

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
25th October 2007

Worcestershire Hub Update

COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	A Better Environment
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Delivering Quality Services
KEY PRIORITY:	Customer Service
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr John Holden
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Customer Services Manager
CONTACT OFFICER:	Lucy Wright ext 2948
APPENDICES	A Bewdley Cash Office Statistics B Opening Hours Surveys/Results – App C B Customer Satisfaction Survey/Results – App D E Year to Date Performance Results

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet with an update of the Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre since opening in November 2006 and the results of Customer Satisfaction Surveys carried out in June/July 2007.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1. Endorse the progress made by the Hub to date.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Worcestershire Hub was introduced in 2002 as a countywide programme of work to improve access to services for the people of Worcestershire. The partnership has made significant progress towards improving the customer experience and providing single points of contact for a wide range of services.
- 3.2 In November 2006, the Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre was opened to the public and existing District Council reception areas in Kidderminster were closed.
- 3.3 The Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre consists of a reception area for basic customer enquiries, a face to face area where more complex services are provided, and a telephony area for all incoming customer calls. Two cash desks are available

for customers to make payments. The Centre also has two meeting rooms and two private interview rooms available. The same services are provided from the Civic Centre in Stourport and from 2008 in Bewdley.

4. **CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 In the ten months since the opening of the Hub significant achievements have been made in areas of:-

Access

- A single point of contact for dealing with customers in person
- A single point of contact for dealing with customers by telephone
- The Centre deals with both District and County enquiries (and those of other organisations as appropriate).
- Worcestershire Hub Online – allowing customers to search across the relevant council sites for their area of interest.

Resources

- Staffing costs and other running costs are shared between County Council and Wyre Forest District Council. County Council contribute 50% of the management costs and provide funding for 6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Customer Service Advisors (CSA's).

Technology

- A countywide Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution called eShop is operational in many service areas across the District Council.
- A single telephony solution is operational in Kidderminster and Stourport. This solution is operational throughout the partnership and allows “virtual” calls to be received from various County Council services such as Highways and Waste Management.

Information

- Management information is available to support performance management and drive improvements in service provision.
- Since opening, the Centre has served over 86,000 customers in person and received over 77,000 contacts by phone.

5. **KEY ISSUES**

5.1 The Centre has taken on additional services since it opened to include registration services, virtual Highways calls, waste permits and, since the Kidderminster Social Care office closed in August, customers are being referred to the Centre. It is the County Council's intention to migrate more services into each Centre and this will inevitably lead to additional resource implications.

Bewdley Cash Office is staffed using the Centres workforce however statistics show that customer numbers at Bewdley are minimal and only increase at the beginning/end of a month when Council Tax becomes due. Further information is shown in **Appendix A**.

At present Bewdley has no access to the telephony system or the CRM system meaning duties that can be carried out, are very limited which is not the best use of a CSA's time. Plans are in hand to extend the data line into the cash office when the Hub in Bewdley has been completed.

Since opening, there have been a number of changes in CSA's which inevitably has an effect on the performance of the Centre.

Each new CSA has a training programme of 4-6 months before becoming proficient in the main areas of the Centre's business.

When the Centre is fully resourced, the team are able to cope with the day to day service levels. However the existing resources do not account for holidays, training or sickness. These events, together with anticipated service level increases such as the beginning of the month when Council Tax payments become due, put a further strain on resources with the concern that the high service levels we aim to provide cannot always be attained.

The CSA's have settled into their roles. With the wide array of services they are dealing with, on-going refresher training is regularly rolled out with a view to covering all service areas.

The CSA's role is to always try to deal with Customer service requests at the first point of contact. However, there is a need to drive down service failure, where back office support is not available, due to issues as different operating hours to the Centre.

