

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

VISIT TO WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL/VERTEX, 22 Jan 2003

Brief report to Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee from Cllr Toby Eckersley, Chair. Further questions for Sub-Cttee suggested:

In attendance from Southwark: Cllrs Stanton and Eckersley.

Gill Davies, Bill Murphy.

City were led by Peter Rogers, CE; about 5 Vertex reps also present

1. Premises – working conditions appeared good and staff morale high

Q: For how long is Vertex committed to in-borough premises?

2. Callers at present reach the centre through re-routing of calls to existing departmental phone numbers; only some depts. currently re-routed; other services migrating now: “fully live in Nov 03”

Q: what multi-skilling limits are there to re-routing a large no. of depts and/or use of one central contact ph. no.? Shd. we wait to see how City manages this migration, and whether alleged benefits are delivered?

3. With the exception of commercial waste (see below), the current operation appeared to add nothing to what a series of departmental call centres cd. offer; i.e. intelligent and friendly service information was offered, nothing more.

Q: What percentage of existing callers is asking for info about more than one service? What percentage, when prompted, requests same?

4. There are significant Data Protection drawbacks to effective use, e.g. to debt-chase, of a multi-skilled, data-backed call centre.

Q: What advice have City/Southwark received on this?

5. City advised that it will be difficult to bring Social Services on board

Q: Is it ever going to be possible to crack this one? Ideally, given the vulnerability of many soc.servs. clients, this service shd. be brought into a CSC: if it cannot, shd. a CSC be pursued?

6. The whole of City’s commercial waste operation has just moved over to the call centre premises; instructions to make good missed collections appeared to be capable of initiation by the telephone operatives, but requests for receipts for payments made for the service required paper processing. Commercial waste was already a trading operation, competing with outside waste companies – an easy one to move over to a CSC. City advised that it helps if there are already specifications for out-sourcing.

Q: What obstacles are there to integration with accounting systems? What progress are our officers making with the analysis of ease/difficulty of bringing the varied local authority functions/operations into a corporate CSC (requested at the Sub-Cttee, 18 dec 02)? For which of those are out-sourcing specs already in existence?

7. It took City 3.5 years to get to implementation. They and/or Vertex are offering a short-cut package to other Councils interested: early decisions are required to maximise govt. grant.

Q: What is the availability of govt. support to Southwark? Does this require us to get together with other authorities? What is the state of our officers’ contact with

other London Boroughs? Is there any interest in the City/Vertex package? What would be the cost? Would all this help to reduce the £2m sought from taxpayers in year 1?

8. City's CSC is delivered not by Vertex alone, but by a partnership of Vertex, Accord, and CapGemini/Ernst&Young. City had many expressions of interest at the start of the procurement process, but this dwindled to a final field of 2 bids, one of which was non-compliant.

Q: Is this a three-cornered arrangement, or is it more complicated? Who is doing what? Who is contracted to whom? Is there sufficient competition available? If not, will sufficiently robust and disinterested advice be available?

9. City's arrangements do not provide for defined capital contributions.

Q: Given that Southwark's IT hardware etc, requires urgent renovation/upgrade across the board, how can this be achieved in the light of the long lead-in and migration periods?

10. City's leadership had confidence that the "revolutionary" re-engineering of business and management processes could work only after a 2-days-away conference of 50 managers in early 2000.

Q: What are the pre-requisites for this revolution working in Southwark? When is a similar conference planned?

11. A graph of a "business case" was presented but the axes were confusing and there was insufficient time to probe this; the impression sought to be conveyed was of net savings starting to come through after 6/7 years; but it was clear that "back office savings are the Council's responsibility"; an impression was given that staff establishment savings wd eventually result from staff carrying out existing duties realising that they wd have time on their hands. It seemed that Vertex etc wd not help much with this process, yet it was critical to the business case.

Q: What is Southwark's medium/long term business case? Given the Wandsworth alternative (refer to Mr Przekop's advice of his contact with W' Worth to Sub-Cttee 21 jan 03) what study of the relative merits of the two different approaches is proposed? Have PA addressed this in the work being done for us? To what remit are they working?