

**Programme Streams 1 & 2  
Remodelling of Customer Services Programme – Telephone Channel  
Service Improvement**

**Recommendations**

**Programme Stream 1 - Single contact centre**

To note the operational decision to create the single contact centre in Technology House and the removal of telephony channel delivery from the Customer Service Centres

**Programme Stream 2 - Review of the telephone number strategy for Central Bedfordshire Council**

To replace the existing telephone service numbers with a small number (between 7-9) of “golden numbers” themed around a linked range of Council Services

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 In the context of improving service, whilst reducing costs, an operational review has been undertaken in Customer Services. It is proposed to centralise telephony service provision in a single location to maximise management efficiency and increase capacity in this channel with the existing resource.

Historically, the legacy Councils operated different Customer Service delivery models, which were appropriate to the scale and scope of those organisations and the range of services provided.

The creation of a Unitary Authority has provided an opportunity to review these arrangements and create an operating model which meets the present and future needs of Central Bedfordshire Council.

**2.0 Scope**

- 2.1
  1. Creation of a single telephony contact centre
  2. Review the telephone number strategy for Central Bedfordshire Council

**3.0 Reasons**

- 3.1 The creation of a single Contact Centre for telephone access will enable the economies of scale and ease of management to be maximised.
- 3.2 Analysis of call demand in the first year of operation of Central Bedfordshire Council has revealed an increase in call volumes of 37.5%, based on demand on the legacy Councils. There has been no increase in staffing, resulting in a failure to achieve the service levels set out in the

Customer Charter, due to insufficient resource. Central Bedfordshire Council has continued to use its Customer Service Centres to deliver both face to face and telephony service, in addition to a contact centre in Bedford. Locating advisors to a single dedicated Contact Centre, service levels for telephone and email contact can be improved within the existing resource for the non peak periods of demand, as there will not be the pressure to provide additional support for the face to face channel.

- 3.3 Analysis of use of the 120 published telephone numbers by the public during the last year has shown that over 57% of enquiries are received on the general enquiries number, 0300 300 8000. This requires customers to be transferred to a Customer Service Advisor with the correct skill, the service area or a specific officer. There is limited or no use of the allocated service telephone numbers. A change is therefore required to enable customers to easily access services correctly at the first point of contact, in a way that they find useable and beneficial.

#### **4.0 Summary of Options**

##### **Review of the telephone number strategy for Central Bedfordshire Council**

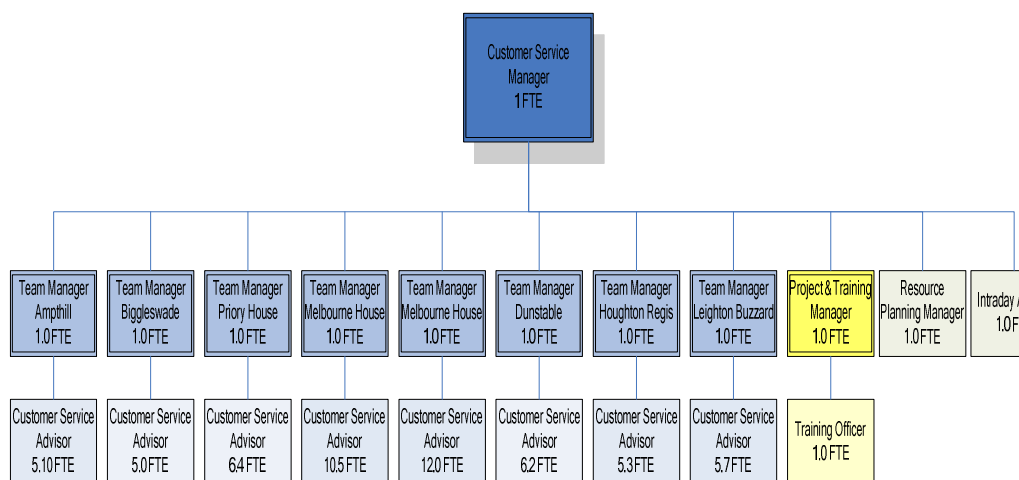
1. Do nothing – retain all 120 existing service numbers and a general enquiries number
2. Introduce touch tone options (press 1 etc) on a single number
3. Introduce automatic speech recognition (say the service that you require) on a single number
4. Replace the existing service numbers with a small number (between 7-9) of “golden numbers” themed around a linked range of Council services

## 5.0 Programme Stream 1 - Creation of a single Contact Centre

### Current Operating model

- 5.1 Central Bedfordshire inherited 2 different operating models for management of its telephony channel.
- 5.1.2 The ex District Authorities operated a virtually distributed Contact centre model, based at its Customer Service Centres in Ampthill, Biggleswade, Priory House, Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Houghton Regis.
- This enabled small teams of advisors to manage all customer access channels across the range of services provided at District level. The sizing of the teams was in line with the operating hours of each District and the volume of face to face, telephony and e mail customers. Whilst, in the main, service levels were achieved, there was conflict of channel management on occasions, with face to face customers taking priority. No workforce management was deployed to accurately calculate FTE requirement and scheduling of staff to meet peaks in demand. Services were still being migrated into Customer Service Centres, particularly in the South at the time of the Unitary decision and this work was not completed, as it was clear that extensive amounts of harmonisation work would be required.
- 5.1.3 The ex County Council operated a telephone contact centre with its face to face services being accessed at point of need by individual service areas, i.e. day care centres, educational support and home care service. This was an appropriate model for the range and nature of services provided by an Upper Tier Authority. This model was not fully developed as services were still in the process of migrating into the Contact Centre at the time the Unitary decision was made, and this work was not completed.
- 5.1.4 Due to the volume of enquiries received, the existing resources are not sufficient under the current operating model to achieve the service standards set out in the Customer Charter. Using the Workforce Management software procured by Central Bedfordshire Council, forecast performance in a single channel telephony environment, performance is expected to improve with the same level of resource as advisors will not be providing additional support to the face to face channel.

