

Report of	Meeting	Date
Head of Customer, Democratic & Office Support Services (Introduced by the Executive Member for Customer Policy & Performance)	Executive Cabinet	29/09/05

## SHARED SERVICES CONTACT CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report seeks to provide a general progress update in respect of the Contact Centre since the last meeting of the Executive Cabinet on 7 April 2005.

### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2. The Contact Centre directly affects the Council's Customer and Capacity priorities.
3. The development represents a major investment to improve customer relations and contact with the Council.
4. The project also provides the basis for realising Gershon type efficiencies that will free up more back office time for processing and will potentially release extra resources for improved direct service provision. This aspect will be covered in a future on the subject of our Channel Strategy, Service Design and Delivery. This is being finalised following consultation.

### RISK ISSUES

5. The issue raised in this report involve risk considerations in the following categories:

Strategy	√	Information	√
Reputation	√	Regulatory/Legal	
Financial	√	Operational	√
People		Other	

6. The Council has an agreed and approved strategy for the development of a customer Contact Centre through joint working in the Lancashire Partnership. It is also expected that Partnership Working will be taken positively in any future CPA review of the Council.
7. This is a high profile scheme that is being looked at from both a regional and a national perspective. If it were to fail it would have a damaging effect on the reputation of the partners.
8. The total cost for the Partnership will be significant, but Lancashire County Council will fund a major share of this. For the initial stages Chorley's contribution is known and is budgeted for, but in the longer term, there may be other financial considerations that the Council is exposed to.

9. Operational risks relate to the non-achievement of planned customer service improvements and continuing reliance on past communication practices.

## **BACKGROUND**

10. Chorley Borough Council has signed up to the Lancashire Shared Services Contact Centre Partnership. This will deliver a fully operational Contact Centre with underlying technology and hardware. The implementation is on a phased basis. Chorley went live on 30 June 2005.

## **GENERAL PROGRESS**

11. The Council is now using Onyx CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software within the Telephony Centre on a restricted basis. Modern technology is also being used to automate call handling and processing.
12. As part of the product solution we have successfully developed the first stages of interface between our workflow scripts from Team Knowledge and Onyx CRM. This will enable seem less capture of service related information from customers to facilitate service provision i.e. refuse collection. This also provides the necessary foundation blocks for system integration to help deliver more efficient services during the next stages.
13. Potential benefit realisation for both the customer and the Council is evident from the initial use of these technologies and the added value it will bring to providing improved customer service.
14. The service is working to the principles of full resolution of customer enquiries at the first point of contact for Environmental Services and where possible other services that will be delivered from the Contact Centre. This will include system updates if possible.
15. The Council is leading on the development of CRM and as a result we are experiencing early teething issues synonymous with technical system implementations. For example, it has become clear from early use of CRM that capturing customer contact details is unnecessarily complicated resulting in lengthy call duration. This has been acknowledged by the partnership and work is underway to streamline the process as soon possible.
16. This approach has enabled the partnership to gauge live operational experience and commit resources to rectifying areas of operational concern before rolling out the programme to partner districts. It also enables the Council to contribute in the development of the product at an early stage.

## **SWITCHBOARD**

17. The switchboard service has been integrated into the new call handling system supplied by Macfarlane and is working effectively. It has provided, for the first time, a real insight into the volumes of calls received and abandoned. Significantly, it has highlighted that around 21% of calls received are answered at the first point of contact. Information requested by customers is not always service specific and these calls are unable to be transferred. For example, officer and member contact information, directions to Council offices or other places within the borough, service opening times and directory enquiry type calls etc. The general view of all calls answered and transferred within seconds is not necessarily true in the provision of a modern day switchboard service.
18. The current average talk time for calls received by (including calls transferred from) the switchboard is two minutes and 26 seconds. Latest call volumetrics in relation to this service are attached.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

