

Report to: Cabinet, 12th February 2013

Report of: Cabinet Member for Delivering Value for Money

Subject: REVENUES AND BENEFITS TELEPHONY

1. Decision Required

- 1.1 To approve the proposal to transfer call handling for the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service be transferred from the County Council Hub Contact Centre to the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service from 1 April 2013.

2. Background

- 2.1 The South Worcestershire Shared Service Partnership Joint Committee agreed in principle at a special meeting on 16 January 2013 that call handling for the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service be transferred from the County Council Hub Contact Centre to the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service from 1 April 2013. This report deals with this proposal from a Wychavon District Council perspective, ensuring that the necessary approvals are in place for this transfer to happen. There are no proposals to alter our arrangements for dealing with customers face to face.

3. Transfer of Call Handling - proposal and rationale

- 3.1 Attached at Appendix A is a report considered by the Joint Committee prepared by Nick Jefferies, Head of Shared Service Revenues and Benefits, and Rachel Hill, Head of Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. This report relates to a proposal to transfer telephone call handling from the Hub Contact Centre to the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, hosted by Wychavon District Council. The Joint Committee agreed the recommendations as set out at a special meeting on 16 January 2013.
- 3.2 The transfer of Revenues and Benefits calls will result in both improved customer service and revenue savings of around £60,000 per year for the partner councils. Improved customer service will result from reduced double handling and the use of service experts. It is important to point out that the Hub Contact Centre has served the Shared Service well for the past five years or so but developments affecting the service, notably on welfare reform, mean that now is the right time to look at alternatives.
- 3.3 Members will be aware that in addition to this proposal for call handling, a Strategic Partnership for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service is being pursued. This initiative is also about preparing early for change and seizing opportunities, in this case those presented by the move to universal credit, whilst also dealing with the need to find further savings. This will be the subject of a report to Cabinet in the summer when the results of our market testing will be known.
- 3.4 An implementation team will be established to ensure the transfer of call handling is seamless to our customers. We will work with the County Council to agree transitional arrangements. A total of 12 full time equivalent (FTE) staff are expected to transfer but this number could vary. This represents a risk to the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service and the partner councils. The Management Board is working closely with the Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and with HR colleagues from Wychavon and the County Council to manage this risk.

4. Policy, Legal, Financial, Equalities, HR and Risk Management Implications

- 4.1 **Policy Implications** - The proposals will help us to continue to improve value for money in this service.
- 4.2 **Legal Implications** - The shared service governance arrangements are set out in the South Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Agreement which delegates functions to the joint committee, however these delegations are service specific. The agreement makes provision for variations and changes. In February 2008 when the decision was taken to enter into the Shared Service Partnership Agreement, Cabinet approved a delegation of functions to the Joint Committee and there was a delegation to the Head of Governance and Corporate Support to finalise the agreement. This delegation does not go far enough to confer an officer delegation to make variations to the agreement and the decision is therefore subject to Cabinet approval.
- 4.3 **Financial Implications** - The proposals will deliver revenue savings for the partner councils, as set out in the report to the Joint Committee. One off set up costs can be contained within the surplus for the Revenues and Benefits Shared service (budget underspend) carried forward from last financial year, 2011/12.
- 4.4 **HR Implications** – There are no HR implications for Worcester City Council from these proposals. A potential TUPE transfer of around 12 FTE staff from the County Council to Wychavon will result.
- 4.5 **Equalities Implications** - Equality Impact screening indicates that there are no equalities implications arising from the proposals and an impact assessment is not required.
- 4.6 **Risk Implications** - The following risks are associated with the proposal which will be managed / mitigation measures put in place:
- significant reduction / failure in customer service levels
 - implementation costs higher than budget
 - number of staff transferring is significantly different to 12 FTE.

5. Comments of Performance, Improvement and Efficiency Service Manager

- 5.1 The transfer of call handling to the revenues and benefits shared service offers opportunities to deliver both savings and improved customer service. The proposal will streamline processes reducing the time and effort required to deal with calls, allowing for consistent, high quality service to customers.

6. THE CABINET MEMBER FOR DELIVERING VALUE FOR MONEY, COUNCILLOR ANDY ROBERTS, RECOMMENDS:

That Cabinet approves the transfer of call handling from the County Council Hub Contact Centre to the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service with a target date of 1 April 2013.

Ward(s): All wards
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