



front office shared services  
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# people's place – the for all healthy living centre

weston-super-mare

The exciting and vibrant 'For All Healthy Living Centre' came about through a combination of community action and a listening, responsive unitary council working with partner agencies from the voluntary and statutory sector. The local community had campaigned for all local agencies, including North Somerset Council to improve services and facilities in the four communities making up the South Ward of Weston-super-Mare.

Previously the council-owned community centre was not fit for purpose; the GP service was delivered from a temporary building; and both Methodist and Church of England churches needed repair. The community, the council, the primary care trust and a range of partners developed a vision to improve local facilities and services bringing them together in an accessible, community managed centre. The underlying principle was that listening to the community would make services more effective, and service under one roof would improve access.

It was clear early on that partners could get more for their money if they acted together, rather than in a series of independent projects, sharing resources, infrastructure, reception and premises. Development of one new building brought revenue and capital savings and maximised the use of the site and land values.

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## overview

The For All Healthy Living Centre:

- provides a **wide range of community services, facilities and activities**, co-existing within a single building
- involves the local community which enables **ownership, generates participation and results in respect** for a joint venture – displayed in ways such as the lack of graffiti
- shows that **imagination, vision and a willingness to take risks can lead to greater achievement**
- demonstrates that **yielding a majority in the management board** to partner bodies and the community **generates a high level of 'buy in'**.

## background

In an area of relative affluence, the South Ward of Weston-super-Mare is an area of great social need, compounded in the recent past by job losses, including factory closures and cut backs in both footwear and helicopter manufacture in the nearby Locking area.

In addition to high unemployment, the local population is younger than average but has greater health needs. Satisfaction with services provided by a range of organisations including the local council, health, and leisure, was low.

The council joined together with local voluntary and statutory sector partners in this innovative project to drive up service delivery to the people of South Ward across a wide range of services. To develop the project, the council took over the role of lead agency in developing the For All Healthy Living Centre, sharing project management with the primary care trust, then tendering and letting the contract on behalf of the partners, ensuring delivery of the project on time and within budget

Improving the customer experience and driving up satisfaction are key drivers of the council's vision for customer access and service tailored to local needs.

### the council's customer access vision

The 'access to services' element in the Healthy Living Centre is rooted in the council's customer access vision.

In 2005, the Executive agreed:

- to resolve at least 80% of customer enquiries at first contact
- to increase customer satisfaction from 50% to 65% over a three year period.

It noted that, over the previous three years, overall public satisfaction with councils and public service providers in general, had slipped. National survey results showed that average satisfaction with unitary authorities slipped from 62% in 2000 to 52% in 2003. At the same time, customer expectations around service choice and convenience had increased significantly. Many public and private sector organisations were looking to take advantage of new ways to provide access to services by phone, internet, e-mail, letter and face-to-face contact, and were extending flexibility around opening hours, and, at the same time, looking to reduce costs.

The 'Customer Access Vision' is:

**'To deliver co-ordinated, accessible and customer led public services in a cost effective way through a programme of improving our work practices.'**

The council's aim is to provide better services and encourage people to switch to more efficient ways of interacting with it, enabling improvements in customer satisfaction and at the same time reducing the costs of providing services.

To achieve this, the customer access vision set out three key areas for the council to focus on when making improvements:

- to provide the information customers need to understand and access services
- to provide staff and partners with the information and support they require enabling them to deliver joined-up services across the council, and allowing them to take informed decisions around service delivery
- to challenge existing ways of working and find better and easier ways of delivering services in ways that make sense to customers.

### project themes

To deliver this vision, the council made a significant commitment to progress a major change programme over the next three to five years to improve access to its services. Six key projects formed the focus for the customer access programme over that period. These covered:

- improving the range of information on, and user-friendly nature of, the website
- increasing the range and number of transactional/payment services available through the website
- introducing customer relationship management technology to provide staff with shared information on customers, where appropriate, to allow the effective tracking of the resolution of customer enquiries and continuity in customer contacts
- introducing electronic records and document management, to allow quick and efficient sharing of data files, where appropriate, to support the handling of customer enquiries
- developing the 'Gateway to council services' concept, by making the library network, and other buildings such as the town hall reception and Healthy Living Centre key face-to-face access points for a range of council information, reflecting the needs of the immediate local community
- building upon the contact centre approach to dealing with high volume, frequently asked customer enquiries for a number of services.

At that time, the council noted that concentrating on improving access to services meant focusing on customers in all that it did.

