

Executive

23rd July 2008

**Developing the range of externally provided public services within
Customer Service Centres.**

Report by: **Scrutiny Management Committee Customer Service Working
Group**

Ward Implications: **All**

FOR DECISION

1. Summary (and Community Implications)

- 1.1 A small working group of Scrutiny Management Committee members has contributed to the on going development work surrounding the City's network of Customer Service Centres (CSCs).
- 1.2 The contribution was intended to verify the current approach to CSC service development and identify any gaps in services or support for service providers which might make current levels of service provision more sustainable. Other benefits of the work included raising awareness amongst elected members and creating opportunities for public involvement. As well as raising awareness amongst Directorates and staff about the potential for service delivery from the network of CSCs.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive is recommended to:
- 2.2 Receive and note the working group's report
- 2.3 Endorse and support the findings and recommendations in the report and ask senior officers to give them full consideration as development work in Customer Service Centres continues.
- 2.4 Ask officers to provide an action plan and progress reports on the implementation of recommendations in due course.

3. . **The Working Group's Recommendations**

Recommendation 1:

The City Council should look for opportunities to formalise service delivery agreements with partners in order to maximise delivery opportunities from our network of Customer Service Centres. The working group recommends that the Council considers the potential to prescribe preferred delivery methods when services are procured or commissioned in the future or perhaps introduced as part of grant conditions when grant aid is awarded.

Recommendation 2:

The working group would like to see a more joined up approach to service planning in shared buildings and service planning in neighbourhoods. It is important that Customer Service Centres are part of ward planning, neighbourhood management, Area Asset Management, regeneration schemes and other policy developments – the staff and premises are significant local assets and their contribution to our communities should be better appreciated and understood throughout the Council.

Recommendation 3:

It is suggested that staff in all Council Directorates are familiarised with the CSC operation so that they can become ambassadors for the Centres- for example, promoting them when they are dealing with partner organisations and the general public.

Recommendation 4:

Council Directorates should also consider Customer Service Centres as premises resources – particularly if they are delivering services in high demand such as Welfare Rights advice.

Recommendation 5:

The working group would also encourage elected members to make the most of our Customer Service Centres and use the premises to hold surgeries and community meetings as much as possible.

Recommendation 6:

It is also important that Directorates consider our network of Customer Services Centres when changes occur in external organisations – for example Post Office closures and the proposals to offer basic health checks to people in the 40 – 76 age bracket, in order to maximise the opportunities for Customer Service Centres to fill gaps in local service provision.

Recommendation 7:

External organisations should be encouraged to deploy their services into Customer Service Centres for an appropriate period of time from the outset – services need a decent amount of time to get established. Unfortunately, services have been lost because of the loss of short term funding and lack of opportunity for the service to become established.

Recommendation 8:

External service providers should be kept apprised of the other services on offer from Customer Service Centres – a significant amount of business is generated between external agencies by referrals from one to another. The potential for referrals would increase if the services offered were more interrelated and had a relevance to each other.

Recommendation 9:

External service providers should be invited to deliver their services on a rotational basis such as one a day a week from each of the Centres so that the most popular services are equally accessible across the City.

Recommendation 10:

Notice boards and printed material should carry an explanation of the services on offer – the name of the agency often appears on publicity but doesn't necessarily convey the nature of the service (e.g. A4E is a debt counselling service).

Recommendation 11:

Using commonly understood 'umbrella' terms to describe what's on offer may generate better take up of services – brand awareness is crucial in encouraging take up of services.

Recommendation 12:

Information about the programmes at all Customer Service Centres should be made available – customers may wish to travel further than their closest Customer Service Centre for a host of reasons: public transport routes are more favourable, availability of other services in the locality, preferences for particular services e.g. favouring one shopping area over another.

Recommendation 13:

Nothing is rated more highly than a personal recommendation of a service – can the Centres find ways to increase the amount of face to face promotion of services by their staff to users and between service users?

Recommendation 14:

The working group suggest that it is vital that Customer Service Centres regularly review and evaluate the services they offer – both externally provided services and council services.

