

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CUSTOMER CONTACT ADVISORY BOARD

27 March 2006

Report of the Customer Services Manager, Central Services Director and Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Innovation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision

1 CUSTOMER CONTACT STRATEGY

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on a number of strands of work associated with the Customer Contact Strategy. Members are specifically asked to consider the proposed redesign of the reception areas at Kings Hill and Tonbridge Castle.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 As Members will be aware from the discussions at the last meeting of this Advisory Board held on the 26 January 2006, there are a number of strands of work encompassed under the banner of "Customer Contact Strategy".

1.1.2 As previously agreed this meeting of the Board is primarily to consider the proposed changes to reception areas and to receive a progress report on other areas of work

1.2 Establishment of a Customer Services Team

1.2.1 At the last meeting of this Board, Members agreed the overall approach to the development of a dedicated Customer Services Team to deliver face-to-face services. The aim is to deliver improved services through our frontline staff at all offices by improving the range of queries that can be answered at the area offices and also at Kings Hill reception thus reducing back office workloads.

1.2.2 The establishment of the team was considered and approved by General Purposes Committee on 6 February 2006 (Minute GP 06/009 refers). Members will recall that this process included the amalgamation of staff from Financial Services, Administrative and Property Services, Planning and Transportation Services and Leisure Services in accordance with the Council's Employment Stability Policy. We are pleased to advise Members that this task is completed and all existing staff will be in their new posts by 1 April 2006.

1.2.3 The staff will continue to fulfil their previous duties whilst undertaking a significant training programme over the 6 months prior to the new reception areas being available in the Autumn

1.3 Re-design of Reception Areas

1.3.1 As advised at the previous meeting Members were advised some key issues to be resolved in order to deliver the new face-to-face customer services : -

| Task | Timing | Decision Making |
|--|---|---|
| Redesign reception at Kings Hill and ground floor at Tonbridge Castle | Options being prepared now for report as Capital Plan Fast Track Evaluation | Finance & Property Advisory Board receive evaluation – 1 March 2006. Customer Contact AB to consider design detail in March. Confirmed by Council – 25 April 2006 |
| Listed Building & Procurement of works consents | Up to 3 months (May to end of July). | Selection of Contractors CSM/CSD or Finance and Property Advisory Board – 12 July, if necessary |
| Lead Time for Contractors | August | |
| On Site | September 2006 | |
| Staff Training | Ongoing | |
| Expansion of CRM and possible inclusion of Revenues and Benefits onto system | Capital Plan Fast Track 'List C' Evaluation | Committee Date to be determined as evaluation progresses |
| Expansion of services across North of Borough based on analysis of existing contacts | For implementation 1 September to coincide with other front office enhancements | Customer Contact Advisory Board – June 2006 |

1.3.2 This programme is ongoing and a number of elements will be the subject of report to future meetings of this Board.

1.3.3 The fast-track 'List C' evaluation re-design of the reception areas was considered by Members of the Finance and Property Advisory Board at its meeting on 1

March 2006. We attach at **[Annex 1]** for information a copy of the fast-track scheme evaluation presented to that meeting.

1.3.4 The purpose of the scheme and the underpinning design principles are set out in Annex 1, which is based on preliminary design work by consultant architects, FDKC. The possible design options have been further progressed in the light of staff consultation, and further consideration in relation to the constraints of working on Listed Buildings.

1.3.5 Finance & Property Advisory Board recommended to Cabinet at Minute FP 06/027 that:

“(1) the action taken in consultation with the Chief Executive to appoint Fry Drew Knight Creamer as Architects for the feasibility study be approved;

(2) if the scheme proceeds Fry Drew Knight Creamer be instructed to complete the full commission of the design stage; and

(3) schemes for the redevelopment of the receptions at Tonbridge Castle and Gibson Building, Kings Hill be approved from the options set out in the supplementary annex to the report for inclusion in List A of the Capital Plan and be progressed for implementation early in 2006/07.”

1.3.6 Members will note from Annex 1 that the indicative scheme costs are given as a ‘range’. At the meeting on 27 March, we intend to update those costs to assist Members in their deliberations about the design options. We are pleased to confirm that the consultant architect, Graeme Gibson of FDKC will attend the meeting to present the design options for both Kings Hill Reception and Tonbridge Castle.

1.3.7 Members will be invited to comment on the designs.

14 Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Telephony

1.4.1 These systems will support both the face-to-face services and the telephone based distributed contact centres across services.