5.2 A satisfaction survey was carried out in June and July 2007 and the results can be found in **Appendices B/C/D**.

5.3 The Centre has performance targets it aims to achieve and the year to date results are summarised in **Appendix E**.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There is a significant 'potential' increase in services provided by the Hub, particularly from the County Council who are looking for service areas such as School Admissions and Library enquiries to be introduced during 2007 – 2008; this would necessitate additional resources.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 Business continuity and service delivery would be at risk if the IT and Telephony technology were to fail.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 With additional County Council services migrating to the Hub, Bewdley coming on stream and increased customer awareness of the services provided by the Hub, it is often difficult to provide the level of service the Council aims to achieve, particularly with the telephony.

8.2 As with any new service, teething problems have been encountered. However the Hub strives to provide the customer with a first class service. The CSA's have had to take on a tremendous amount of knowledge and have experienced a huge learning curve. Whilst there is room for improvement, the benefits of all the hard work is now showing in improved performance figures.

9. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

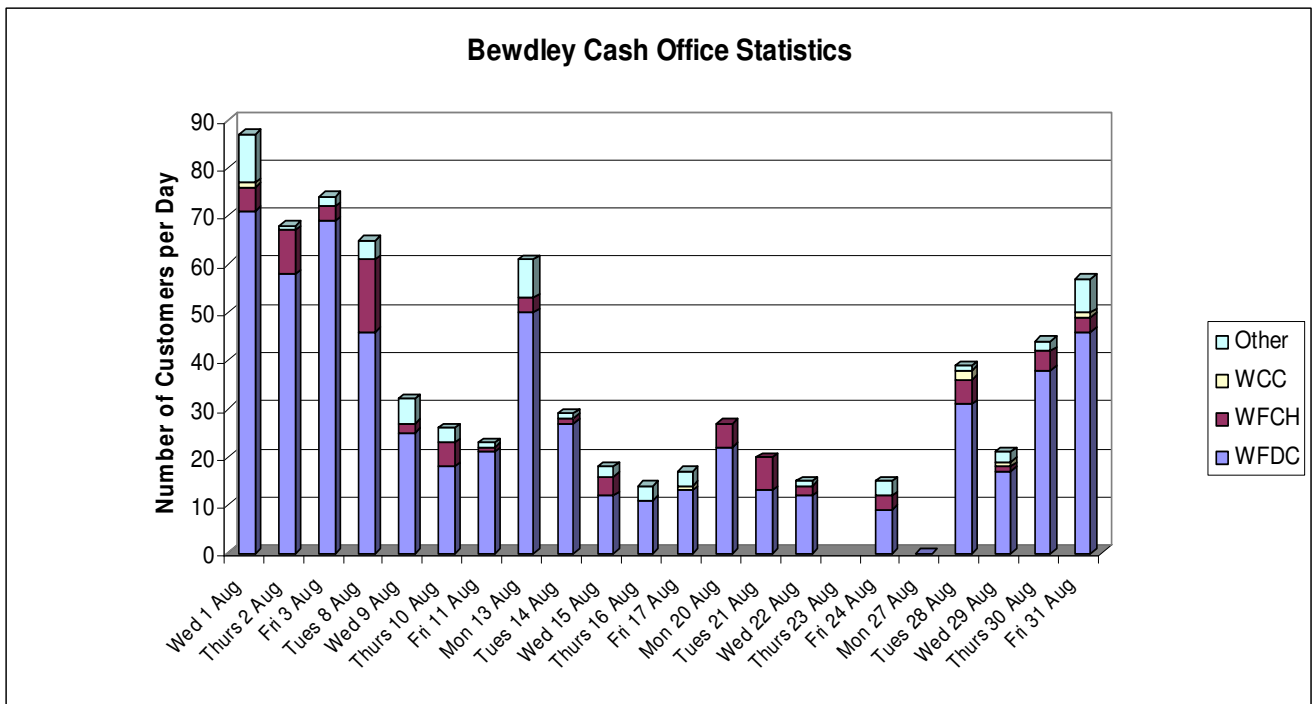
9.1 A review of how the Centre works with each main service area is yet to be undertaken. The overall aim is to make improvements wherever possible and drive down service failure; It is expected that these reviews will be completed by December 2007.

9.2 The Centre is expected to take on additional County Council services and will have to do so within the existing resource as no further County funding will be made available.