## 5.2 Current structure



5.2.1 The main published telephone number for Central Bedfordshire Council General Enquiries (0300 300 8000) has been delivered to the contact centre in Melbourne House since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, with the Customer Service Centres handling enquiries on legacy general enquiries numbers, including 08452 30 40 40 and 01462 611222. Following the implementation of a single telephony platform in August 2009, this enabled general enquiries received on 0300 300 8000 to be distributed to Customer Service Advisors in all locations.

As ICT systems migrate onto Citrix, this will enable training and skilling of all advisors in service areas they did not cover in their legacy Councils, e.g. Highways for District staff and refuse and recycling for County staff.

5.2.2 With the increase in call volumes, together with an increase in face to face customers, telephony channel performance has been difficult to predict and manage within the multi channel Customer Service Centre environment because:

- Operating hours for the Central Bedfordshire Customer Service team are longer than those previously in place at the Districts. This required a shift system to be implemented without additional resources being available, reducing available cover during the working day
- Face to face customers can take priority in the Customer Service Centres
- Rotas are generated for the telephony channel, but not always

adhered to due to operating in a multi channel environment, i.e. conflicting priorities of face to face and telephone queues. As a result, the forecast performance is not met

- Historic Health and Safety recommendations at 3 sites required a minimum of 3 staff to be on site at all times. Advisors from other centres are then needed to cover any absence. This has been reviewed in line with CBC policies, with the result that a minimum of 2 staff are required in CSCs where the face to face operation is separate from other Council staff located in the same building. Where a CSC is located in a Council office or library, there is no requirement for a second Customer Service Advisor to be present, other than where customer demand, cover etc requires this.
- Operational queue and skill management of the telephony channel at 7 sites is difficult due to their locations
- Training requirements are complex and need to be adapted per site causing inconsistencies and restrictions on training delivery
- The impact of the recession resulting in an increase in face to face enquiries, particularly in relation to claims for Housing and Council Tax Benefit – putting additional demand on limited face to face resource and conflicting priorities

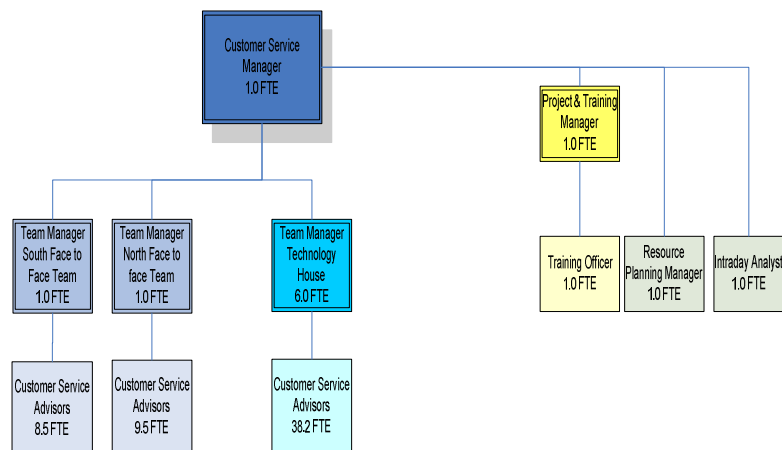
With all of these issues impacting on telephony performance management, there is now a clear need to split the face to face and telephony channels. This will remove conflicting priorities for the Advisors, and maximise the ability to adhere to schedules, which predict the performance that can be achieved with the available resource.

- 5.2.3 In the wider context of public sector reform and the findings of the Total Place pilot, face to face service provision on a wider basis will also benefit from the separation of channel management.

### 5.3 **Proposed model**

The proposal is to create a single contact centre which will deliver efficiencies whilst enabling performance of the telephony channel to be managed without the conflicting face to face needs pulling on the same resource pool. A single contact centre provides a stronger platform for migration of new services into the Customer Services Team. The proposed model will improve customer service for the telephony channel within the same resource. It will also deliver a service which will support the Council's objective of operating in partnership with 3<sup>rd</sup> party organisations.

- 5.3.1 The new model will be based on the following structure



- 5.3.2 The recommended ratio of Customer Service Advisors to Team Manager in a business specific (utility, ICT support or banking) Contact Centre environment is 12-15 staff per Manager. The new model provides an ultimate ratio of 8-10 FTE of staff per Team Manager to allow for the range and complexity of services provided. This will equate to 10 – 12 individual staff members due to part time working arrangements.
- 5.3.3 In the proposed structure, the current staff to team manager ratio averages 6.3 FTE. This short term additional capacity within the Team Manager group will play a vital role in supporting the remodelling programme and service migration, as each Team Manager acts as an Account Manager for each of the services handled via Customer Services. New services require a high level of support and involvement of the Team Manager. As the requirement to recruit new advisors to manage these additional enquiries occurs, the size of each team will increase to the ratio detailed in 5.3.2 above.
- 5.3.4 The face to face teams in the North and South will be responsible for providing face to face service at the Customer Service Centres in Ampthill, Biggleswade, Priory House, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard. The current face to face service at Houghton Regis is under review as part of the overall remodelling programme, but sufficient staffing is allocated to cater for additional demand at Dunstable or the maintenance of a face to face presence at Houghton Regis.
- 5.3.5 By moving Advisors into a centrally located contact centre, service levels for telephone and email contact for existing services are expected to significantly improve and expertise in district service areas can be utilised to assist with developing training and to support the team. This will also provide the benefit of the CSCs being able to focus on face to face contact, giving customers an improved, personalised service. arise

where staff from the main Centre can also provide cover for absence if needed. Retaining some part time options based on workforce management planning, will give the necessary flexibility to cover core hours and assist with staff consultation.

## 5.4 Contact Centre Location

- 5.4.1 As part of the “your space” project, the options available to Customer Services for a single location were Technology House and Dunstable. In recommending the location of the single contact centre in Technology House, analysis has been carried to determine the number of staff who would be affected depending on the location of the main contact centre. Distance from current work place has been used to identify possible risk to the location.

### Within 15 Miles of Bedford

	FTE	Heads
Priory House	7.4	8
Amphill	6.1	8
Biggleswade	6	7
Bedford	20.5	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>44</b>

### Within 15 Miles of Dunstable

Amphill	6.1	8
Houghton Regis 6.3		7
Leighton Buzzard	6.7	7
Dunstable 7.2		8
<b>Total</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>30</b>

44 people currently work within 15 miles of a Bedford telephony centre and 30 work within 15 miles of a Dunstable telephony centre. Working on the proviso that most people live close to where they work Bedford proposes the least risk to staff based on distance and therefore

Technology House was recommended.

