

**Revenues & Benefits Shared Service**

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:** Councillor E Woodburn

**LEAD OFFICER:** Jane Salt, Head of Customer Services

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Jane Salt, Head of Customer Services

**Summary and Recommendation:**

Members are requested to:

- (i) note the significant progress made to date in investigating the potential for Copeland, Allerdale and Carlisle to share Revenues and Benefits service and
- (ii) endorse the proposed way forward for delivering the quick wins and the development of a business case for a longer term shared service
- (iii) agree to carry forward the underspent budget for the future phases of the project.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 As members will be aware from regular newsletter briefings, Copeland, Allerdale and Carlisle are undertaking detailed investigations on whether there is a business case for a shared Revenues and Benefits service encompassing the three authorities.
- 1.2 The project initiation document (PID) produced in July 2008 set out the principal drivers for merging the three councils' Revenues and Benefits service:-
  - Increased capacity and capabilities delivering economies of scale.
  - Reduced ongoing revenue costs for the three councils.
  - Improve service performance for the councils' customers.
  - Taking advantage of the fact that Carlisle and Copeland councils use Academy/Anite operating system to administer Revenues and Benefits and Carlisle and Allerdale are well advanced in introducing a joint ICT service.
  - Provide a model for future shared 'transactional' service initiatives.
- 1.3 A Project Board was set up including the relevant Directors and Service Heads from each of the 3 authorities (supported by practitioner groups) with the terms of reference to progress the actions set out in the PID in

producing a Revenues and Benefits Business Case (if delivering the outcomes as set out in 1.2 above) for member consideration.

- 1.4 This report sets out progress to date and asks members to support the short term (i.e. delivering quick wins) and longer term (i.e. progress to full business case) outcomes as set out in this report.

## **2. PROGRESS TO DATE**

- 2.1 Workpackage teams, i.e. senior Revenues and Benefits practitioners within each council, have been identifying:
- (i) how each council currently administers their services, i.e. council Tax, NNDR, Recovery, Benefits, Benefits Fraud Prevention, and ICT/Technical Support;
  - (ii) 'best performance' within each authority.
  - (iii) issues which need addressing in delivering 'enhanced' service provision either via individual council or via a shared service operation.
- 2.2 Final reports submitted by workpackage teams (mainly favouring enhanced single council delivery in the short term) were subject to independent scrutiny and challenge by Meritec, expert consultants engaged by the Project Board for this purpose.
- 2.3 Meritec, after reviewing all workpackage reports and holding meetings with workpackage teams to discuss how they had come to their decisions, provided the Project Board with a report on the suggested way forward for the shared services initiative.
- 2.4 In summary, based on their review, Meritec advised that:-
- (i) there was an opportunity to progress to shared working;
  - (ii) this would be better dealt with as a phased approach to allow the 3 councils time to:
    - assess accurately the potential costs, savings and performance improvement of shared working

- assess the significant impact on ICT resources/infrastructure of shared working particularly as ICT is currently implementing a shared service initiative of its own
- enable different working practices and procedures operated within each council to be harmonised where possible

### **3. OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED**

3.1 The Project Board, after considering workpackage reports, Meritec advice and receiving a presentation from 'Westweys', a successful shared Revenues and Benefits partnership operated by Weymouth, West Dorset (and soon Purbeck) councils, agreed the following phased way forward subject to member agreement.

#### **3.2 Phase 1**

3.2.1 Introduction of 'quick wins' suggested in the workpackage reports, some benefiting all three councils e.g. introduction of telephone benefit claims, and some benefiting individual councils e.g. further e-government initiatives in Carlisle (paperless direct debits).

3.2.2 An action plan detailing these quick wins, i.e. work to be done, timetable and responsible team.

3.2.3 By working together to introduce 'quick wins' practitioners in the 3 councils will be preparing the ground work for future more ambitious shared working, i.e. in sharing best practice, aligning policies, procedures and processes and shared training.

#### **3.3 Phase 2**

3.3.1 Enhance and refine the shared service PID to develop a longer term business case taking account of:

- (i) lessons learned to date from:
  - workpackage reports
  - successful shared service provision operated by other authorities
- (ii) advice provided Meritec (and Westwey) particularly the requirement to align policies , procedures and processes before entering into a formal shared services arrangement.
- (iii) the major issue of aligning ICT provision taking account of the conflicting resource issues of the ICT shared service initiative between Carlisle and Allerdale.

- (iv) the best shared service model for the 3 councils in meeting PID outcomes.
- (v) the additional time/resources needed to fully quantify costs, benefits, return on investment, and timescales for implementing a full shared service if the business case stacks up.

3.3.2 It is anticipated that the Project Board would have a robust business case prepared for member consideration by 30 September 2009.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 In conclusion the rationale behind proceeding with this two-phase approach and its proposed timescales is:

- the need to prioritise our resources – there are many projects ongoing currently
- phasing allows the Project Board time to take a holistic, top down approach and to define clearer targets
- the need to understand fully the implications of costs and benefits around the ICT systems and infrastructure
- allows opportunity for further exploration around best practice which may be available but up to now resources have not been able to take into account
- ability to challenge the services and to lay the groundwork for culture change, i.e. will engender a collaborative project/teamwork approach between all the councils via the achievement of quick wins, prior to major changes in phase 2 implementation

4.2 As members will be aware Carlisle has been contracted to provide management and technical support to Copeland's Revenues and Benefits service since September 2007. Whilst the suggested quick wins and shared services business case development is being progressed over the next 9 months, in tandem, the current shared management arrangements with Copeland will be strengthened. Discussions between the two councils are being held on how this can be achieved.

4.3 Lessons learned from managing two Revenues and Benefits operations 35 miles apart will be taken into account in producing the Copeland/Allerdale/Carlisle shared services business case.

## **5. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)**

5.1 Each authority gave £25,000 to the project, plus we have received £10,000 from CIEP to cover the expense of unifying our procedures.

5.2 Copeland's £25,000 contribution is within the budget for 08/09. The estimated spend before 31 March 2009 is £5,000 and it is requested that the remaining balance of £20,000 be carried forward to 09/10.

## **6. PROJECT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 The project is being managed by a project manager employed by all 3 authorities.

## **7. IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN**

7.1 Improve service delivery

### **List of Appendices**

**None**

**List of Background Documents:** RBS Shared Services PID

**List of Consultees:** Corporate Team, Leader

## **CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES**

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed . This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	None
Impact on Sustainability	None
Impact on Rural Proofing	None
Health and Safety Implications	None
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	None
Children and Young Persons Implications	None
Human Rights Act Implications	None
Monitoring Officer Comments	None
S151 Officer Comments	None

Please say if this report will require the making of a Key Decision    NO