



front office shared services
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sunderland customer service centre

bunny hill

The Sunderland Customer Service Centre Bunny Hill brings together business, voluntary and public sector organisations to pioneer a new model of service provision. The approach delivers greater accessibility, personal service, and continuous improvement. The Centre has city branding so that customer service centres are inclusive and 'owned' by those who use them, not the individual operators or service areas. It responds to public service reform as well as the local commitment for service improvement, exemplified by the priorities of the Sunderland Partnership LSP.

The council adopted a 'community leadership' role and worked with a range of public agencies to provide the widest possible array of services to the local community. Co-location of related services has led to better partnership working and to services clustered in a way that 'makes sense' to the customer.

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overview

The Sunderland Customer Service Centre Bunny Hill (The Centre):

- brings **together business, voluntary and public sector organisations** to pioneer a new model of service provision
- forms a key part of Sunderland's city-wide Customer Service Centre Network and enables residents of north Sunderland to access a wide range of services
- is built on **the principles of innovative and integrated service delivery**
- takes the concept of the 'One-Stop-Shop' a step further by creating a 'First-Stop-Shop' and is a beacon for the new way Sunderland delivers customer service
- is one of the city's Customer Service Centres, branded for the city – not the individual partners – **so that they are inclusive and 'owned' by those who use them**, not the individual operators or service areas
- engenders pride through its location and design but most importantly its ethos, which places it right at the heart of the community, delivering the services local people want, involving them in the process
- will evolve as a facility that will shape the community it represents.

The organisations involved are:

- Community and Cultural Services Directorate, operating the Customer Service Centre, the Library & Electronic Village Hall and Wellness Centre and providing facility management for the whole Centre
- Education Directorate, operating the Adult and Community Learning Centre
- Children's Services Directorate, operating a Sure Start Children's Centre
- Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust, operating the NHS Primary Care Centre
- Dr. Datta & Partners NHS GP Practice, operating the integrated NHS GP Surgery
- Sunderland Housing Group, operating the Downhill Area Housing Office

- A&C Ventures Retail Pharmacists, operating the Bunny Hill Pharmacy
- Sunderland North Community Business Centre (SNCBC), operating the Community Suite, the 'Meet & Eat' Café and the Buttercups Day Nursery and Crèche.

background

The Council's Customer Service Strategy is key to achieving sustainable and rapid efficiency gains and achieving the performance ambitions in the corporate improvement plan. The strategy drives improvement across the council by recognising that customer service affects the whole customer journey, from initial contact to the service delivery and eventual closure of the request for service.

Customer service covers face-to-face, telephone and other electronic access channels (Internet, street based kiosks) and the council sets out to deliver customer services as effectively and efficiently as possible. It has two organisational principles:

- integration of front-facing services to these access channels and investment in multi-skilled staff to deal with a range of enquiries at first point of contact
- migration of all appropriate customer enquiries to the contact centre (for telephone and other e-contact) or through any centres which are part of the Customer Service Centre network (for face to face contact).

The approach responds to the ever-increasing expectations of residents for accessibility, personal service, and continuous improvement. It also responds to public service reform and the commitment to service improvement in the priorities of the Sunderland Partnership LSP. The Centre epitomises the council's response to national drivers and demonstrates innovation in the 'place-shaping' of its locality. This approach, based upon a wide interpretation of convening local public services, is relevant to other local authorities and their public sector partners within a LSP and LAA context. (See the Appendices for national drivers).

customer experience

The Centre is light, fresh, airy and bright – a smart welcoming place designed to enhance people's lives and reflects the city partner's strongly held values. It is a deliberate integration of city brand with service implementation.

customers can enjoy access to:

- a wide range of council services via informal, semi-confidential and confidential interviews and a live video link to other parts of the Customer Service Network
- basic skills and other non-vocational courses through the Adult and Community Learning 'Skills for Life' Centre working in conjunction with other learning providers via three hi-tech flexible teaching spaces and a resource base for tutors
- a Community Library, incorporating an Electronic Village Hall and Children's Library
- a programme of activities and training for parents and under fives via the Centre's Sure Start service and Children's Centre, providing a wide range of staff and facilities with close ties to the 24 place Neighbourhood Nursery and crèche with external play areas for children and babies
- health services via the NHS Primary Care Centre, which operates from 6.00 a.m. to 8.30 p.m., seven days per week. It offers a comprehensive range of NHS diagnostics (digital x-ray), treatment and planned care. There is an Urgent Care 'Walk-In Centre' treatment is available without appointment. The Primary Care Centre also incorporates an NHS GP Practice with consulting and treatment rooms for seven GPs and associated practice professionals. A new retail pharmacy delivers a dispensary service and offers general pharmacy products.

