contact centre with 13 members is unrealistic. It is even more unrealistic given that only 6 of the districts joined the project, as it raises the added complication of relations with the non members. It is clear that the priorities of the different councils, although linked, are different. The task group would welcome a review of the very basis of the project, and would support a looser form of joint working with all of the districts.
9. All parties have acknowledged that there was a failure to recognise the size of the task at the outset. An appropriately senior and well qualified project manager should have been appointed at the outset of the project, and should have received the necessary

Recommendations

The task group recognises that Richard Jones is undertaking a thorough and far reaching review of the project. The task group supports Richard Jones in this endeavour, and believes that the key to past difficulties and future success lies in effective management and governance arrangements. We therefore recommend

1. That Richard Jones considers the conclusions of this task group in drawing up his recommendations and future programme.
2. That a clear and precise set of objectives and timescales for the project is produced, and that by politicians and officers at the highest level strongly and

actively champion the project

3. That the Cabinet member responsible establishes a cross party working group to regularly monitor progress against the plans presented by the Executive Director for Adult & Community Services to the Cabinet in September 2006.

Finally, the task group would like to acknowledge the work of County Councillor Bernard Whittle in proposing the task group and in providing a list of questions for consideration.

Acknowledgements

The task group would like to thank all those officers and members who attended as witnesses.

In addition, a number of staff worked hard to retrieve background and historical information on the project. Their time and effort is appreciated.