To date, the council has:

- reviewed its customer care standards, and put in place new monitoring procedures
- introduced a new customer feedback system for the council
- invested in a 'People First' staff customer care programme, with 400 staff receiving training to date
- increased resources for consultation and communication with its customers
- developed a customer-focussed approach to business planning
- tried new ways of working, utilising mobile technology, customer relationship management software, electronic document management and service based contact centres
- put in place a customer access programme board, chaired by the chief executive, to lead the change programme.

As part of the council's customer access programme, the 'gateways project' aims to provide face-to-face access points to customers across the district with each specifically focussed on local needs. These access points have a core range of facilities tailored to meet the local need and setting. They will be of high standard everywhere, but will not be a case of 'one size fits all'.

The Council Connect service at the For All Healthy Living Centre is the first 'gateway' to have been developed. It was designed in consultation with the local community via the For All Healthy Living Centre Board. It complements the work of all the existing partners in the building and brings a much needed access point to council services, plus a library service to the local community.



### the for all healthy living centre

For All Healthy Living Centre brings together a wide range of services in a striking modern building. It also responds to the council priority to 'improve the health of the community', with the GP surgery, the wide range of physical activity provided and the low cost healthy food in the café.

In the Healthy Living Centre, the council took the innovative step of drawing together the various partners necessary to drive up performance across a wide range of services specifically for the people of South Ward.

The project has many innovative features, setting it apart from most other joint ventures.

The range of facilities and services within the centre includes:

- Council Connect first stop shop for information and advice
- library, including computers allowing free internet access
- Methodist and Anglican Church, a shared facility, which can also be used as a community room
- health centre providing GP, and nursing services

- community hall
- children's centre
- outdoor playground
- neighbourhood management likely to co-locate within the building
- Citizen's Advice Bureau runs a service weekly and there is a Money Advice centre nearby including Credit Union and district housing office
- Barnardos 5 to 13 year olds' project, jointly with North Somerset Council
- Community Learning
- day centre, with lunch club for older users, to which volunteer drivers bring the 40 members from nearby estates.
- Skills for Life courses, run by Weston College
- counselling services
- victim support
- information, advice and guidance services
- café, run by a small staff team plus volunteers.

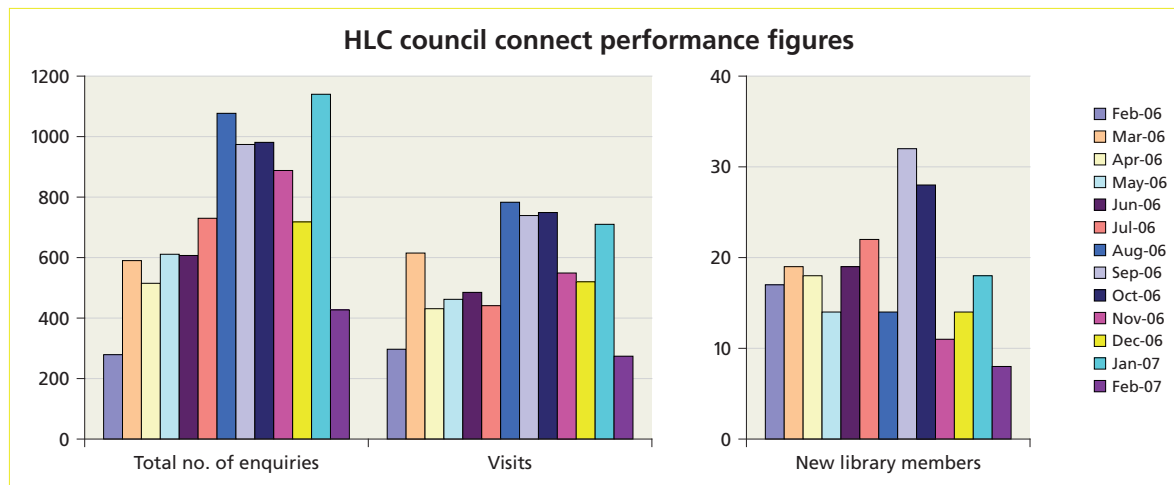
The style of the project is innovative in that North Somerset Council, as just one partner in the Centre, respects the preferences of the local community. The fully-functioning contact point for council services is very lightly badged as just one part of the whole centre.



## customer experience

### impact on the community

Local people have flocked to the Centre, to the extent that managing the resource is challenging at busy times, when there may be eight or nine activities taking place within the foyer and more elsewhere in the building. Quotes that capture local people's pleasure in their own way are included throughout this section.



The figure above summarises the number of enquiries, visits and new library members dealt with by the Healthy Living Centre Gateway facility.