9.3 Coaching of CSA's will form a large part of their ongoing development; this will allow each CSA to achieve the high standards that are expected of them.

10. CONSULTEES

10.1 CMT



Customer numbers at Bewdley are minimal on average and only increase at the beginning/end of the month when residents' Council Tax becomes due. Excluding this period, the average number of customers served per day is 28 or 7 customers per hour.

At present Bewdley has no access to the Hub telephony system or eShop which results in limited duties being undertaken.

Worcestershire Hub Opening Hours and Customer Satisfaction Survey

Introduction

As part of our ongoing commitment to Customer Service we shall continuously monitor the quality of our service provision in order to improve the manner in which we deliver our services. Central to this scheme of continuous review is feedback from our customers.

During June and July 2007, customers who accessed Council services through the Worcestershire Hub were asked to take part in two surveys, one relating to opening hours of the Centre and one to gain satisfaction levels relating to Customer Service.

Opening Hours Survey

Background

When Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre opened in November 2006, by way of improving access to Council services, the decision was made to extend the opening hours of the Centre to open between 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with the exception of Wednesdays when the Centre would open at 10 a.m. in order to provide staff with valuable training sessions. This meant an increase in opening times by an additional 4 hours per week.

It was then agreed that a review of opening hours would be undertaken in order to ensure the Council are providing access to services in line with customer demand.

Action Taken

During June and July 2007, 728 customers across a variety of service areas were asked if they were satisfied with the extended opening hours and the results can be found in **Appendix C**.

Several customers also commented that the opening times were not visible when the Centre is closed, which caused confusion on Wednesday mornings. This is currently being addressed and the Buildings Section together with the Conservation Officer, are looking into external signage to address this problem.

During the exercise customers were also informed of the availability of the Councils website, should they want to report any issues outside of our opening hours, including the ability to pay Council Tax online and over the telephone.

Summary

95% of customers surveyed were satisfied with the current opening times.

2% of customers surveyed were not satisfied with the current opening hours.

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3% of customers surveyed did not express a preference.

The findings of this survey conclude that the vast majority of customers are satisfied with the present opening hours. Extending the opening hours of the Centre would stretch existing resources without necessarily capturing additional customers or smoothing out any present peaks and troughs in service demand. This would have a negative impact on existing staff cover and reduce our ability to respond to fluctuations in service demand. On this basis any increase in opening hours would need to be met with additional resources.

The findings of this survey conclude that the vast majority of customers are satisfied with the present opening hours.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the opening hours of the Centre are not altered. In order to ensure the service is tailored to suit the needs of the customer, it is recommended that a further survey is carried out in 18 months time.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

Background

In line with the Council's Customer Service Strategy, it is the Council's aim to seek feedback from customers accessing Council services in order to develop improvements where necessary.

Action Taken

During June and July 2007 customers accessing Council services through the Worcestershire Hub, were asked to rate their satisfaction to 8 statements relating to their experience. A total of 273 surveys were completed and the satisfaction ratings to the following statements were received. Further detail can be found in **Appendix D**.

- 1 - I was satisfied with the length of time I had to wait to be answered
- 2 - The Customer Service Advisor (CSA) fully understood my enquiry
- 3 - The CSA made me feel that my enquiry was important to them
- 4 - I feel confident that the information I was given was accurate
- 5 - The CSA completely resolved my enquiry **or** I am confident that appropriate action will be taken
- 6 - I was treated with courtesy and respect at all times
- 7 - I was happy with the overall service I received
- 8 - I would be happy to contact Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre again

The largest area of dissatisfaction was in respect of the length of time customers had to wait to be answered. The responses referred to a combination of telephone and face to face customers and received a rating of 4% of customers either dissatisfied or completely dissatisfied. Comments received indicate that customers would like to see more CSA's at the desks to reduce the waiting times. However this is not possible within existing

resources. Dissatisfaction ratings are also indicative of the occasions when customers' calls are held in a queue and again this cannot be easily resolved with existing resources.

