

12. Area North Community Offices Update Report

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Purpose of the Report

To inform Members of the work carried out in the Community Offices in Area North, since the transfer of staff to the Heads of Area Development.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members comment upon and note the contents of the report.

Background

The management and budget of the Community offices in Langport and Somerton were transferred to the Head of Area Development (North) from Customer First on April 1st 2007. Three members of staff requested to be transferred to the Area Support Team led by the Area Support team leader. To fill in the residual vacant hours one person was employed. Therefore, the opening hours of the Langport reception remained as 9 am to 5:15 pm Monday to Thursday and 4:45 on a Friday. Somerton's opening hours of 9 am to 12 noon, Monday to Friday, also stayed unchanged.

Report

The Langport community office is located with the Area North District Council Office and the Somerton community office is shared with Somerton Town Council in the Parish Rooms in Market Place. They provide members of the public a frontline contact with South Somerset District Council, offering the same access to information as the Contact Centre. Details and requests are entered into the Northgate software, which is used in all area offices and by Customer First. In addition, a planning officer is available once a week in the Langport office for planning queries plus the community offices provide leaflets and local information.

The main change for Customers Advisors is that they do not take customer phone calls for South Somerset District Council on the general 01935 462462 number. These calls are now only dealt with in the contact centre. The benefits are as follows:

- Face to face service levels have improved, since the priority is always to the customer in the office. Customer Advisors continue to support Customers First, for example managing telephone calls whilst Customers First have team meetings or training.
- They are able to take on a greater variety of work, which increased the capacity of the Area Support team
- Late openings and last minute closure of receptions has been virtually eliminated because local flexibility covers the gaps

Table 1 gives the footfall figures in the Langport and Somerton Community offices, showing the variety of enquiries. The most popular service in the Langport office is planning, mostly because of the availability of a planning officer once a week and planning applications are

available to view. Welfare, Housing and Council Tax benefits are important parts of the Area support assistant role, who can help the applicants fill out their forms and answer queries.

Table 1

	Langport Office enquiries							Somerton Office enquiries						
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Total footfall	450	456	446	393	364	451	451	154	114	197	213	193	219	223
Reception services	143	185	165	158	122	188	187	52	28	74	59	36	76	79
Benefits	40	32	31	39	36	39	31	15	7	14	9	16	27	16
Building Control	31	23	25	16	21	15	12	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Bus Pass	22	33	26	13	18	19	27	25	13	15	14	36	27	21
Car parks	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	1	1	2
Licensing	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Council Tax	28	23	18	12	19	28	27	5	6	2	5	9	2	7
Elections & Dem Services	21	3	2	4	1	5	9	2	4	-	-	-	1	2
Environmental Health	7	10	6	6	7	6	7	2	2	1	-	2	2	1
Housing & Homelessness	19	6	15	22	15	11	12	2	7	2	6	5	3	2
Planning	63	68	71	58	65	88	75	4	8	6	6	3	3	4
Waste & Recycling	26	19	19	18	17	23	19	10	12	14	22	8	11	14
Tourism & countryside	5	6	5	5	3	3	6	6	5	11	12	13	4	16
Horticulture & Streetscene	4	5	10	8	5	4	7	3	2	8	1	2	2	2
Registrar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
Town Council	-	-	3	1	-	1	2	-	-	17	61	43	20	36
County Council (Social Services, locality team)	37	19	30	18	15	9	9	6	3	3	1	-	7	2
County Council (other)	-	-	10	3	6	1	11	-	-	4	-	4	7	3
Other	3	23	7	11	14	11	10	19	17	24	17	15	24	15

Area Support services

The increased capacity, use of technology, and changes in processes to improve efficiency, have provided opportunities to support other teams, not located in Area North. For example, providing support services to the Waste Service during the roll out of the SORT IT programme and continuing with a project to check and dispose of scanned planning files. The team will also be working with the Revenue and Benefits service to index scanned documents. This is an excellent example of how e-technology allows remote working across the district. In addition, Area North will be piloting the process of taxi licensing for the Environmental Health service.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Deliver well-managed, cost effective services, valued by customers.

Other Implications

Community offices provide local access to South Somerset District Services and support local community needs.

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Financial Implications

None.

Background Papers: *District Executive Report 7th December 2006*
Full Council Report 14th December 2006