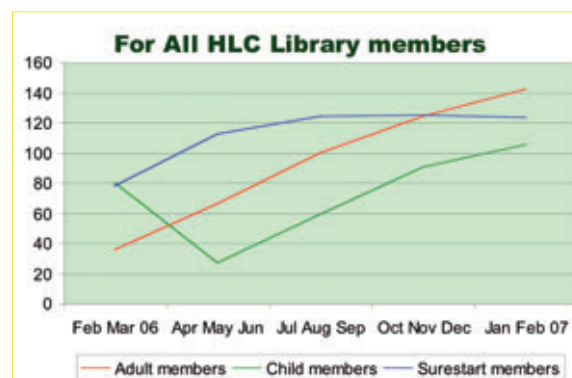
The small library facility within the Healthy Living Centre Gateway is the first ever permanent library facility within South Ward. A target of 200 additional library members was set for the first 12 months of operation, and this has been exceeded.

*'What a wonderful building.'*

Of the enquiries made, 81% are dealt with at first point of contact. Requests relate to a whole range of services, including adult social care, children's services, financial services, environmental health and waste/recycling issues.

*'This is the best ever.'*

*'The café is great, good luck with this venture.'*



A key aspiration of the Healthy Living Centre Gateway project was to increase library membership numbers within the South Ward community.

*'The Healthy Living Centre is wicked, I like the computers.'*

*'It is cool.'*

## partnership working

### **governance**

The governance of the project is also innovative. Although the council owns the site and was the lead agency during the construction of the Centre it joined with the other statutory sector agencies involved in a brave decision to put management of the centre in the hands of a not-for-profit organisation. This effectively gave control to the residents of the area.

The For All Healthy Living Company is limited by guarantee. It has a board of eleven, with one partner director from each of:

- children's centre
- council
- community association
- church
- Primary Care Trust, which established and runs the GP surgery.

In addition, there are six resident board members, ensuring that residents are in the majority.

The aims of this project are to meet social need and deliver improved customer service and satisfaction, rather than deliver efficiency gains. The council made a conscious decision to focus on face-to-face contact, because that is what customers demand and want.

In terms of efficiency and value for money, the benefit is cost-effective development of a shared asset. Thus, rather than making a capital investment to be recouped in revenue savings over a number of years, the main gain was better value for money in a joint project rather than a series of independent developments.

The underlying principle of this project was that the constituent partners could get more for the same investment and thereby offer an improved service to their customers by pooling their resources and seeking synergies.

## public value of investment

### financial value

#### capital contributions

Organisation	Contribution (£000s)	Notes
North Somerset Primary Care Trust	585	+ £4,000 for work added into the contract
SureStart Local Programme	230	Grant plus a contribution from DfES
North Somerset Council	200	Housing Revenue account
Diocese of Bath and Wells	408	
South Weston Community Association	180.4	via a Community Fund grant
For All Healthy Living Company	1,000	New opportunities Fund
Town Council	40	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,647.4</b>	

The partners generated capital savings as a result of this project. North Somerset Council estimated the cost of refurbishing the old community centre at £300,000, compared to contributing £200,000, land, construction project management, operating as lead agency for grant management, VAT and legal advice to the project – and as a consequence gained use of a brand new state-of-the-art facility.

The District Valuer judged that the PCT would get value for money within the scheme with a contribution of up to £610,000, compared to the actual amount shown above.

The balance of the investment came from grants and partners supporting the initiative as a contribution to their own service improvement.

### customer value

The project delivers enormous value to customers. Many social and service needs are met in a single, modern, attractive, high-quality building set right in the heart of the local community.

The council has also invested in web information and services, however, it recognises that many customers have a preference and need for face-to-face contact, especially in issues related to benefits and other social needs. The council has not only responded by providing such a service, but in a way which is strikingly friendly and helpful

### organisational value

Through a positive and sensitive response to the wishes of the local community, the council has been able to deliver its own vision of services. Along with the partners, it has been able to benefit from the economies of scale through joint working, so that the total is much greater than the sum of the parts.

## sector learning

Other local authorities could achieve similar success by following the same imaginative approach.

Key learning points are:

- listen to local people, who can articulate better than anyone else what their key needs and wishes are
- shared governance with other partners, including empowering the local community, generates wholehearted buy in commitment and a true sense of ownership
- combine council delivery of service into the vision and style of a wider project
- recognise that a broad council vision needs to be delivered in different settings in ways which meet local needs and style
- share credit, satisfaction and recognition
- share the vision from the top of the organisation and encourage buy-in through visible leadership.

## next steps

The council is pursuing a major programme of outlets which build on the For All Healthy Living Centre, incorporating common features from the corporate vision, delivered in a flexible way, such as:

- access to services and information, using all channels, but ensuring face to face contact is available
- working with partners to improve the health of the local community through investment in prevention, healthy living and access to health services
- co-locating libraries and information technology
- providing gateways to other services such as education and community safety.



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