## 5.5 Statistics

### 5.5.1 Current operating model

#### 2008-9 legacy performance

It should be noted that the BCC figure represents 100% of calls handled by the Customer Engagement Centre in 2008/9, and is not a 60% split between Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire demand. An alternative estimated figure has also been provided to show the 60% split.

	Offered	Answered	Abandoned
BCC	320,829	308,573	3.71%
BCC (CBC 60% share)	192,497	185,144	3.71%
MBDC	126,340	120,503	3.94%
SBDC	181,139	160,441	10.7%
Total (BCC 100%)	628,308	589,517	
Total (BCC 60%)	499,976	466,088	6.11%

#### 2009-10 actual / forecast for year

Service levels on the telephony channel in 2009/10 have not met the levels set in the Customer Charter. However, the increase in calls offered and answered, demonstrate the efforts and commitment of the team in responding to an increased number of enquiries with the same headcount. Forecasting information was not available for the whole of 2009/2010 as the new UCCE telephony system and workforce management systems were not live until November 2009. It must also be noted that major ICT issues have affected the accurate recording of telephone statistics. It is estimated that actual call volumes are at least 10% higher than indicated in the table below. Service levels and abandoned rates can therefore also only be estimated as best available figures

	Forecast	Offered	Answered	Abandoned	% Abandoned Rate	Service 80%-20 seconds
Apr-09		53648	50211	3437	6.41%	80.5
May-09		48976	46733	2243	4.58%	82.17
Jun-09		55321	52968	2353	4.25%	81.7
Jul-09		54121	50921	3200	5.91%	78.28



Aug-09		44830	41293	3537	7.89%	69.48
Sep-09		60644	53377	7267	11.98%	53.11
Oct-09		49265	47354	1911	3.88%	81.71
Nov-09	51771	49160	46721	2439	4.96%	76.44
Dec-09	41786	45077	42186	2891	6.41%	76.68
Jan-10	56346	63606	58905	4701	7.39%	63.15
Feb-10	54092	42030	37843	4187	9.96%	63.69
Mar-10	58517	58330	53637	4693	8.05%	64.44
<b>TOTAL TOTAL (with 10% uplift)</b>		<b>625,008</b>	<b>582,149</b>	<b>42,859</b>	<b>6.81%</b>	<b>72.61</b>
		<b>687,509</b>	<b>640,364</b>	<b>47,145</b>	<b>6.81%</b>	<b>72.61</b>

This represents an increase of 37.5% call answered volume on 2008/9 figures.

#### 5.5.2 Proposed operating model

Removing the conflicting priorities of face to face and telephony channel management is estimated to provide an average of 5 FTE additional resource, taking into account annual leave, training, sickness, breaks, lunch etc. There is pressure to resource to peak demand in the face to face channel, due to length of enquiries and waiting times that can arise. Careful monitoring of service levels on each channel will be required after the new model is implemented to ensure each channel is adequately resourced to meet customer expectations.

## Appendix B – Programme Streams 1 & 2 – Telephony Channel

### Monthly Summary Telephone Service Performance

### Customer Service Centre Friday, January 1, 2010 to Sunday, January 31, 2010

	Offered	Answered	%	Abandoned	%	SL Calls	SL %	AHT	ASA	SL Target	SL Variance	Wrap	LWT	LWT Occured at
Blue Badge Secondary	346	329	95%	17	5%	206	60%	353	36	80%	-20%	168		
Carers Secondary	33	25	76%	8	24%	18	55%	386	29	80%	-25%	135		
Contact Point Secondary	10	7	70%	3	30%	4	40%	167	32	80%	-40%	20		
General Enquiries Tertiary	34,312	33,046	96%	1,266	4%	26,666	78%	99	16	80%	-2%	23		
HR Recruitment Secondary	280	255	91%	25	9%	172	61%	241	32	80%	-19%	93		
Highways Secondary	2,065	1,858	90%	207	10%	1,089	53%	395	50	80%	-27%	162		
OPT Duty Desk Secondary	2,652	2,537	96%	115	4%	1,843	69%	349	21	80%	-11%	154		
Social Worker Secondary	278	230	83%	48	17%	155	56%	226	28	80%	-24%	89		
OT Secondary	276	262	95%	14	5%	181	66%	471	27	80%	-14%	198		
Registration Secondary	2,424	2,301	95%	123	5%	1,396	58%	234	40	80%	-22%	54		
Schools Transport Secondary	582	519	89%	63	11%	293	50%	209	56	80%	-30%	71		
Waste Secondary	397	369	93%	28	7%	230	58%	347	42	80%	-22%	173		
Mid Beds Environmental Service	5,909	5,152	87%	757	13%	2,631	45%	149	65	80%	-35%	48		
Mid Beds Planning and Building	846	737	87%	109	13%	376	44%	162	65	80%	-36%	35		
Mid Beds Council Tax and Bene	2,541	2,249	89%	292	11%	1,127	44%	269	73	80%	-36%	59		
South Beds Environmental Servi	5,825	4,893	84%	932	16%	2,087	36%	221	90	80%	-44%	71		
South Bed Housing Primary	2,510	2,114	84%	396	16%	890	35%	196	89	80%	-45%	46		
South Beds Council Tax and Be	2,320	2,022	87%	298	13%	805	35%	224	102	80%	-45%	56		
	<b>63,606</b>	<b>58,905</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>4,701</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>40,169</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>-17%</b>	<b>47</b>		

\\fsa\Home\$\JarmanP01\My Documents\My Crystal Reports\IC @ C Summary Report Central Bedfordshire.rpt

#### Legend

SL calls – calls answered within the service level of 20%

AHT – average handling time (call length)

SL variance - % by which calls were not in line with service levels

Wrap – after call work associated with each call

## 5.6 Costs

- 5.6.1 Costs of the physical move of staff into the proposed Technology House Contact Centre have been accounted for in the “Your Space” project and are therefore not repeated here as a direct cost of this proposal

### Staff travel costs

At this time, staff consultation is in progress and no definitive numbers of staff transferring to the single contact centre are known. However, based on the required size of the face to face service teams, it is estimated that there will be a cost of £385,000 over a period of 4 years payable under Appendix E allowances, including excess travel time allowances payable over 3 years for ex South Bedfordshire staff. This is based on excess travel time from current location to the new location in Technology House and will be subject to more detailed work once the consultation period is completed and staff are assigned to their new locations.