19. This service is progressing well and we are achieving a high resolution of service at the first point of contact, currently 92.03%. The provision of this service from the Telephony Centre includes full system updates and dispatch of any appropriate post to customers. In effect this enables officers engaged in service provision to concentrate on their specialist aspects of business delivery leading to improved deployment of resources.
20. The provision of this service from the Telephony Centre has highlighted the need to ensure the relationship from the initial point of customer contact to the point of delivery is efficiently delivered if the Council is going to be successful in continuing to deliver excellent services. Not doing so results in generating customer frustration, repeat calls, inefficient use of resources and poor management. This is clearly evident from customer concerns already apparent, significantly the number of repeat calls generated due to poor service delivery.
21. Latest call volumetrics in relation to this service are also attached. It is considered relatively early to make any significant operational changes as a result of the information now available. However, early indications suggest a possible shortfall in staffing levels once all services are being delivered from the Telephony Centre and it may be necessary to draw on additional resources.
22. The next services to be delivered from the Telephony Centre will be Housing Benefits and Council Tax. Work is underway to enable this to happen.

## **ONE STOP SHOP**

23. In partnership with Lancashire County Council's Youth & Community Service we are working together to enable members of the minority ethnic community in Chorley to have improved access to Council services through established relationships with a key County Council employee. This service commenced on 7 September. Morning surgeries are held every Wednesday.
24. Chorley is one of only two districts to have fully implemented the automated online application for new bus passes. This is a significant step forward as photographs for the NoWcard pass (Smartcard) are taken in the One Stop Shop saving customers time and money.
25. Renewal of taxi licenses and associated system updates is also being delivered from the One Stop Shop. The provision of this service is continuing to grow working to the principle that all aspects of the first point of customer contact are delivered by Customer Services.

## **COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES**

26. HR fully support the Contact Centre operation. However, consideration should be given to the resources dedicated to the unit. High call waiting times and abandoned calls lead to customer dissatisfaction which can potentially lead to conflict within our call centre advisors. It is essential that the resource for the contact service can meet the call volume and that staff are fully trained in dealing with the variety of calls they will receive.

## **COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

27. The report indicates that once further development of the Contact Centre begins there may be financial consequences, as yet unknown. The final outcome on cost will be dependant upon ensuring the staffing levels are right to ensure the customer contact is dealt with to the satisfaction of the customer and the Council's ability to migrate services to the Call Centre, whilst maintaining quality and either driving out cost or transferring resources to the Call Centre.

28. As the report stipulates, the intention is to look at transferring telephone calls from Housing Benefit and Council Tax as the next steps in developing the Call Centre. I am currently working with the Assistant Head of Customer Services to identify issues and agree a process and timetable for change that ensures the high quality service currently provided to customers is maintained.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

29. That the report be noted.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

30. The report provides a general summary only of progress made so far.

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

31. None

MARTIN O'LOUGHLIN  
HEAD OF CUSTOMER, DEMOCRATIC AND OFFICE SUPPORT SERVICES

There are no background papers to this report.

<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Ext</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Doc ID</b>
Asim Khan	5448	19/09/05	SSCC PARTNERSHIP

<b>Service</b>	<b>Environmental Services</b>	<b>Switchboard</b>
DDI	515355, 5546, 5547, 5548, 5722, 5734	515151
Operating Times	Mon - Fri 08:00 to 18:00	Mon - Fri 08:45 to 17:00
Start Date	05 July 2005	30 August 2005

Calls Received	12,215	4,047
Calls Answered	10,741	3,744
Calls Transferred	856	2,922
Calls Abandoned	1,474	303
% Abandoned	12.10	07.50
Average Talk Time	02:48	02:26
Average Wait Time	01:17	00:43
Average Abandoned Time	02:16	01:19
Average Received Calls Per Day	249	404

% Calls Answered at the First Point of Contact	92.03	21.96
% Calls Answered within 20 Seconds Target (excl. abandoned)	50.30	49.80