

**TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CUSTOMER CONTACT ADVISORY BOARD**

**Monday, 27th March, 2006**

**Present:** Cllr R C Brown (Chairman), Cllr D J Cure, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr P J Drury, Cllr Mrs J M Harrison, Cllr Mrs F A Hoskins, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr B Miners and Cllr M R Rhodes.

Councillors Aikman, Baldock, Balfour, Bolt, Mrs Murray and Worrall were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Coffin, Smith and Thornewell.

**PART 1 - PUBLIC**

**CC  
06/004**      **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**CC  
06/005**      **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Notes of the meeting of the Customer Contact Advisory Board held on Thursday 26 January 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET**

**CC  
06/006**      **CUSTOMER CONTACT STRATEGY**

Members were updated on work associated with the Customer Contact Strategy and considered the proposed redesigns of the reception areas at Kings Hill and Tonbridge Castle, as detailed in the joint report of the Customer Services Manager, Central Services Director and the Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Innovation.

The amalgamation of staff from various services within the Council to create a Customer Services Team had been achieved and all existing staff would be in their posts by 1 April 2006. A significant training programme would be undertaken over the next 6 months in advance of the new reception areas being available in the autumn.

Members were reminded of the overall timetable for the re-design of the reception areas and of the key issues to be resolved in order to deliver face to face customer services. The possible design options had been further progressed with architects, Fry Drew Knight Creamer (FDKC), following staff consultation and further consideration given

related to Listed Building constraints.

The Chairman introduced Graeme Gibson, of FDKC, who summarised the design options and explained that the main objectives of the design included improvements in customer services, compliance with Disability Discrimination Act guidance, the creation of user friendly customer counters and secure interview rooms and the utilisation of space released to improve customer service areas.

Members reviewed the design plans for Kings Hill and Tonbridge Castle and expressed concerns relating to the escape route from the secure interview room at Kings Hill and felt that this should be investigated further, with 100% soundproofing guaranteed for confidentiality purposes. Waiting areas and queuing procedures were discussed and the Customer Services Manager assured Members that options to manage queues at peak times would be investigated, in close liaison with the Customer Services Supervisors.

Disability access at Tonbridge Castle was reviewed and Members acknowledged the difficulties associated with making a Scheduled Ancient Monument DDA compliant, but felt that good progress had been made. The Customer Services Manager confirmed that the location of the disabled parking bay would be looked at to see if this could be moved nearer to the gatehouse.

Members sought clarification regarding tourist information provision and were advised that staff at Tonbridge Castle would be providing a much wider range of services including tourist information although this would be presented in a revised layout.

It was confirmed that the Council may be unable to determine the Listed Building consent and that the final decision could be made by the Secretary of State. The works at Tonbridge Castle may also require Scheduled Ancient Monument consent. Members sought reassurance that the relevant Area Planning Committee representatives should be involved in the process, particularly with regard to the proposed new build elements at Tonbridge Castle.

Members were impressed by the work undertaken so far and the Chairman thanked Graeme Gibson for his presentation and hard work.

The Board was informed that work continued on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and telephony systems with a live date of July 2006 predicted. It was believed that this was a realistic target and could be delivered without detriment to existing satisfaction levels. A demonstration of both systems would be arranged at a future meeting in view of the revised project plan.

Members were advised that the design proposals for the reception areas took into account the actions identified in a previous Disability Discrimination Act Audit. The Disability Working Party would be consulted on these proposals.

The Director of Finance outlined the proposed funding package to meet the revised costings for the project, and emphasised the importance of this investment if the Council and its customers were to benefit from possible efficiency savings previously identified. The majority of the project would be funded from Capital Plan provision and Building Repairs Reserve, whilst the "windfall" grant from the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Scheme received from Government in February 2006, and currently held in Revenue Reserve, would be used to fund the balance.

Members were pleased to support this funding provision, but urged that the successful contractors be monitored closely to make sure costs were kept within budget.

The Customer Services Manager outlined the risks associated with the Customer Contract Strategy and the CRM system and explained that the Council's very high customer satisfaction levels could decline if the works were not progressed.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the schemes presented at the meeting by FDKC be approved, subject to minor alterations specifically in relation to the escape route from the Kings Hill interview room;
- (2) funding from the Capital Plan provision for "Fast-Track" schemes (£292,000), DDA Improvements relating to reception areas (£6,000), Corporate Buildings Security Improvements (£13,000), Building Repairs Reserve (£17,000) and the Contribution from Revenue Reserve (£96,000) be agreed; and
- (3) the preferred schemes be progressed in consultation with staff, customers and the Disability Working Party.

**\*Referred to Cabinet**

**MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**

**CC  
06/007**

**EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

No items were considered in private.

The meeting ended at 2122 hours