The areas with the highest satisfaction ratings were with regard to the customer being satisfied with the CSA's fully understanding their enquiry (100% satisfied or completely satisfied) and the fact that they were treated with courtesy and respect at all times (100% either satisfied or completely satisfied).

Summary

The overall satisfaction ratings are as follows:-

98.5% of customers are either satisfied or completely satisfied with the service they have received

1.5% of customers are either dissatisfied or completely dissatisfied with the service they received

It is worth noting, however, that some of the comments made by customers relate to the actual service they received as opposed to the way their enquiry was dealt with. For example, a customer may have scored their satisfaction based on the length of time it took to remove a wasp's nest instead of the length of time it took for the call to be answered. Any future surveys will be refined further in this respect

Any comments received relating to a specific service area have been referred to the Section Heads for their action if appropriate.

Opening Hours Survey Results

728 customers were asked if they were satisfied with our extended opening hours. If not, they were asked to provide further comment.

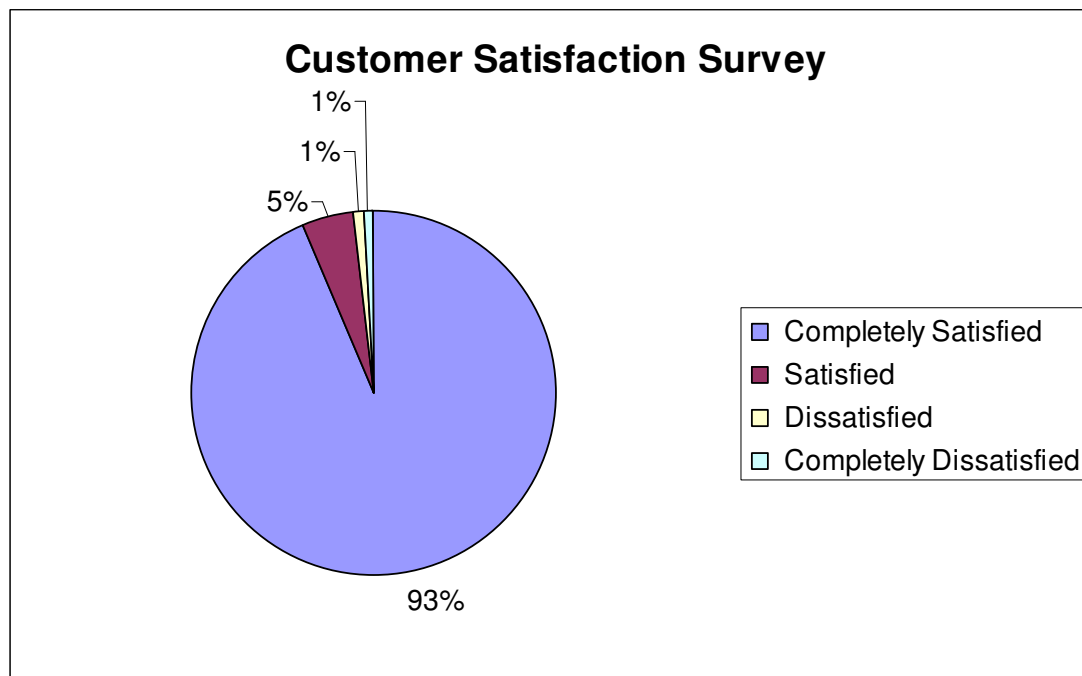
During this survey, all customers were advised that our website was available to make enquiries, request services or make payments as necessary.