Customers can use the Wellness Centre incorporating a 'Technogym', 'Wellness System', and activity space, linked electronically to the treatment and diagnostic services provided by the NHS.

Local people can use the Community Suite comprising a community hall, demonstration kitchen/meeting room, office, confidential interview room and large community meeting room. The 'Meet & Eat' Community Café offers a wide range of nutritional food at reasonable prices.

In a recent Customer Satisfaction Survey, 92% of customers were very satisfied with the services they received. One benefit customers identified is that the multiple services available save on journey times. A customer reference group will map out customer journeys and build upon the existing Sunderland Contact Centre protocol, which was used to design the service within the Centre. The Occupants Group will investigate different partners' interaction with and management of customers. This information will assist in alignment or standardisation of practices.

Customer feedback indicates that the GP practice patients like the facilities more than the previous surgery premises and that initial fears of being located on a hill appear not to be an issue. No older patients have opted to leave and the practice has increased to 7,000 patients compared to the city average of 5,000. Usage of library services at the Centre has doubled across all age ranges compared to the two libraries it replaced and hours have been extended in line with other partner services.

Sure Start was previously based in temporary Portacabins so the Centre is a great improvement. They currently have 100 clients per week although there are some access issues resulting from being on the second floor. The Centre needs to improve its 'child friendliness'.

Customers made the following points:

- location is a key issue for older people – its good to have all services in one place, but the hill is steep
- many children come straight from school to library to use the computers. Some 16 year olds also use the gym
- car parking is a concern (including security at night)
- the bus stops between the library and the GP surgery, creating a problem for people with mobility problems
- about 70% of the people who begin to use the gym on a doctor's referral subsequently join it
- some resources could be used more intensively. The Computer Room sits empty whilst computer facilities are developed on other sites
- there is no apparent formal consultation processes for service development.

Staff raise the following points:

- the bus service needs to be improved – the hill is an issue
- some practical issues around building and access still arise – a ‘meet and greet’ person would address some
- the venue is ‘so good’ that the Primary Care Centre now attracts patients from outside its catchment’s area – Gateshead, Jarrow, North Tyneside etc.
- the informal communication links between different organisations have developed well
- overall staff are very impressed.

targets and progress

Targets have been set using the four headings from Sunderland LAA. (Please see the Appendices for details of targets).

healthier communities & older people

- the Centre includes a ‘Health Zone’: Primary Care Centre, GP Practice and Wellness Centre
- Primary Care Centre saw 5,454 patients of its annual target of 22,000 in one quarter
- GP Practice registered 1,000 new patients (no leavers) and carried out over 19,163 appointments
- Wellness Centre far exceeded its targets with over 600 members. It achieved its first months target in the first week
- Primary Care Trust had 142 referrals to their HELP program in its first five months
- pharmacy runs smoking cessation clinics to encourage people to stop smoking.

enterprise & economic development

- Adult & Community Learning Centre runs a range of courses including literacy and numeracy skills, and IT skills.

safer & stronger communities

- people can pay rent, report housing repairs, raise anti-social behaviour issues, and make housing allocation and general housing enquiries
- residents access an improved neighbourhood housing service and a wider choice of properties through the ‘Choice Based Lettings Scheme’
- Sunderland Housing Group staff have completed 25,671 transactions
- a video link to the Civic Centre gives access to trained advisors on a range of information and choices for people facing homelessness
- the Centre has a Northumbria Police Neighbourhood Action Group Pilot Scheme with an information stand covering issues such as house burglary, car thefts etc.