Recommendation 15:

Service providers themselves should be asked to complete regular self assessments to evaluate the impact and take up of their services. Customer Service Centre should develop a self assessment tool, in line with the best practise developed by Children's Centres, which helps delivery partners assess how far they are contributing to the aims and objectives of the Customer Service Strategy.

Recommendation 16:

The working group recommend that Customer Service Centres regularly canvas the opinions of the public – users and non-users – together with elected members from the catchment area for the Centres and frontline staff from the Council and the community & voluntary sector to find out which additional services would be most beneficial.

4. Corporate Implications

4.1 Views of the Head of Customer Service

The proposal was initially put forward to Members of Scrutiny Management Committee to contribute to the current activity of expanding the range of external service providers from the network of CSCs as it was considered that Elected Members would provide local knowledge and residents' feedback.

The Customer Service Team welcomes the findings and recommendations from Scrutiny Management Committee and will over the forthcoming months draw up an Action Plan which will be presented to Scrutiny Management Committee in November with six monthly progress reports thereafter.

Furthermore it is recommended that the report of the Scrutiny Management Committee be referred to the Newcastle Partnership Delivery Board, so that it can be drawn to the attention of partners in relation to the availability of the facilities within CSCs for service providers.

We are on target to complete the network of CSCs by December 2008 and it is our intention to develop a Communications Plan which will raise citywide awareness of the CSCs. It is also our intention to link up with LSP Delivery Board to look at how we can work together

4.2 Financial

It's not envisaged that the working group's recommendations will have any significant implications for budgets – internal adjustments and sharpening of some processes and procedures may well address the majority of recommendations.

4.3 Any additional views of City Treasurer

No additional comments received.

4.4 Legal (including any Human Rights Act implications).

The Head of Legal Services has seen the report and advises there are no legal issues arising.

4.5 **Environmental and Sustainability**

There is scope for Customer Service Centres to play a significant part in the delivery of key agendas such as climate change and also communicating changes in services such as the new waste strategy.

Developing the range of services available in our Customer Service Centres may ultimately reduce the need for travel in the City reducing congestion and carbon emissions.

4.6 **Risk**

There are risks to the sustainability of the programme of additional, externally provided services, if appropriate actions aren't taken to support this service delivery. Support for this work will ultimately enhance the core offer of Council services offered through the Centres and give residents greater choice and access locally.

4.7 **Equalities**

The Customer Service Centre Strategy and network have been subject to their own EINA. Each building complies with Part M of the Buildings Regulations and BS8300 (the design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people – code of practice), to ensure a thorough approach to making our services accessible to all. Each CSC has undergone a Disability Audit with a Disability Action Plan drawn up for any corrective action.

4.8 **Ward, Community Impact and Engagement Implications**

All wards benefit from access to a Customer Service Centre – and by the end of 2008 the network will be complete with 6 CSCs across the City. Sustaining and growing the contribution of external service providers to enhance the core offer of services can only increase the benefit to communities. By relating Customer Service Centre service development and service planning to neighbourhood management and local planning, the potential for engagement and community impact also increases.

4.9 **Scrutiny**

The working group's report (appendix one) has been presented and discussed at Scrutiny Management Committee, where it was endorsed and referred to the Executive for decision.

The appropriate Scrutiny Committee is: Scrutiny Management Committee

4.10 **Partnership**

This report does not involve creating any new significant partnerships, however, it has been suggested that the report is referred to the Newcastle

Partnership Delivery Board in order to raise awareness amongst Partners of the facilities available at Customer Service Centres.

4.11 **Community Safety Implications**

There is potential for Customer service Centres to be involved in the identification and response to community safety issues. Developing the role of CSCs, their frontline staff and user groups in mapping local issues and planning appropriate service delivery responses would be an important contribution to community safety issues.

5. **What Happens Next**

- 5.1 Within three months of the date of Executive approval of any or all of the recommendations, officers will be asked to respond to the working group's report by producing an action plan to address and implement the recommendations therein. The action plan and 6 monthly monitoring reports should be reported to Scrutiny Management Committee.

6. **Appendices:**

1. Report of Scrutiny Working Group – “Developing the range of externally provided public services within Customer Service Centres” April 2008 – attached.

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