1.4.2 The project plans have now been agreed with the suppliers of both the CRM (Lagan) and the supporting telephony system (MacFarlane). The introduction of CRM is a major programme of work which requires significant staff input and training from all Phase 1 services, and of course IT. In agreeing the project plans, the Officer Project Board, has been careful to consider a programme which facilitates the proper introduction of the new systems taking account of known service commitments, such as the expansion of the green waste scheme.

1.4.3 The project plan predicts a go live date in July 2006. We believe this is realistic and can be delivered without detriment to existing satisfaction levels.

1.4.4 Members have requested a demonstration of both systems and this will be arranged for a future meeting in the light of the revised project plan.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 There are a number of matters we would draw to Members attention:

- This activity is undertaken under the Council's general powers to do all things calculated to facilitate the discharge of its functions contained in section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- The procurement of the building works will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's financial regulations and Contract Procedure Rules.
- The design proposals for the reception areas take account of the actions identified in a previous Disability Discrimination Act Audit. The Disability Working Party will be consulted on these proposals.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 Indicative Capital and Revenue implications were presented to the Finance & Property Advisory Board on 1 March 2006 as mentioned at paragraph 1.3.3. (Annex 1 refers) Members are reminded that those figures were:-

- Kings Hill – Proposed scheme £95,000 (inc fees)
- Tonbridge Castle – A range from £225,000 up to £300,000 (inc fees)

1.6.2 However, as referred to at paragraph 1.3.6 above, the schemes have been further refined and the revised costings will be available at the meeting.

1.6.3 Members will appreciate that the proposed alterations to the reception areas have a significant capital cost. This investment is necessary if the organisation and its customers are to benefit from the possible efficiency savings previously identified including :-

- Reducing unnecessary contacts through informed marketing and information
- Increasing customer self service through the website
- More efficient front office operation by answering questions more effectively at the first point of contact
- More efficient back office procedures allowing professional staff to focus on core tasks.

1.6.4 At the meeting of the Finance & Property Advisory Board earlier this month, the Director of Finance advised Members that should the Council wish to progress the

options at the lower end of the cost range, there is likely to be sufficient funding allocated within the agreed Capital Plan provision (£750,000) specifically set aside for 'fast-track' schemes. However, if the preferred options fall at the upper end of the cost range, additional funding sources may need to be identified and approved by Cabinet and full Council. At the time of writing this report the revised costings have not been received and it is therefore difficult to predict what, if any, additional monies may be required. On the evening of the meeting, Members will be advised of all the likely cost options as well as potential funding 'packages'.

- 1.6.5 It is clear that the redesign of the reception areas could be a significant capital scheme for the Council, but we need to recognise that it is key to the delivery of the face-to-face elements of the customer contact strategy. Putting this into context, Members will recall that the implementation the Customer Contact Strategy alongside the action plan agreed following the Best Value Review of Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefits will generate net **annual** corporate savings in excess of £43,000 which is reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 The report to the previous meeting of this Board included a risk assessment in relation to both the overall Customer Contact Strategy and the CRM system.

- 1.7.2 With regard to the proposed re-design of reception areas, a number of risks can be identified:-

- Proposals at both locations require Listed Building Consent. This could be refused. In order to minimise this risk the schemes have been brought forward in full consultation with the Development Control Section, informed by their experience of works to Listed Buildings.
- Procurement of building works will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations. There is a risk that the tender prices could exceed the identified budget allocation. This risk has been minimised through the Architect's use of a Quantity Surveyor to cost the options at this stage.
- Members will be aware of the potential prospect of Local Government re-organisation and the current level of uncertainty. The time-table for this project is such that final designs and the necessary Consents for works will not be in place before July 2006, and as such there can be no procurement commitment to contractors, thus allowing the final decision for implementation to be informed by the White Paper due to be published at the end of June 2006.
- If the works are not progressed there will be a lost opportunity to deliver the Customer Contact Strategy and the associated customer benefits and efficiency savings

1.8 Summary and Recommendations

1.8.1 The re-design of the reception areas at Tonbridge Castle and Kings Hill is key to the delivery of the face-to-face elements of the customer contact strategy.

1.8.2 It is therefore **RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) Members consider the schemes presented on the evening and identify any modifications to the reception at Kings Hill and the preferred option with regard to Tonbridge Castle and make the appropriate recommendation to Cabinet.
- 2) Subject to Cabinet endorsement, the preferred schemes be progressed in consultation with staff, customers and the Disability Working Party

Background papers:

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Nil

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