

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF CUSTOMER TRANSFORMATION TASK AND FINISH
PANEL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 2009
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 8.35 PM**

Members Present: B Rolfe (Chairman), J M Whitehouse (Vice-Chairman), D Bateman, A Boyce, Mrs R Brookes, Ms J Hedges, Mrs J Lea, R Morgan and J Philip

Other members present:

Apologies for Absence:

Officers Present D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Chandler (Assistant Director - Community Services and Customer Relations), M Warr (Performance Improvement Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

33. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

35. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from 25 November 2008 were noted and agreed as a correct record.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked about the current position of the report on the Forester consultation. He was told that the report would go to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June. Officer were also currently in talks about incorporating some regular LSP articles (from the Police, Health, Fire etc) into the Forester magazine. They could pay for the space used, thus helping to reduce reliance on the amount of advertising in the publication.

36. CONSIDERATION OF FINAL REPORT BY CABINET

The meeting noted that the Panel's final report went to the Cabinet on 5 February 2009 where it was well received. The Cabinet accepted that communication with residents was important and as such the Council's website required additional resource and proposed that an extra Website Officer be employed on a three year fixed term contract. This Panel's Chairman was requested to reconvene the Task and Finish Panel and further prioritise the remaining seven recommendations of the report for further consideration by the Cabinet.

The Panel noted the suggested order of priority for the remaining recommendations as set out in the agenda.

Councillor Philip remarked that the Panel needed to put them in order of priority and not just of affordability. He thought that the Council needed a contact centre and to redesign its reception areas.

Councillor Whitehouse agreed with Councillor Philip. The Panel needed to think about how residents contacted the Council. Where should the money go, on people, telephones or the website? He thought that the number of visits in person would reduce in time and therefore it was probably the telephone system that needed to be looked at first.

The Assistant Director of Community Services and Customer Relations, Julie Chandler, had visited Waltham Forest Council recently where the manager told them that they would not have purchased their CRM system but would have developed their own. Councillor Philip said that customers often said it would be cheaper to develop a system for themselves, but it rarely was. But there are often alternatives to just buying off the shelf.

Councillor Mrs Brookes said that she was sorry for the receptionist who had to deal with a lot of people at the same time, it was so much better in Harlow where they had 2 or three receptionists on at any one time. This should be a high priority. Councillor Philip agreed, which was why he said the Council needed a contact centre. They needed to get that structure in place to focus on the workload. He would not put a CRM above a contact centre.

The Panel agreed that they should consider the report on NI 14 – Avoidable Contact before they came to any decision on prioritising the recommendations.

AGREED: that the Panel consider the next report on the agenda, NI 14 – Avoidable Contact, before they come to any conclusions on this item.

37. REPORT ON NI 14 - AVOIDABLE CONTACT

The Performance Improvement Officer, Mike Warr reported back on the completion of the 'NI 14 – avoidable contact' measuring exercise. A total of seven service areas were included as part of the measuring exercise. These were: Planning, Finance (benefits), Finance (Council Tax), Licensing, Electoral Services, Housing and Environmental Services. Staff were asked to note all types of contact and record it if they thought it was avoidable or unavoidable, this was recorded in five different ways. It was a paper based exercise, collated on a daily and weekly basis. The overall result was that the council had an overall 'Avoidable Contact' result of 26.9%, with a telephone avoidable contact result of 36%. This would be reported as part of the National Indicator Set to the government.

Mr Warr tabled a paper that broke down the results into service areas and the types of contact recorded by number and percentages. The Panel noted that there was a much higher avoidable contact figure by telephone and the poor call transfer figure was high. The various directorates had been tasked to take this on and produce improvement plans to try and reduce the final avoidable figures.

Members thought it was clear they needed to address contact as a whole. Telephone contact may reduce over time if the other areas were improved.

It may be that a consultant be asked to design the reception areas and also asked to look at putting in a Contact Centre incorporating CRM for the future when funding may be more readily available. The Panel needed to say what its priorities were and

how they could be delivered. A feasibility study may need to be commissioned. Perhaps Overview and Scrutiny should be asked to task this Panel with looking further into this. A lot could be done in house.

The Panel summed up by saying that work on 'The Forester' was a given. The Forester survey had already been carried out and any redesign could be accommodated within the existing budget. There was no need for additional resources and if some money could be had from the LSP to replace some of the present advertising, that would be helpful.

The other recommendations needed to be prioritised. There was a need to look at how the council could do things more efficiently. There was a need to get a contact centre in place; this should be done by putting in a CRM system and redesigning the reception areas. There would be a need for financial due diligence to take this forward.

The Panel did not want to alter anything in their original report, but did want to keep Cabinet financial concerns in mind. There was, therefore, a need to look at this in more depth as a Panel before they reported back to the Cabinet and would ask Overview and Scrutiny to extend the life of the Panel into next year.

RESOLVED:

1. That the National Indicator 14 (Avoidable Contact) report be noted and that the results be suitably communicated to the public, perhaps through the Forester and the website.
2. That the redesign work on the Forester, including the possible link up with the LSP be agreed.
3. That the Panel ask the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to authorise their continuance into the new municipal year to further define and prioritise their original recommendations to the Cabinet.

38. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was raised.

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