children & young people

- 5% of Wellness Centre visits by under 16 year olds
- up to 24.8% of children under five within the local area, including children with disabilities, are on the Child Protection register, and many from different ethnic minorities have been seen by the Sure Start Centre
- a total of 15,758 have used the Library and the Summer Reading Groups exceeding all targets and registering more attendances than the City Library.

partnership working

partner perspectives

Partners provided a number of positive reasons for participating in the Centre, typified by the following. ‘The whole point of the wellness service is to join up from the user point of view and it’s much easier to develop an integrated service when everything is on the same site. We have been able to get a wellness offering onto NHS care pathways for different conditions whereas previously integration was more ad-hoc and it was pretty much down to the customer to find these activities. With co-located services, GPs become better advocates because they actually see the service in operation.’

The partners held a number of cross-organisational meetings before moving in and are now beginning to programme across services. This has developed organically from exchanging copies of each other's leaflets to planning joint staff workshops to improve service delivery and increase customer satisfaction. All organisations now anticipate an impact on their performance.

project formation

The council created six Area Committees in 1999. The North Area Committee was successful with a City Challenge bid and commissioned research into the needs of the area. The report's findings led on to 'casting the net' to determine which service providers, from both the statutory and voluntary sectors, would co-locate to a proposed new Centre and what finance and grants might be available as a result. The feasibility stage of the project involved extensive consultations with all the proposed project partners.

The council adopted a 'community leadership' role by developing a partnership with as many public agencies as possible to provide the widest possible range of services to the local community. From the outset the council took an open approach to the development of the building. All partners were able to bring their services into the building and the council financed the initial development costs, smoothing the way for partners to become involved. This involved some bold financial and development decisions and long periods of negotiation with many parties.

The umbrella organisation for the local voluntary sector – Sunderland North Community Business Centre (SNCBC) – runs the community spaces so the local community feels a genuine 'ownership' of the Centre. The council, which funds the Group's activities, decided not to market the Centre as a council building but as a Customer Service Centre for Sunderland, a true partnership facility that carries the Sunderland Partnership logo and image. The Sunderland North Community Business Centre now runs day-to-day activities in the 'Community Suite'.

programme management

Although the project preceded the adoption of Prince2 project management methodology by the council, a project board made up of elected members from the local wards supplemented by the Portfolio Holder for Management managed the initial stages. The leader of the council, who is a local ward member, chaired the board. The project later transferred to the strategic change team as part of the strategic change programme. It then came under the auspices of the programme board made up of officers representing all of the council's directorates and other stakeholders.

The council provided technical support to manage the project and the Centre opened in 2006 in a phased manner between February and September 2006. The official public opening event coincided with inauguration of the Community Suite in June 2006.

managing risks

The council values the contribution of risk management techniques and invested in embedding these throughout the organisation. This allows more effective management of strategic decision-making, service planning and delivery, and gives greater certainty to the achievement of its objectives. Risk management is an integral part of the internal control framework that ensures both corporate governance and the statement of internal control are achieved. The council's risk management framework spans all directorates and includes the corporate risk profile, corporate and service planning, project management, partnerships and schools.

public value of investment

methodology

The costs and benefits of this project were determined using the documentation provided by Sunderland City Council and through interviews with key finance and management personnel at the council.

The costs and savings (where applicable) are calculated for Sunderland City Council and are, therefore, distinct from those for the whole of the Centre or all of its occupants. The construction period ran from April 2004 to the opening of the first facility in February 2005.

investment

capital costs¹

The total capital costs for setting up the Centre were £8.145 million. The distribution of capital costs between partners is proportionate to the lettable space used by each of the occupants.

A number of external funding sources supported the project, amounting to £6.604 million, with a net cost to the council of £1.541m. The council received several grants and all but one of the partners made capital contributions to match their apportioned capital costs. The charts below show the proportion of capital costs covered by the council and the contributions from external financing.