	Satisfied	Not satisfied	No preference
Number of customers surveyed	688	16	24

16 customers reported that they were not satisfied with the current opening hours and the comments were captured as follows:-

- 3 customers were not happy with the late opening on Wednesdays (2 who were paying Council Tax and 1 for Housing Benefit).
- 2 customers were not satisfied with the Duty Planning Officer availability (on duty between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.).
- 1 customer wanted the Centre to open on Sundays between 9 and 5. This customer was a taxi driver who stated that he did not think it was fair that Licensing Officers are not available when he and his colleagues are.
- 2 customers wanted the Centre to open 24 hours a day 7 days a week for the same reasons as above.
- 4 customers wanted the Centre to open until late evening to pay their Council Tax. The times of opening varied including 7a.m. – 7p.m., 8a.m. – 8p.m.
- 1 customer wanted to be able to pay their Council Tax at 7:30 a.m.
- 1 customer wanted to pay their Council Tax on Saturday.
- 2 customers did not provide further comment.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results



Ratings by Service Area

	% Completely Satisfied	% Satisfied	% Dissatisfied	% Completely Dissatisfied
Blue Badge	97	1.5	1	0.5
Taxi Tokens	93	1	3	3
Bus Passes	99.5	0.5	0	0
Council Tax	100	0	0	0
General Enquiry	94	5	0	1
Refuse & Recycling	91.5	6	1.5	1
Pest Control	89	6	4	1
Student Finance	94	3	0	3
Housing/Council Tax Benefits	96.5	3	0	0
Planning *	100	0	0	0
Kids Klub *	75	25	0	0

* only 1 return for service area

YEAR TO DATE PERFORMANCE RESULTS – WYRE FOREST CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

	Face to Face Enquiries (Kidd Town Hall only)	Cash transactions (inc SOS & Bewdley)	Incoming Calls	% Calls Abandoned (Target <10%)	Average Speed of Answer (Target <15 secs)
December	1628	8716	6499	8.40%	13 secs
January	2420	7997	10017	10.00%	16 secs
February	2641	3364	8629	7.81%	11 secs
March	2982	5537	10947	12.94%	18 secs
April	2650	10050	9900	14.76%	24 secs
May	2582	9904	9848	14.64%	24 secs
June	2371	9329	10531	20.15%	22 secs
July	3368	10065	11016	16.70%	18 secs
August	3805	9485	10200	13.90%	23 secs
September	3532	8367	9106	9.96%	16 secs

Although the average abandoned call rate is 12.92% it is worth noting that 57% of all calls abandoned did so within 15 seconds showing an intolerance of callers wishing to hold to speak to a CSA.

All callers phoning the Centre are given the option to hold or when the system recognises that all CSA's are busy on calls and there is a queue waiting, the caller is given an option to leave a message.

Performance Indicator	Dec 06 – Aug 07	Target
% enquiries resolved at the first point of contact	98%	80%
% visitors served within 15 minutes	87%	80%

SUMMARY OF TELEPHONE CALLS TO HUB CENTRES

SEPT	Bromsgrove	County	Malvern	Redditch	Worcester	Wyre Forest
Calls answered	10043	9608	8100	3676	8368	7901
ASA ¹	53 secs	31 secs	38 secs	73 secs	28 secs	16 secs
TSF ²	52.60%	60.72%	51.75%	44.69%	62.08%	74.10%

¹ASA = Average Speed of Answer

²TSF = Telephone Service Level – Percentage of calls answered within 15 seconds (target 80%)

Note – Wychavon District Council are not included as they have a different telephony system.

SUMMARY OF PERSONAL VISITS MADE TO HUB CENTRES

SEPT	Bromsgrove	Malvern	Redditch	Worcester	Wychavon	Wyre Forest
Number of personal visits	1555	1442	8940	4628	6573	3532
Number of cash payments	2612	2916	14731	5234	11213	8167
Telephone payments	458	638	191	1694	994	740
Internet Payments	183	252	140	87	768	223
TOTAL CUSTOMERS FACE TO FACE	4808	5248	24002	12416	19548	12662

Note – Worcestershire County Council are not included as they do not have any Centres dealing with personal visitors

HUB CENTRE RESOURCES

SEPT	Bromsgrove	Malvern	Redditch	Worcester	Wychavon	Wyre
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						Forest
CSA's (FTE)	15.5	16.59	29.31	27	30.7	18
County Funded CSA's (FTE)	6	7	6	6	7	6
% DC services	86.43%	76.41%	88.55%	70.97%	86.64%	73.62%
% WCC Services	13.57%	23.59%	11.45%	29.03%	13.36%	26.38%