

## COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

20 MARCH 2012

### REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

#### CUSTOMER SERVICES STAFFING RESOURCES

##### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To gain approval for recommendations put forward following work undertaken by the Customer Services Task Group for additional staffing in Customer Services to address resource issues and increased workloads and to improve the efficiency of the service by developing systems to improve service delivery to the customer.

##### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To recruit 4 additional FTE Customer Services Advisor posts and an additional 1 FTE CRM Development Officer;**
- 2.2 **That the full year cost of £109,780 be referred to the Policy, Finance & Admin Committee (PFA) for approval for funding from the working balance (para. 5.2 refers);**
- 2.3 **That PFA be asked to approve a permanent increase to the establishment (para 5.3 refers) and;**
- 2.4 **That the decision regarding a new website solution is paused to allow consideration of another emerging option.**

##### 3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The current staffing resource within Customer Services is struggling to deal with increases in workload. The increase is due to different factors but the recession is a key influence. Also improvements to the CRM have made it more attractive for service areas to look to improve their efficiency by ensuring relevant information is given to and collected from customers.
- 3.2 Investing solely in additional Customer Services Advisors does not provide a long-term solution to reducing the workload and improving the service. By investing in additional Customer Services Advisors and an additional CRM Development Officer, more processes can be designed and built to improve the efficiency of services in the Council while providing a good service in the interim.
- 3.3 The option of fixed term advisors has been explored but it is considered that permanent staff are required to provide stability and the level of knowledge and skills required to provide an efficient, effective service to the customer. Review of the staffing establishment as appropriate would ensure that the staffing level remains fit for purpose as the work of the CRM Officers begin to impact.
- 3.4 Sickness has a significant impact on workload. Sickness in 2011 was consistently higher than in other years (there were two peaks in 2009 that were due to the swine flu outbreak). There have been several long-term absentees within Customer Services throughout 2011 and this has had a major impact on the Service's resilience and ability to deal with the increased workload. Automated work processes would enable less

experienced and skilled staff to cover sickness and vacancies. The proposed staffing level takes in to account cover for a level of sickness and therefore the impact will be lessened.

- 3.5 There is a strong focus on improving the reputation of the Council. As the face and voice of Melton Borough Council, it is extremely important that the front office is working efficiently and effectively in order to create a positive impression. We are now developing some rich customer insight around all of our customers and their interaction habits and now is the time, following the move into Parkside, to really be proactive in how services are delivered but we first need to equip our front line staff with the resources to be able to do their job to the best of their ability.
- 3.6 Emails to the Council have been given a higher priority recently reducing the target turnaround substantially from 10 days to 24 hours. This has proven successful and the number of emails received in February was approximately treble the number ever recorded as received. This approach is considered the right way forward and a resource will therefore be needed to deal with incoming emails as currently the resource has been moved from the telephones which has had a detrimental effect on call statistics. In time the email channel should divert calls away from the phones thus encouraging channel shift. Previously when the email turnaround was 10 days customers would email, realise the turnaround period and ring or ring at a later date when they had not had a reply thus creating an email and a telephone call.
- 3.7 Over the past 2 years significant progress has been made with developing the CRM. A completely new workflow was designed for the benefits new claims lean project which assessed potential entitlement and eligibility before the customer makes a claim. A further workflow was developed for the change in circumstances lean project whereby the CRM intuitively categorises different types of changes and assigns a priority based on their impact to the customer and the organisation. Similar workflows have been built for ASB and planning which have greatly improved the efficiency of the services.
- 3.8 In addition to using the CRM to provide and collect information, it can also be used to automate processes. Customer Services will very shortly be going live on a new notification of death and Council Tax change of address workflows which completely integrate with the back office systems thus eradicating the need for a trained Council Tax processor to go back into the case history and update the systems.
- 3.9 There is a need to develop the systems to be more automated with no dual keying, more intuitive thus reducing the constant need for dedicated training and more customer-friendly, proactively offering customers services they may be entitled to rather than placing the onus on them to recognise they need them.
- 3.10 Although on their own, these developments only save pockets of time, collectively they greatly improve the efficiency of the service and have the potential to either reinvest time saved back into improving the service further or taking back as an efficiency saving. What is needed to achieve this is investment up-front so that more processes can be built to automate with back office systems.
- 3.11 From the above points it is clear that there is a broad breadth of work required from the CRM Development Officer. This has led to a conflict in priorities as most of the work is equally important with equally important benefits to the customer and Council. It is therefore identified that a further resource is needed.
- 3.12 The CRM Development Officer is also responsible for building web forms so that customers can self-serve online as well as building fully integrated self-service online transactions. Furthermore, they maintain the online Capita system and the frequently asked questions.