## 5.7 Savings

### 5.7.1 Staff savings

Non cashable savings of £200k per year (from the 2 Team Managers and 3 Customer Service Advisors) can be realised from improved service levels and offset of efficiencies achieved to the Authority by services transferring into Customer Services with existing resources. It is expected that cashable or non cashable savings attributed to service migration will appear in Directorate budgets.

Once the new operating model is in place and actual performance is measured against that forecast, any additional capacity will be identified, which either can be offered as cashable savings, or offset against efficiencies generated by migrating additional services into Customer Services. This second option would offer additional savings through a reduced requirement to recruit and train new advisors. It is important to note that any perceived additional capacity or savings may be reduced, should advisors choose not to transfer to the single contact centre. Any requirement to fill vacancies resulting from this would be assessed at the relevant time and in line with the progression of the service migration plans, and performance levels of the service being in line with customer and Member expectations.

5.7.2 Therefore a net saving of £415k over 4 years can be attributed to this restructure. This is non cashable, as the resource is required to deliver an acceptable level of service to our customers, that is more in line with the levels published in the Customer Charter.

	Yr 1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr 5
Cost	98,262	98,262	98,262	90,042	0
Saving	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
Net saving	101,738	101,738	101,738	109,958	200,000

## 5.8 Risk

Staff may not want to change locations  
 Staff not committed to change  
 Availability of Facilities to move staff  
 HR resource not available to support the change  
 ICT resource not available  
 Savings may not be realised

## 5.9 Timescale

The latest indications are that the annexe at Technology House will be available for the Customer Service Staff during the third week of July.

Estimated timescales are shown in the table below:

	Start	Complete
Melbourne House	21/07/10	23/07/10
Houghton Regis	28/07/10	30/07/10
Leighton Buzzard	04/08/10	06/08/10
Dunstable	11/08/10	13/08/10
Priory House	18/08/10	20/08/10
Amptill	01/09/10	03/09/10
Biggleswade	08/09/10	10/09/10

## 5.10 Other options considered

5.10.1 In proposing a single contact centre, other options were investigated, but were not considered to offer the most efficient solution

### 5.10.2 Operating 2 contact centres

This option would have reduced staff travel costs and possible attrition, but was considered to not provide the efficiencies and environment for training and migrating new services into Customer Services

**5.10.3 Expanding the size of each of the Customer Service Centres telephony provision**

This option would have incurred a similar cost in respect of staff travel. It would have ensured that staff skills from legacy Councils were in place at each location and would not have prevented migration of services.

There is limited space to expand at some of the Customer Service Centres, meaning teams of uneven sizes.

The conflict between face to face and telephone channel priority would remain, whilst would be reduced

## 6.0 Programme Stream 2 - Telephone number contact options

### Background

- 6.1.1 The creation of Central Bedfordshire Council required consolidation of existing telephone numbers within each of the legacy authorities into a single numbering plan. This identified Central Bedfordshire Council as a new Unitary entity and ensured that any impact on Bedford Borough Council, who retained many of the ex County Council numbers, was minimised.
- 6.1.2 Due to the wide geographical district covered by Central Bedfordshire, including 5 geographical area codes, it was decided to adopt the 0300 range of telephone numbers. This enables customers to contact the Council, regardless of either their or the Council office location, at a local rate from a land line or a mobile. Providers are obliged to include 0300 numbers in their free call packages, in the same way as a 01 or 02 number.
- 6.1.3 A general enquiries number of 0300 300 8000 was heavily promoted, together with 120 service numbers, printed in News Central, on the website and other publications. Officers were also provided with 0300 direct dial numbers within a separate range, ensuring that only service numbers were published, as this ensured resilience and continuity of service to the public, regardless of any changes in structure within the Authority.
- 6.1.4 These numbers include national hotline numbers, eg Consumer Advice, those for individual libraries and leisure centres and separate numbers where Council services are operated from different locations whilst harmonisation of staff, systems and processes are completed.
- 6.1.5 Analysis of call volumes during 2009/10 have shown that the 0300 300 8000 general enquiries number is heavily used, receiving an average of 32,500 calls per month, many of which are transferred to service areas, or within Customer Services, with the remainder being officer specific calls.
- 6.1.6 In contrast many of the published service numbers receive between 5 and 25 calls per week directly
- 6.1.7 Clearly this method of promoting and publishing numbers is not understood or used by our residents and with the Council now reaching its first anniversary, is an ideal opportunity to review the strategy and consider a wider range of options, as the organisation starts to mature and functions and services are more defined.
- 6.1.8 The Customer Services remodelling programme, including migration of all

appropriate services also provides a catalyst for a change to the way in which we publicise telephone contact numbers. The Customer Services team provides first contact resolution or value added activity, ie not a pure switchboard service. By linking similar services together, enables a customer to receive additional advice on entitled to services or those that are related to their original enquiry. This develops the concept of responding to the root cause of an enquiry, rather than just the presenting need. This will reduce avoidable contact, thereby creating efficiencies for the Authority.

- 6.1.9 It must be recognised that none of the proposed options will completely eradicate transfers between advisors in Customer Services or to individual service areas, due to the wide range of services provided by a Local Authority, but it is considered that some of the options will provide a significant improvement in service delivery to our residents.

