



**Chester-le-Street**  
District Council

**Report to:** Executive

**Date of Meeting:** 5 November 2007

**Report from:** Customer Relationship Manager

**Title of Report:** Development of a Customer Service Centre within the Civic Centre

**Agenda Item Number:** 7

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## **1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for the Executive to reconsider the development of a customer service centre within the Civic Centre following the decision on Local Government reorganisation in County Durham. It is not felt that it is now appropriate to carry out the works from a value for money point of view.
- 1.2 Members are recommended not to proceed with the proposals previously agreed by the Executive

## **2. CONSULTATION**

- 2.1 The Chief Executive, Asst Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Service Team Managers, Action Learning Set (Accommodation) and all employees affected by the proposals have been consulted throughout the design stage of the project.
- 2.2 The Executive also considered the proposals and agreed to go ahead with the tender process in January 2007. Regular verbal reports have been made to the Executive via the decision tracker.

## **3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES**

- 3.1 Customer Excellence is at the forefront of the Council's overall drive and ambition to achieve excellent status in the future. This was exemplified by the Corporate Plan and the Improvement and Recovery Plan. In particular the Improvement and recovery plan lists a number of actions associated with the creation of a corporate customer services team to become the main point of contact for enquiries within the civic centre. In addition access to services, specifically, is the driving force behind the modernisation agenda and a number of projects have been introduced to support the Council's drive for customer excellence.

- 3.2 However, with the onset of the Government's decision regarding local government reorganisation within County Durham, key issues have been reviewed and reprioritised based upon the financial commitments that the Council must make in light of this decision. The Executive agreed a process for revising priorities and proposals in the Corporate Plan at their meeting in October. Members have previously agreed to receive a formal report at its November meeting so it could formally re-consider an earlier decision to progress the proposals prior to the future of Local Government in the County being known.

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS**

##### **4.1 Financial Implications and Value for Money Statement**

In 2005, the Council identified £200,000 for a modular extension to the civic centre to replace the obsolete portacabins currently used by employees. At the request of the Executive in January 2007, the tender exercise was completed and costs compiled for the project. This amounted to a minimum cost of £360,000, well above the initial budget identified. At the time of the original decision it was felt that the proposals were necessary. Now in the light of clear uncertainty over the future of the Civic Centre it is not considered that the works would represent value for money even if they could be completed within original estimates.

##### **4.2 Legal Implications**

There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

##### **4.3 Personnel Implications**

Personnel affected by the creation of the customer service centre were consulted throughout the design and tender stages and have been informed of progress and key decisions taken.

##### **4.4 Other Services**

A number of initiatives associated with the new design were at the request of other service providers in order to help improve customer services. Those teams were also kept informed of progress and key decisions.

##### **4.5 Diversity**

The Council is committed to ensuring that citizens and other stakeholders are given full and equal access to its services. The customer service centre was developed to ensure that customers, regardless of their individual needs, received improved access to the customer services team, reception etc. In not carrying out the proposals the current facilities would remain and no further improvements to customer access would be undertaken.

#### 4.6 Risk Implications

The creation of the customer service centre would play a vital role, along with the creation of the customer services team, the introduction of a new telephony system and the roll out of the Durham e-government CRM system in ensuring that we meet our priorities and create an excellent customer service for our customers. Any decision made to abandon the project is done so, taking account of such risks.

#### 4.7 Crime and Disorder Implications

There are no direct links to crime and disorder within this report.

#### 4.8 Other Implications

None within this report

### **5. BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL**

5.1 A key part of the Customer Excellence Strategy, Improvement and recovery plan and drive for efficiencies, within the Council, is the creation of a Customer Services Team. In addition to the introduction of the Durham e-govt CRM system and a new telecommunications infrastructure to be introduced in October / November 2006, The Customer Services Team has been established and plays a pivotal role in achieving customer excellence within the Council.

5.2 The creation of the One Stop Reception in January 2006 has shown that customers receive a more joined up service than previously with the 3 reception points. However, it has also shown that the very layout of the Civic Centre, i.e. multiple-levels, poor lighting, information displays and waiting areas do not meet the standards required to provide an excellent environment for our customers to do business with us. To meet these requirements the best way forward was felt to be the development of a customer service centre that would have become the focal point for face to face, telephone and web based enquiries that will also incorporate the cash handling facilities. In addition the design was considered to be the best way to ensure that Disability Discrimination Act requirements are also met.

5.3 As agreed at Executive in January 2007, a tendering exercise was completed and 4 tenders returned; the cheapest of which amounted to £360,000, almost twice the previously identified budget. In addition members also agreed to delay any proposed start date until June 2007, at the earliest, to allow for the CPA inspection and local elections to take place unhindered. Any further decisions were delayed with the onset of the Local Government Reorganisation.

- 5.4 It is not now felt that spending such a large amount of money on a facility that could have limited life is now appropriate. It would not deliver value for money. It is considered that the scheme should not now be progressed in view of this.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 It is recommended that members formally agree not to progress the customer service centre proposals.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO**

- 7.1 Chester-le-Street Improvement and Recovery Plan.  
7.2 Corporate Plan 2006  
7.3 Customer Excellence Strategy 2006 -2008  
7.4 Responses to consultation with Executive Members, Directors, Service Team Managers and employees.  
7.5 Advice from Technical Services Personnel.

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