

Integrated Customer Management

Operations Committee

Committee: OPERATIONS
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Title: INTEGRATED CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT
PROGRESS REPORT
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Agenda Item

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Item for note

Summary

This report provides details of the progress of the Integrated Customer Management (ICM) project. It focuses on developments on key aspects of the project.

Recommendations

Members comment on and note the progress of the project.

Background Papers

ICM project file.

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Please refer to paragraph 1e of this report
Community Safety	There are no specific community safety implications contained in this report
Equalities	There are no specific equalities implications contained in this report
Finance	All progress is within budget
Human Rights	There are no specific human rights implications contained in this report
Legal implications	There are no specific legal implications contained in this report
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

1. ICM progress on key areas is as follows: -

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a. New Telephone System

Operations Committee resolved on 9 February 2006 to replace the current telephone system. Owing to the amount of time available to procure the new system in readiness for the implementation of the customer service centre in November 2006, a meeting was convened with the Procurement Agency for Essex and the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) with a view to truncating the tendering process. At that meeting, the option of a managed telephone service instead of outright purchase was discussed. The benefit of the latter is that it would be a more suitable solution if the council were to eventually embark on a shared (hosted) telephony service with other councils.

Another report at item 6 on this Committee's agenda explains the role of OGC and its relationship with OGCbuying.solutions. The latter offers a managed telephone service through a partnership with Global Crossing and is therefore fully compliant with current procurement guidelines. In view of the potential business benefits of a managed service arrangement, a meeting was held with OGC and Global Crossing on 14 March 2006 to discuss possible options for future telephony services. Global Crossing has been provided with technical data, which will enable them to supply costings for the managed service arrangement. Members will be updated on developments verbally at the Operations Committee meeting.

b. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System

Problems are currently being experienced with the CRM system. The main problem has been with losing services on an intermittent basis when updating the system. There have been other problems such as system error messages appearing when carrying out routine navigation and enquiries and also system slowness. These have been raised at a very senior level with Northgate Information Solutions, who have provided additional staffing resource to resolve the issues. At the time of writing this report, Northgate appear to have resolved the more serious problem of services being lost, but this is still subject to rigorous testing. The other problems are being worked on and it is hoped that the CRM system will be stable within a matter of a few days. Once this has been achieved, Northgate will be providing resources to complete the Ocella (Environmental Services) and Sx3 (Revenues and Benefits) back office integration, enabling the CRM system to be used to answer customer enquiries in relation to those services.

c. New Ways To Pay

A letter was sent on 6 March 2006 to over 4,300 people who paid for council services using cash, cheque or postal order between 1 November 2005 and 22 January 2006. This would have either been by a personal visit or by sending the payment through the post. The purpose of the letter was to advise them of the review that had been carried out by the council on how customers

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access services and ways in which this could be improved. It also mentioned the high cost of handling cash at the council offices. The letter announced that, as from September 2006, customers would be able to make payment at any of the nationwide network of Post Offices at no cost to the customer. It also mentioned that the new payment method would significantly increase the number of places that people can pay for council services. Another benefit would be that Post Offices have longer opening hours including, for many, Saturday mornings and provide them with much needed business.

People were asked to volunteer to participate in a trial to help the council roll out the new method of payment, which would involve them paying at a Post Office using a plastic payment card.

The response to the letters has been extremely encouraging with over 180 in favour of the new proposals. Around 20 people were needed for the trial and this number was reached very quickly with many more being turned away. On the down side, 14 people have raised their concerns over the withdrawal of the facility to pay by cash at the council offices.

d. Premises

The ICM JMT Premises Group have been consulting staff on the proposed lay out of the new customer service centre in order to involve staff as much as possible. The appropriate planning consent applications have been made and it is hoped that work will commence in May 2006. The group is now concerning itself with the details of how the centre will be laid out.

e. Communication, consultation and community/user involvement

It was mentioned in (c) above that the new ways to pay initiative had been communicated to those customers most affected.

The Executive Manager (Customer Services) made a presentation to the Parish Liaison meeting on 7 March 2006 about ICM, including the new ways to pay initiative. The same presentation was made to the council's Tenants Forum on 13 March 2006. It is also proposed to meet with the Housing Services sheltered unit wardens at their next meeting in June 2006 to talk through 'new ways to pay'.

A questionnaire has been sent to JMT staff asking that they identify any operational issues that need to be overcome with the introduction of 'new ways to pay'.

An article on the new ways to pay initiative was included in the recent edition of Uttlesford Life.

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f. Business process re-engineering

It is anticipated that the first phase of the business process re-engineering (BPR) programme will now commence in Revenues, Benefits, Cashiers and Anti-Fraud in April 2006. The start of the programme has been delayed as internal staff need to be appointed to the internal BPR team before the programme can commence.

A meeting was held on 13 March 2006 with staff that had expressed an interest in the internal BPR posts. A selection process will follow shortly.

Initially, it was envisaged that the first phase would take up to 4-5 months allowing for a break in the programme because of council tax and business rates annual billing. However, Northgate are of the opinion that the first phase could now be completed in 3-4 months as it will start following annual billing.

The second phase of the programme will cover Housing Services processes. Discussions are currently taking place with West Lancashire council, who are currently carrying out the same programme in this service area. It is proposed that guidance is sought from that council to help with and speed up the BPR exercise in Housing Services.

It is important to note that the BPR programme is an ongoing process and will continue past the implementation of the customer service centre in November 2006.

g. Human resources

Additional staff workshops were set up to explain the impact that ICM would have on the organisation and how staff would be affected. Discussions have also taken place with staff that had particular concerns about the proposed changes.

h. Risk

The JMT Risk Group meets regularly to re-evaluate the risks, append the revised register and draw attention to the most recent amendments. The Executive Manager (Customer Services) attended the last meeting of the group on 13 March 2006 to discuss the recent CRM system problems and delay in starting the BRP programme.

Targets

2. The council needs to move towards a system of Integrated Customer Management (ICM). This means that customers dealing with the council should have a common experience and level of service regardless of which service they

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are seeking or which access channel they choose to use. Achieving this requires the development of common processes, systems and standards across the whole organisation.

3. ICM will mean integrated access, integrated services and integrated service delivery.
4. Customer service standards are detailed in the council's customer service strategy.

Options

5. This report recommends that members comment and note on progress of the project.

Pay-Offs/Penalties

6. As previously reported at the last meeting of this committee, it is envisaged that the customer will have one single point of (real or virtual) contact for access to all services. This is likely to be through as many access channels as possible including telephone, letter, e-mail, internet and face-to-face. Notwithstanding the growth of the web, for the foreseeable future phone access will be the major contact medium. Along with face-to-face contact, this is also vital to ensure social inclusion for those who are unable or unwilling to make use of new means of communication.
7. Dealing with the majority of customer enquiries through a customer service centre would enable specialist officers within the council to focus on more complex work.