Technology, including CRM, workflow, increased transactional services on the web and automation where appropriate will enable information to be transferred between advisors, thereby avoiding the customer repeating information which is then rekeyed by subsequent enquiry handlers, lengthening call handling times, and increasing costs

- 6.1.10 Reviews of many Councils websites including Cheshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, London Boroughs and Essex, show that there is not a single best practise model in place, ranging from every service having its own number published to those with a switchboard function and a single number

## 6.2 Options

- 6.2.1 Do nothing – retain the current structure of a general enquiries number and service numbers, which are expected to reduce from approximately 120 to 90 once harmonisation activity is complete and service migration activity is fully defined and implemented
- 6.2.2 Operate a single number strategy with touch tone options (press 1 etc)
- 6.2.3 Operate a single number strategy with automated speech recognition (say the service you require)
- 6.2.4 **Recommended** - Create a themed golden number strategy - Services are grouped into key themes and each theme allocated a single number. It is expected that over time the number of themed groups can be reduced.

## 6.3 Detailed evaluation of each option

### 6.3.1 Option 1- Do nothing – retain the existing model

6.3.2 The current operating model was designed to enable customers to make contact directly with the area of the Council that was able to resolve their enquiry.

6.3.3 An A-Z of services was produced detailing in the region of 120 numbers and is published across 2 pages in the News Central magazine. This includes different numbers for ex District services where services and ICT systems are not yet harmonised. There is pressure on space within News Central and there is a requirement to rationalise the lay out, using data on number usage over the last 12 months.

The service numbers are also included on the website and other publications, letters and leaflets.

6.3.4 As services are harmonised and ICT systems become available on a single platform, it is projected that the number of published numbers will reduce by 10.

Service migration of services such as libraries into Customer Services, should remove the requirement for a published telephone number for each location, further reducing the list by 18.

Therefore, it is expected that approximately 90 service numbers will be in circulation by April 2011.

6.3.5 The main 0300 300 8000 general enquiries number is heavily promoted, resulting in over 57% of the total calls received by Customer Services arriving on this number. The call queue with the next highest volume is the Mid Beds Environmental Services queue with approximately 6% of the total calls.

Whilst the general enquiries number is used by members of the public to speak to officers, it is also used by customers who require a service where there is a separate number published. This results in calls being transferred within Customer Services to an advisor with the correct skill, causing delay to the customer and double handling of the enquiry.

### 6.4 Benefits to this Option

6.4.1 No action is required – the model is already in place

6.4.2 No additional cost incurred

6.4.3 Maintenance of a general enquiries number which is well recognised by the public.



## 6.5 Barriers to the project (Risk)

	Barriers	Impact	Mitigation
6.5.1	Telephone enquiries will be not be resolved at the first point of contact	Additional transfers and longer call lengths for customers	Increased promotion of service numbers
6.5.2	Additional space required in News Central which is not available	Additional cost of publishing News Central Reduced space for articles and information	Reduce the volume of numbers as soon as possible to its minimum of approximately 90 numbers

## 6.6 Conclusion

6.6.1 Due to the lack of customer take up of the 120 service numbers and therefore, the inefficient way in which telephone enquiries are currently received, officers do not recommend this as the preferred option. However, should this be the preferred way forward, consideration will be given to how the general enquiries number is managed to ensure this continues to be through the most cost effective method.

Options will include:

Either

- Creating a dedicated switchboard function within Customer Services – this may save cost, but will reduce the ability of Customer Service staff to undertake the signposting and decision making elements of responding to a switchboard call. Examples of this are where a customer asks to speak to an officer, but the advisor has a greater understanding of the function that Customer Services undertakes for that service and that the call can be resolved by an advisor. Also, general information on library opening times, Council meetings etc are provided within a general enquiries call, whereas this would not be best practice for a switchboard service where speed of answer and short handling times are paramount

Or

- Retain the existing model – Customer Service Advisors receive general enquiries calls in addition to their service / skill enquiries. This ensures greater equity of call distribution across all advisors and allows the elements discussed above to be managed. This supports the concept that Customer Services should add value to every transaction it receives.

And

- Remove reference in the A – Z for services that have had no or a very low number of calls delivered via their service number over the last 12 months. This would be validated against the number of calls handled

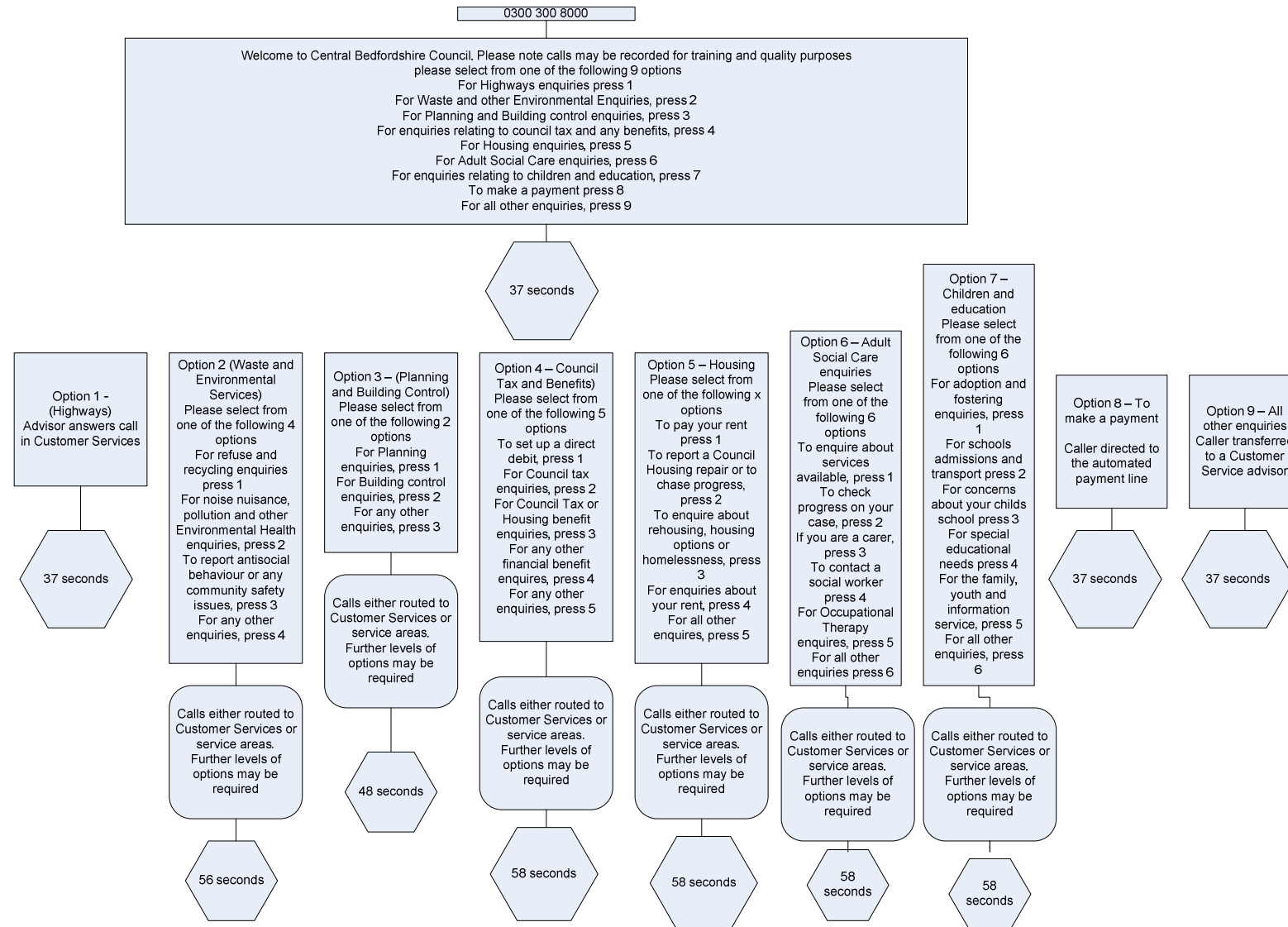
by the service, which should support that customers are using the 0300 300 8000 number to seek this advice and information. Examples of this are the BeaR Project which averages 1 call per day and the parking line with an average of 4 calls per day. This would not prevent the service area from using their allocated number on publications and their web pages, but it is not a high volume service that would require inclusion in the A-Z

