



ROCHDALE
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH
COUNCIL

ITEM NO. CC115

Subject: *Review of staffing in Revenues and Benefits and Customer Access*

Cabinet Member: Councillor Peter Williams
Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Economic Affairs

Councillor Farooq Ahmed
Portfolio Holder for Finance

1. RECOMMENDATIONS / DECISION REQUESTED

1.1 Members are asked to approve as a basis for consultation:

- The re-structure and integration of the existing Revenues and Benefits and Customer Access functions.
- A review of the Community Language Service, with the intention of ensuring a cost effective solution is in place, to meet the reduced needs of a smaller Council from 2013/14 onwards.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Council is facing an acute financial challenge, with significant reductions to the funding it receives from central government. As a result of this the Council is reviewing all services to ensure that they are delivered in the most cost effective way possible.

2.2 There is already a strong relationship between the Customer Access and Revenues and Benefits services, with the receipt of benefits evidence at front line customer service centres then being processed in the back office by revenues and benefits personnel. By bringing all staff involved in the assessment process under single line management, it will be possible to train all staff in all elements of the process which will increase resilience and should support improvements being made to benefits processing times. Culturally this approach also has the advantage of ensuring that all staff understand – and are therefore accountable for, all stages of the process.

2.3 The merger of the two functions has several impacts, including:

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- Increasing benefit assessment capacity by one additional post at the bottom layer of the structure, ensuring that processing times are not adversely impacted as far as possible.
- The strengthening of collection functions, creating a new 'corporate debt' function which will map and bring together debt collection council wide as well as the strengthening of collection in relation to National Non Domestic Rates (NDR), which is particularly important as these business rates will, in the future, have a direct impact on council revenue.
- Creating a stable approach to the use of apprentices in the service by providing a specific budget for this purpose.
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2.4 In addition, the service intends to review the Community Language Service. This service provides translation and interpretation services internally. At present this service is provided in house and an administrative post is in place to oversee this. As the council reduces in size, it is not clear whether this will represent the most cost effective method of delivery. It is proposed that during the consultation period, the existing service is reviewed, with a view to minimizing demand and ensuring value for money. If the service remains in house, it will be required to at least cover its own costs and will be market tested. It is anticipated that the recommendations of the review will be reported back to members following consultation.

3. ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 It is possible to maintain Customer Access and Revenues and Benefits as separate functions, however no further savings could be made independently within each service if this was the case without whole areas of the service stopping or significant service degradation. Economies of scale can only be achieved by joining up.
- 3.2 It is possible to align some of the functions within customer access with other parts of the council – libraries for example have strong synergies with both the skills/lifelong learning and wellbeing agendas. It is recommended that this is considered as part of the wider Library Strategy that is out to consultation separately.
- 3.3 It is possible to merge all or part of the Revenues and Benefits service with the finance function within the Council in order to ensure that the Council's Section 151 officer has direct control of the collection of business rates. This may however also be achieved through governance rather than a structural solution.
- 3.4 It is possible to outsource all or part of the existing access and benefits functions, however there is not considered to be a significant cost/benefit in doing so and this is considered a risk at a time when there is such significant change proposed to this area of the business. It is recommended that this is reviewed again once the full impact of welfare reform and in particular the introduction of Universal Credit is known.

4. BACKGROUND & SUMMARY

4.1. As above

5. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN / REQUIRED

5.1. Consultation will be required with affected staff and with the existing providers of Community Language Services to the Council.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. **Theme:** In service savings

6.2. **Proposal Title:** *Review of staffing in Revenues and Benefits and Customer Access*

6.3. **Breakdown of Savings from the Service**

Service Name: Customers and Communities Service

Area of Service: Customer Access and Revenues and Benefits

Cost Centre affected: Various

Is this a cost or additional saving: Saving

	Savings 2013/14 £000		Savings 2014/15 £000		Total £000	
	Ongoing	One Off	Ongoing	One Off	Ongoing	One Off
Employees						
Other Costs Income lost (Show as minus)						
Net Savings Additional Income Generated (show as a positive figure)						
Total Savings Implementation Costs						
Total Savings less Implementation Costs	302	127			302	127

6.4 Financial Impact on another service? Yes

6.5 Details of the Financial Impact on another service

6.5.1 The strengthening of the collections function and creation of a specific Team Leader role to oversee the collection of National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) should have a positive impact on the Council's revenue.

6.6 Voluntary Sector Financial Impact

6.6.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1. There are no legal implications as a direct result of this report.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1

9. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There is a risk to the Council's revenue if the Council implements a structure without sufficient capacity to ensure that NNDR and Council Tax are collected promptly. The proposed structure seeks to mitigate this risk and to ensure that there is adequate capacity to protect this revenue stream.

10. ASSET IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

11. JOINT WORKING

12. EQUALITIES IMPACTS

12.1 **Workforce Equality Impacts Assessment**

12.2 **Equality/Community Impact Assessments**

The proposal to review the Community Language Service as part of this re-structure may have an impact on protected groups, including people whose first language is not English. The Council will update its Equality Impact Assessment as the review moves forward with a view to minimizing the impact of any proposed changes.

13. **VOLUNTARY SECTOR IMPACTS**

13.1 There are no equality/community issues arising from this report.

14. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

14.1 There are no background papers.