Total scheme cost	8,145,000
Financed by:	
Grant Funding	
LSC grant	309,676
Sport England grant	750,000
Sure Start capital contribution	931,731
NRF grant	200,000
ERDF grant	60,400
Sub-total grant funding	2,251,807
External Occupants' Capital Premium Contributions	
Sunderland Housing Group	941,447
Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust	1,836,132
A & C Ventures Ltd (Pharmacy)	200,000
City Hospitals (phase II)	50,000
Lease payments re Deerness Medical Practice	1,081,780
Sub-total capital premiums	4,109,379
Capital Receipts	
Sale of land to Sunderland Housing Group	242,500
Sub-total capital receipts	242,500
Total Financing	6,603,666
Net capital cost to Council	1,514,334

1. Capital costs have been extracted from the latest capital review programme.

ongoing costs²

The annual revenue cost of £0.521m is split between occupants depending on the cost element as a direct cost to occupants or in proportion to amount of lettable space or number of opening hours. The running cost for each partner is charged directly to them; costs to the council are exclusively those from the four services it provides and additional costs associated with facilities management, caretaking and security.

The annual service running costs applicable to the council are £0.190m. Savings arising from the closure of the two former libraries and income generated from the Wellness facility has led to an overall saving of £20,722 compared to previous costs. This allows for the absorption of additional costs arising from the new Wellness Facility.

The council has contracted with SNCBC to deliver community development activities within the Centre. This additional service costs £31,604. It provides:

- management of the 'Community Suite' reducing the management burden on council staff
- a 'neutral bridge' between the statutory services on offer in the Centre and the community at large
- a sense of 'community ownership' of the building, removing the perception that the Centre is 'another council or NHS building landed in the neighbourhood'.

Facilities management, caretaker and security arrangements have required additional funding from the council of £50,242 to cover running and staff costs. This second element forms a part of service charges.

The following summarises the ongoing full year additional running costs to the council.

	Full Year effect £
Net reduction on Libraries and Wellness Facility	(20,722)
Additional Facilities management costs	50,242
Contribution to voluntary group and management etc	31,604
Net Additional Cost	£61,124

financial value

The council embarked on the project to achieve a number of aims:

- to extend the Customer Service Centre Network to one of the City's most deprived areas and to extend the range of council services on offer so that customers could access services 'when, how and where they wanted them'
- to encourage as many of their strategic partners, from both the statutory and voluntary sectors to co-locate in the Centre to create a true 'first-stop-shop' where residents could access as many front line services as possible under one roof
- to realise the benefits of co-location and go several steps further by enabling integrated service delivery between service providers in the building
- to gain maximum benefit from the land use and economies of scale in the procurement and construction of the centre.

2. Revenue service costs are informed from a copy of Bunny Hill Centre Costs. Revenue staff costs are have been provided by the Centre Manager.

As well as these primary aims, the project has yielded a number of efficiencies including:

cashable savings: disability discrimination act (DDA) compliance costs

As a result of the libraries rationalisation, work required to bring the former premises up to DDA requirements was avoided saving £102,200.

Theoretically the Centre will have generated savings from both procurement and project management costs arising from co-location of services in one building rather than in separate newly built premises for each service. However, quantifying these savings would be a complicated and time-consuming task and it has not been possible to do this within the current timescales.

non-cashable savings

Visitor numbers at the two former local branch libraries in 2005/2006 were 38,036. Estimated annual total visitor numbers at the Centre, based on actual returns, is 53,060 (a 39.5% increase). Achieving this level of increased visitor numbers at the two former libraries would have cost £155,102 (using the costs of the two former libraries of £111,184). However, the actual running costs of the new service at the Centre is, £111,052 representing an annual non-cashable saving of £44,050 (after taking account the cost of the capital investment etc.)

customer value

- The business case for the project identified its desired outcomes; progress towards these outcomes was assessed four months into the programme. (See Customer Experience).
- Additional services – the Council Customer Service Centre, Wellness Centre and the Adult and Community Learning Centre are new services to citizens.
- Extended and enhanced services – the transfer of other council services into the Centre has been accompanied by improvements to services previously provided. Examples of this are the Sure Start Children's Centre and Nursery, the Electronic Village Hall in the library and live video link from the Customer Service Centre to other parts of the Customer Service Network.
- Co-location of related services – co-location leads to better partnership working, through sharing of knowledge and management information, and also clusters services in a way that 'make sense' to the customer. The Centre hosts a 'Health Zone' for citizens showing best practice in joined up working with, for example, the electronic linking of the Wellness Centre to the treatment and diagnostic services provided by the NHS.