## **7.0 Option 2 - Operate a single number strategy using touch tone (press 1 etc)**

- 7.0.1 The high usage of the main general enquiries 0300 300 8000 number offers opportunities to streamline the range of numbers published by the Council.
- 7.0.2 The use of touchtone technology as a means of interaction with an organisation is well established in all aspects of daily life. It has been used to a limited extent previously in legacy District authorities, where the range of services was more narrow, with Customer Service Advisors possessing the majority of skills to resolve enquiries at the first point of contact for major services, and a smaller officer base to transfer enquiries too. Touchtone was not used within Bedfordshire County Council.
- 7.0.3 Perception of touchtone is based on an individual's personal experience, and highlights that it is very easy to implement touch tone badly. Common errors include
- Too many options
  - Too many levels
  - No "get out" to speak to a real person
  - Getting lost in the system
- 7.0.4 If implemented appropriately, touchtone can assist in directing customers to the correct place to have their enquiry resolved more quickly. It can also be used to supplement other options in this report.
- 7.0.5 In order to implement touchtone in Central Bedfordshire, an indicative call routing plan is detailed below.

The average length of the messaging is included to demonstrate the time and cost to the customer of using this system. The option for "any other enquiries" in each option provides the customer with the opportunity to speak to a Customer Service Advisor in a switchboard capacity at any time.

# Appendix B – Programme Streams 1 & 2 – Telephony Channel



## 7.1 Costs

7.1.1 The infrastructure is already available within the current telephony system of Central Bedfordshire Council.  
Therefore the only costs associated will be officer time to configure, record and implement the changes.  
This is estimated at 20 days of officer time, in ICT and Customer Services

There will be a requirement to consult with all Directorates to confirm the wording of the options, routing and cultural changes associated with this change.

In the longer term, there may be a requirement to replace signage that uses current service numbers

## 7.2 Benefits

- 7.2.1
- The technology infrastructure is in place
  - The options can be changed to reflect changes in Council operating priorities, using internal resources
  - There will be a single number in place for Central Bedfordshire Council
  - Whilst there will be requirement to publish separate numbers for fraud and whistleblowing, these will be minimal
  - Existing service numbers can be redirected to their correct destination in the call routing
  - Additional space in News Central magazine

## 7.3 Barriers to the project (Risk)

	Barriers	Impact	Mitigation
7.3.1	The implementation of touchtone options into a Unitary Authority, using a single entry point number is not a common approach.	Customers may find the system unwieldy and complex	Clear messaging and service descriptions
7.3.2	The range of services operated by a Unitary Authority is extensive and can make the number and levels of options extensive and complex	Customers may choose the wrong options Customers will not respond well to multiple levels and options to choose from	Option to speak to an advisor at every level
7.3.3	Directorates will have	Options and levels	Agreement at CMT

	differing views and priorities for options at all levels and the maintenance and checking that each end point for the customer is operating correctly will be an ongoing cost.	may change frequently. Confusion for regular callers Additional officer time to reconfigure and record changes	level on corporate priorities
--	--	--	-------------------------------

## 7.4 Conclusion

7.4.1 Due to the lack of best practice in implementation of touchtone at this scale in a Unitary Council, together with the estimation of the levels and options required, officers do not recommend this as the preferred option. However, should this be the preferred way forward, consideration will be given to how this implementation can be managed to improve the customer experience.

Options will include:

- Consultation with officers, Members and customers to agree the most usable routing and wording
- Extensive testing of the routing to enable necessary changes to be made
- Communication plan to explain the benefits and how to use the system

Whilst full scale implementation of touchtone is not recommended, it is appropriate to consider use of touch tone in specific service areas where a single level with no more than 5 options can be implemented..

## 8.0 Option 3 - Operate a single number strategy utilising automatic speech recognition technology

### Background

8.0.1 Central Bedfordshire Council based its initial telephone numbering strategy around the potential implementation of automatic speech recognition technology – a customer speaks to an automated agent who analyses the service they have requested from a large vocabulary base to direct the caller correctly.