- 3.13 Progress regarding the website and options available have been reported to PFA and to CSA Committees recently. A further option has recently become a possibility that may be viable and give flexibility for more joined up services in the future therefore in order to allow this option to be considered properly the organisation concerned requires some time to work up further it's plans before we can consider whether it is an option we wish to pursue.

#### 4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The SOCITM review of ICT services may impact on the CRM Officer role, therefore if approval received the additional CRM officer post will initially be advertised on a six month fixed term contract with a view to making it permanent if appropriate at a later date.
- 4.2 The recruitment of staff on a permanent basis rather than fixed term appointments may result in potential redundancy situations arising in the future if the establishment is reviewed and reduced. Normal HR procedures would be followed in these circumstances. However, future costs in the form of redundancy payments cannot be ruled out.
- 4.3 The recently agreed Customer Services Strategy will be affected by these proposals in so far as the additional resources will assist in moving the strategy forward and meeting its aims.

#### 5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Cost based on full year assuming 01/04/2012 start date

4 post at band 4 to 6  
costing at middle band 5 spinal point 16 = £16440

4 Posts @ £16440	=	£65760
MBC National Ins.	=	£ 4332
MBC Pension	=	<u>£11113</u>
<b>Total Cost for 4 posts</b>	=	<b>£81205</b>

1 Post at band 8  
costing at band 8 spinal point 27 = £22958

1 Post @ £22958	=	£22958
MBC National Ins.	=	£ 1740
MBC Pension	=	<u>£ 3880</u>
<b>Total Cost</b>	=	<b>£28578</b>

- 5.2 There are potential HR implications to the recommendations that have been consulted with the recognised trade union representatives.
- 5.3 The total annual cost of £109,780 will require a supplementary estimate from the working balance in 2012-13 and will require approval from PFA to fund the proposals. The level of working balance approved by PFA for next year is £640k prior to this proposal being approved. This will be subject to further review by PFA in April when considering changes to the budget as a result of the receipt of the Sainsbury's monies.
- 5.4 An increase to the permanent establishment will also need to be approved by PFA.
- 5.5 Members need to be aware that there is future pressure on the Council's finances as identified in the review of funding from 2013/14 in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which was approved by PFA on 25 January 2012 i.e. the localisation

of business rates and council tax benefits.

**6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

6.1 There are no legal implications not already covered in 4.

**7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

7.1 There are no direct community safety implications

**8.0 EQUALITIES**

8.1 An EIA has been completed.

**9.0 RISKS**

9.1 **Probability**



Very High A				
High B				
Significant C				
Low D			2	
Very Low E			1	
Almost Impossible F				
	IV Neg- ligible	III Marg- inal	II Critical	I Catast- rophic

**Impact**

Risk No.	Description
1	CRM officers do not deliver changes to workflow required.
2	Inability to recruit to CRM officer with necessary skills on a 6 month fixed term basis.*

\*If risk 2 appears to be the case consideration will be requested from Management Team for the post to be advertised on a permanent basis or other suitable options to address the problem.

**10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE**

10.1 There are no direct implications for climate change.

**11.0 CONSULTATION**

11.1 This subject of this report has been discussed at Management Team and Customer Services Task Group. The recognised trade unions are aware of the proposals.

12.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 All

Contact Officer      Angela Tebbutt, Head of Communications  
Date:                    12 March 2012

Appendices :        None

Background Papers: None

Reference :            X : Committees\CSA