

**Report of the Head of Business Transformation Division**

**Improving Call Handling at Adur District Council**

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report asks Members to approve an overall approach to improve telephone call handling at Adur District Council (ADC) by transferring the Council's Switchboard to the West Sussex County Council's Contact Centre, (WSSCC CC).
- 1.2 Adur DC cannot expand its current call handling at the switchboard without a substantial internal reorganisation with the service line teams. In addition, probably late in 2007-8, much of the current telephony infrastructure would need replacing.
- 1.3 It is therefore proposed to transfer the Switchboard function to WSSCC CC as this will offer short and long term improvements to call handling and will be cheaper than the alternative of keeping the service in Shoreham.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to approve the transfer of ADC's Switchboard to the WSSCC CC at a cost of a one-off start up fee of £30,000 and £38,000 per annum thereafter. Assuming a mid-year implementation in 2006-7 the annual fee will be c £19,000 in the first year.
- 2.2 Members are asked to note that the 1.5 FTE Switchboard posts will be made redundant and the council will seek to find suitable re-deployment opportunities in line with the councils employment stability policy.
- 2.3 Based on average staff costs for the grades involved, this leaves a cost increase of about £8000 pa (£4000 in the first year) that can be met from the CRM project revenue budget in the short term and savings in the telephony upgrade project in the longer term.
- 2.4 Members are asked to note the long-term plan to improve call handling at ADC by examining working practices section by section and building on the corresponding call handling capacity at the WSSCC CC. Any proposals on this will be presented for approval in a subsequent paper.

**3.0 Background**

There are three options available to us:

**3.1 CONTINUE AS WE ARE:**

This is not a 'zero cost' option as the existing telephone infrastructure will need replacing from 2007/8. (Some spare parts are already difficult to obtain.) Whilst the

detailed figures have not been obtained at this early stage, initial feedback from suppliers obtained by the ICT manager indicated costs in the region of £100,000. This has already been built into the 2007-8 budget plan. *This costly equipment upgrade would exclude any improvement to the service apart from minor tinkering.*

### 3.2 MOVE SWITCHBOARD TO WSCC CONTACT CENTRE

Following this approach we will have some start up costs and some further telephony costs later but the overall capital outlay would be in the region of half the telephony costs indicated above. In addition, the move to WSCC CC would also offer Adur a realistic option to improve telephone based customer services. *This is the recommended option, described in paragraph 4 below.*

### 3.3 EXPAND OUR EXISTING SWITCHBOARD INTO A CONTACT CENTRE IN ADUR

This is felt to be far too complex a project for Adur to take on. The costs of building the physical facilities would be substantial and, in addition to the previous option, we would also have to fund substantial implementation costs in terms of consultancy for both telephony and contact centre as we do not have the skills to do this thoroughly in-house. (As an example Arun DC have spent £100,000 on these aspects on their new contact centre.)

## 4.0 Proposals : to transfer services to an expert facility

- 4.1 It is recommended that we move the switchboard traffic to an existing expert facility. This is a competitive market place but, as WSCC have recently tendered for, and put in place, a very successful facility using Liberata as suppliers, the need for a further tender or quotation exercise is being discussed with Legal Services. The WSCC facility contract makes clear the potential for District work and WSCC are keen to take on our work.
- 4.2 It is recommended that ADC transfer existing Switchboard services to the WSCC CC, based at Durban House, Bognor Regis. The first steps of this will involve the drawing up of full project and legal documentation jointly by ADC and WSCC.
- 4.3 As Durban house is an established Contact Centre run by professionals the project management expertise will largely be derived from them with Adur staff feeding in information as required. This will make for an easier implementation path.
- 4.4 There would be a one-off set up cost of £30,000 for equipment and installation effort, covered in the CRM capital project budget
- 4.5 WSCC have estimated an annual running cost of £38,000 which is a bit higher than our current cost of around £30,000. The current Switchboard posts will be made redundant. The additional cost of £8,000 pa can be funded from the CRM project revenue budget in 2006-7 and 2007-8 and will be more than offset by the reduction in the telephony budget in subsequent years.
- 4.6 WSCC have made clear that an early move will be cheaper to us as they have existing building capacity to absorb our work. If we wait we would almost certainly be charged extra start-up costs.

## **5.0 Service Benefits**

- 5.1 The move to WSCC CC would lead to an immediate improvement in service as 9% of our current calls (10,000 pa) are 'lost' (not answered). The greater staff base at the contact centre enables it to handle peak loads so we would expect this to fall to c 1% (their current performance).
- 5.2 Up to 40 Adur customer calls per day are already passed by switchboard to WSCC. These will be handled more smoothly.

## **6.0 Long Term Plan – Expansion into Contact Centre**

- 6.1 The aspiration remains to move to more centralised call handling but no detailed planning has been done in this area yet. Any proposals will be submitted to members separately for approval.
- 6.2 Clearly, as the WSCC CC is expert in more detailed call handling, it would be a natural location for this work to be located. The switchboard move is seen as a first step along this path but, because of the financial advantages, still stands up on its own merits in business terms.

## **7.0 Local Government Re-Organisation**

- 7.1 As the Contact Centre seems certain to remain in place regardless of change and as all West Sussex Councils are using the same base software for customer handling (Lagan Frontline) this approach is as future proof as any other.

## **Local Government Act 1972 Background Papers:**

Various project papers held by Jeremy Beales.

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## **Appendix**

### **1.0 Council Objective**

1.1 This proposal supports Core Value Statement, “To put the customer at the heart of our business”

The proposal also links to the key Priority of Partnership Working as it involves close working with WSCC within WSASP aspirations.

### **2.0 Specific Targets**

2.1 This proposal will have a direct impact on the LOST CALLS target as it is expected to virtually eliminate the current 9% loss.

### **3.0 Sustainability Issues**

3.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **4.0 Equality Issues**

4.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **5.0 Community Safety issues (Section 17)**

5.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **6.0 Human Rights Issues**

6.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **7.0 Financial Implications**

7.1 As set out in the report.

### **8.0 Legal Implications**

8.1 The tender position, in terms of a non-competitive selection of WSCC for this work, is being examined.

### **9.0 Consultations**

9.1 None required at this stage

### **10.0 Risk assessment**

10.1 Full risk assessment to follow as once the PID is established.

### **11.0 Health & Safety Issues**

11.1 Matter considered and no issues identified