8.0.2 This option was included in the Customer Service Strategy, with the requirement that Members were fully engaged with any more detailed proposals for procurement and implementation

## **Proposals**

- 8.1.1 The potential deployment of speech recognition was investigated in 2008/ 2009 and was based on information available at the time in relation to how the structure of Central Bedfordshire may look.
- 8.1.2 The technology is based on purchasing automated agents who can be thought of as the equivalent of deploying a staff member in a contact centre or on a switchboard to answer calls. Each automated agent can service calls and provide the caller with services they require, based on the skills they are equipped with. Automated agents have the ability to learn additional vocabulary based on the requests they receive. This information is then added to the call routing plans.
- 8.1..3 Any of the following skills can be purchased to be used by an automated agent

### **Payments**

Customers demand accessible service at a time convenient to them. They may have data security fears when making payments for routine transactions such as council tax payments, parking fines, invoice collections or setting up a direct debit. **Payments** allow customers to make payments quickly, accurately and securely

### **Operator**

Customers expect their call to be dealt with in an efficient manner each time they contact the Council. **Operator** politely and efficiently greets callers, using simple spoken instructions and connects them directly to the required contact or department.

### **Information**

Customers want to access routine information requests such as my next bin collection or housing registrations, at a time convenient to them. Using **Information**, customers simply answer set questions and receive answers relayed from a web-enabled CRM systems real-time

### **Reporting**

This skill makes it quick and easy for customers to pick up the phone and report information such as missed refuse collection, faulty streetlamp, unable to attend an appointment, to the Council, any time of the day.

### **Mail-2-me**

This skill enables customers to request further information such as electoral registration, postal votes, benefit leaflets, planning applications whilst it is fresh in their mind, without having to queue to speak to an agent, especially during seasonal or promotional call traffic peaks. With **Mail-2-me**, callers simply provide their name, address details and select their requirement from a menu. This can then be actioned by a member of staff in the same way as an e mail.

### **Survey**

This skill enables customers to provide feedback on the Council and its services, without sharing this with a real advisor. With **Survey**, the advisor can give customers the option to provide customer feedback or survey information, quickly and anonymously.

### **Locator**

Customers are keen to locate a Council facility or service such as *where's my nearest facility or service?* over the telephone. They want to do this quickly without having to queue to speak to an agent. **Locator** allows customers to simply provide their postcode and the relevant information is read back to them. Additional nearest services can also be relayed over the phone.

- 8.1.4 It is not necessary for agents and skills to be matched on a 1-2-1 basis, an automated agent can pick up any available skill to meet a customers enquiry. Any customer demand not able to be managed through the automated route, will automatically divert to a "live" advisor to respond to. This is of particular importance at times of peak demand, which will exceed the number of automated agents or skills implemented, as it is not cost effective to resource to peak demand.
- 8.1.5 The solution is scalable as it allows additional agents or skills to be added as demand for and acceptance of the system grows by the customers.

## **8.2 Costs**

- 8.2.1 The costs below were provided in 2008, and therefore should be indicative for any future procurement
- 8.2.2 Purchase of the system, including professional services with the operator skill
- £104,770
- Maintenance costs are not known but have been assumed at 20% - £21,000 per year
- No capital funding has been secured for this project to date
- It is expected that a reduction in Customer Service Advisors of 4 FTE could be achieved through the introduction of this option with a saving of £120,000 per year.
- This equates to a net saving of £339,000 over a 4 year period

There is the potential for this to be used as non cashable savings initially to support the service migration plans and improve service levels, with this saving being taken to avoid excess capacity or budget within the Customer Services Team

Officer time will be required for the implementation and configuration of the system. The extent of this cannot be anticipated at this stage, but will include involvement from service areas, ICT and Customer Services..

### 8.3 Benefits

- 8.3.1
- Implementation of this technology will enable a single number strategy to operate.
  - The initial cost could be offset by a reduction in existing Customer Service Advisors, or an increase in capacity within the existing resource to absorb the additional service identified in the Service migration plan, with reduced additional recruitment, therefore delivering the same levels of savings
  - There is the potential to expand the use of the automated agents to provide service or information outside of traditional Council operating hours at limited additional cost, including undertaking surveys or taking requests or service complaints.
  - The skills used by the automated agents can be changed to meet different service challenges through the year.
  - An automated agent does not take holiday or have sick leave and provides a consistent service delivery every time.

### 8.4 Barriers to the project (Risk)

	Barriers	Impact	Mitigation
8.4.1	Implementation of speech recognition, whilst in use as an internal switchboard in some London Boroughs is not widely used at present in the public sector. Councils at a District level have implemented this technology for automated payments or for taking reports of events, such as missed bins both in and out of hours.	Certain customers may not want to use the technology.	Accessibility to the Council must be a key consideration for all of our residents and this aspect must be thoroughly investigated and tested



8.4.2	Potential for the customer enquiry not to be recognised.	Customers will not use the system Reputational damage to the Council	An enquiry is passed immediately to a “live” advisor, as soon as the system has failed to recognise the request once.
8.4.3	Cost of ongoing maintenance and configuration routing	Potential savings reduced	Contract negotiations and development of skills within the Council
8.4.4	This technology is taking the Council further away from residents, rather than closer.	Reputational damage Inconsistency with Council ambitions	Clear communication plan to promote benefits

## 8.5 Conclusion

8.5.1 Based on the significant resistance from Members during consultation on the Customer Service Strategy, this option is not recommended. Should Members reconsider and this option be the preferred way forward, it is recommended that the Operator skill be implemented initially to provide a virtual switchboard function for the Council. This can release savings or resource within the Customer Service Team to improve service levels and first point of contact resolution.

It is not recommended that the system is utilised as an internal switchboard as officers and Members do not currently use the Customer Services team for this function, in view of the availability of the corporate telephone directory and this would not be cost effective.

It is also not recommended that the system be configured to enable customers to ask for a particular officer. Again, the Customer Services team currently intercepts many of these enquiries and resolves them without reference to the service areas, providing a warm transfer when a customer does need to be transferred. Again, this would be seen as a backward step. Officers also have their own direct dial numbers which can be provided to customers who need to make direct contact with a particular team.

## 9.0 Option 4 Create a themed golden number strategy

### 9.0.1 Context

The Customer Services remodelling programme, including migration of all appropriate services also provides a catalyst for a change to the way in which we publicise telephone contact numbers. The Customer Services team provides first contact resolution or value added activity, ie not a pure switchboard service. By linking similar services together, enables a customer to receive additional advice on entitled to services or those that are related to their original enquiry. This develops the concept of responding to the root cause of an enquiry, rather than just the presenting need. This will reduce avoidable contact, thereby creating efficiencies for the Authority.