organisational value

- Co-location is facilitating better links and delivery of complementary services particularly in respect to the Wellness Agenda.

political value

- By having a presence on Bunny Hill, the Centre demonstrates the authority's commitment to the needs of a deprived area.
- By joining-up services under one roof, the agencies have developed trust between each other, and demonstrate credibility to citizens.

capacity

Partnership working is the key enabler within a continuum of effort over a number of years through the Sunderland Partnership. Organic step-by-step change and development has valued the traditions, histories and experience of customers and partners, together with their future aspirations and recognised the need for people to experience continuity within the change experience. This is a process of building from the past and into the future rather than breaking off and doing something new.

The e-government agenda offered a platform for greater integration of public service delivery; however, this has not been the project's main driving force. There remains scope for further leverage of technology. Co-location is an excellent start, but it will take some time before more complete integration of health and council services. Support services can be shared and opportunities to widen into this will occur over time. The establishment of communal centres as part of the 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say' White Paper could help in the delivery of the both Sunderland Partnership and council's objectives. As that agenda rolls out, then the need for integration of business processes between all organisations occupying the Centre will increase.

barriers and challenges

- The hunger and desire for making change and development – keeping the services fresh and new.
- Overcoming unnecessary and avoidable professional, managerial and organisational boundaries.
- Actively listening to users and consumers of the building and its services.
- Partnership working – the council has worked out the importance of 'place-shaping' with other partners in the face of huge industrial restructuring issues.
- Integrating the design needs of different occupants from a customer (seamless) point of view.

workforce

No issues were identified. Co-location has been good for staff, offering them access to canteen and fitness centre facilities, engendering healthier and more able communities.

support from central government

The Project Manager considers the most useful external support to have been the financial contributions from the respective partners and funding agencies plus the NHS's expertise on the design of their part of the building. The council acted as a broker and banker to help bring this project to fruition. Continued future support on property maintenance and financial management would be valuable.

relevance to and replicability in other local authorities

Several of the funding streams may not be available to other authorities looking to implement a similar project. The grants depended on particular funding criteria (around redevelopment, health and adult learning), which may not be available to other projects. The council partnered with a number of groups that were able to cover all their capital costs.

One element of the project, which is replicable to other local authorities, is driving economies of scale from developing large capital construction projects within partnerships. Many of the partner organisations exist all over the country (PCT, Sure Start) and other authorities could reproduce the partnership arrangement secured by the council.

sector learning

Involvement of all participants right from the start was considered critical by many of the partners, as there were some inevitable tensions along the way. A single development team offered reduced development costs and improved the speed of delivery. The project manager's relationship with the council's portfolio holder needed to be strong to enable him to exercise flexibility when making arrangements with all organisations for their occupation in the building. Many partners considered the project manager as 'the glue' and he was enabled to be a 'door opener' when and as required.

An important issue is the need to sustain funding, promote service development and to develop a 'continuity plan' for perpetuating progress and fully exploiting the potential of the Centre going forward. Currently there is much day-to-day operational contact but no clear forum for planning the future of the centre or for developing and spreading the emerging good practice. The partner organisations believe the project was pursued through an 'open and equal partnership approach' and that the Centre offers enough essential services to draw people in.

A major learning point is to have more interaction at a strategy and policy level between the potential partners at the earliest possible point. Many consider there is a need to take time to debrief and review on the lessons learned by the participating organisations.

next steps

'We will continue to learn from Bunny Hill as the latest in a number of Customer Service Centres across the City. The next ones planned will build on the lessons learnt to date. Bunny Hill will undoubtedly be home to even more service providers in the future – some of whom are not yet in existence but will arise out of responding to developing needs and cross working between the organisations already in there.'

Sunderland City Council

appendices

For the appendices, please go to www.idea.gov.uk/foss

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