9.0.2 The proposal will not completely eradicate transfers between advisors in Customer Services or to individual service areas, due to the wide range of services provided by a Unitary Local Authority, but it is considered that this approach could provide a significant improvement in service delivery to our residents.

9.0.3 Technology, including CRM, workflow, increased transactional services on the web and automation where appropriate will enable information to be transferred between advisors, thereby avoiding the customer repeating information which is then rekeyed by subsequent enquiry handlers, lengthening call handling times, and increasing costs

### 9.0.4 Research

Reviews of many Councils websites including Essex, Cheshire, East Riding of Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire, shows that there is not a single best practise model in place, ranging from every service having its own number published to those with a switchboard function and a single number.

The approach taken by Essex County Council matches most closely the concept of related services and the aspiration that we have for our own Customer Services Team. The website link is shown below for information

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/>

### 9.0.5 Proposal

9.0.6 Services are grouped into key themes and each theme allocated a single

number a “golden” number.

9.0.7 A themed number approach would not prevent those service numbers currently in existence being used in discrete publications or consultations, or where the service will never be handled by Customer Services, e.g. child protection issues. Customer Services must add value to every transaction or enquiry it undertakes to maximise the efficiencies that can be achieved across the Authority by migrating appropriate services into a first point of contact resolution multi skilled environment.

9.0.8 The themed number model has been adapted to meet the organisational structure of Central Bedfordshire Council, and the knowledge we have of our residents.

The general enquiries number does not exist to prevent it being used in preference to the themed numbers.

### 9.0.9 Proposed Service groupings

Group	Services include
Living	Births Marriages and Deaths Environmental Health Waste Pest control Community Safety Housing
Money and Benefits	Council Tax Benefits Grants Free School Meals
Planning and Business	Development Management Building control Trees and Landscapes Business advice and support Trading standards Economic Growth Licensing
Travelling	Highways Public and Community Transport Concessionary Travel Public Rights of way Cycling and Walking

	Blue Badges
Learning	Education Nurseries and Playgroups Adult Community Learning Libraries School Music services School Transport Youth Participation
Health and Caring	Adoption and Fostering Adult Social care OT and OPT Caring for Children and Young people Mental Health Services for those with disabilities Health Youth Support
Enjoying	Archives and Museums Arts Leisure Country Parks Tourism Tastes of Bedfordshire Theatres
Your Council	Councillors and Officers Decision making / Committees Finance and Performance Freedom of Information Our objectives Feedback Emergencies Elections

## 9.1 Implementation

9.1.1 Consultation and input from the Communications Team will be undertaken to validate the theme titles to minimise confusion for our residents and therefore transfer of enquiries. The publication of these numbers would replace the existing use of 0300 300 8000 on the reverse of News Central etc

9.1.2 In mapping the existing service numbers into these themes, detailed discussions will take place with each Directorate to ensure their key

services are included in the correct themes and communicated to the public.

- 9.1.3 The use of touchtone where appropriate on each of the theme numbers will also be used, particularly in the short term whilst the service migration programme is underway, ensuring that customers reach the right person first time. Where implemented, this would be at a single level with no more than 5 options.

## 9.2 Costs

- 9.2.1 There is no additional infrastructure cost to this proposal. Officer time will be required to agree, configure and implement the changes. This cannot be accurately estimated until a full scoping exercise has been undertaken.
- 9.2.2 Changes will be required to the website and these will be incorporated into the web redesign project and will not result in direct additional cost.
- 9.2.3 Large stocks of leaflets are not held by the Authority, so there will be no requirement to reprint any information, as all existing published telephone numbers will be mapped to the relevant theme and to the Customer Services Team or the service area direct as appropriate.

## 9.3 Benefits

- 9.3.1 Customers will have a more concise and relevant list of telephone numbers to refer to for resolution of their enquiries.
- 9.3.2 By removing the general enquiries number, customers will be able to access an advisor at the first point of contact with the skills to resolve their enquiry, or interpret a more complex request and deliver the customer to the correct service area specialist.
- 9.3.3 Customer Service Advisors will be structured to be associated with each of the themes, developing greater understanding and ability to offer related services at the first point of contact, e.g. signposting to additional services or benefits that a customer may be entitled to. This supports the findings of the Total Place pilot in respect of access to benefits.
- 9.3.4 Insight gained from customer interactions within each theme will better inform and support the service migration plan. By allocating smaller groups of advisors to each theme, feedback and service improvements are more easily identified and progressed.
- 9.3.5 Directorates will be able to use the themes to develop cross directorate working to deliver real joined up customer solutions and work with

Customer Services to foster stronger relationships and sharing of knowledge and information

- 9.3.6 There is no additional capital cost associated with implementation
- 9.3.7 Customers will not have to interpret which service they require from over 139 A-Z entries
- 9.3.8 Discrete service telephone numbers can continue
- 9.3.9 As additional services migrate into Customer Services, there is no change in contact details for the customer

#### 9.4 Barriers to the project (Risk)

	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
9.4.1	Customers have become used to the 0300 300 8000 number for general enquiries.	Customers will not respond well to the change	Communication of the changes as a service improvement must be carefully managed
9.4.2	Some services may not be easily identifiable as belonging to a theme.	Customers will not be connected to the correct advisor first time	Theme titles will be as clear as possible, with key services listed below. Analysis of calls arriving in the wrong area will provide valuable feedback to informing changes that need to be made

#### 9.5 Conclusion

- 9.5.1 Officers recommend this option. This method of contact can be replicated via the website, providing consistency for customers. There is minimal cost associated with the change and it is expected that the customer experience of having their enquiry resolved at the first point of contact will significantly improve. Opportunities for offering additional services will be increased, as advisors will have more specialist knowledge in closely related areas.

Should this be the preferred way forward, it is recommended that additional research is undertaken with other Authorities who have adopted this strategy, to ensure that any learning can be integrated into the project.

- 9.5.2 Internal communication is essential to ensure that all staff and stakeholders are aware of the benefits of the change and where their services fit.