

**REPORT OF DAVID GARY, PROJECT MANAGER TO THE  
EXECUTIVE ON 12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2003**

[This report is the responsibility of Portfolio Holder Councillor Paul Partington]

**SOMERSET DIRECT – PROGRESS REPORT**

**1. Purpose of the report.**

- 1.1 To bring members up to date with the progress being made on the Somerset Direct Partnership project, and to recommend that further work proceeds aimed at completing the project.

**2. Background.**

- 2.1 The following is a brief reminder for members of what the project consists of and is aiming to achieve.
- 2.2 Somerset Direct can be broadly described as a "virtual call-centre" – i.e. one where call centre technology is used – not only to provide a quicker and consistent service to the caller – but also in a way which makes better use of expensive technical staff ("back office staff"). In other words its aim is to provide the public with all the best elements of a call centre – without its worst elements.
- 2.3 We (i.e. the County and 5 districts) have been given substantial financial support by the government to get this pilot project up and running in about a year's time. Broadly what we see happening is that (in the longer term) the public will be given a single phone number for all local services throughout the county – wherever they live and whoever provides the service they are enquiring about.
- 2.4 Rather than going through a switchboard and on to one or more technical officers (the "back office") the caller would instead be connected to the first officer of whichever authority who became available. These "front office staff" would consist of a range of staff in each authority who would be chosen particularly for their customer skills.
- 2.5 They would be empowered in various ways to deal with a substantial range of transactions themselves - leaving hopefully about 30% of calls which would need still to be routed on to more expensive professional/technical back-office staff. If successful this project would therefore deliver a better service to the public – and at a lower cost.
- 2.6 During 2002 members were given presentations on the early progress of the Somerset Direct Project. Since then a number of steps forward have been taken:-
- An officer management team has been formed
  - A full time Project Officer has been appointed for Taunton Deane
  - A Project Implementation document has been created,
  - Joint project principles have been agreed with the partners

- The joint project has also developed a full implementation plan and Management structure
- 2.2. The project partners are the five district councils of Somerset, and Somerset County Council. SCC is the lead authority and will take responsibility for the signing of contracts with future suppliers.

### **3. Current Issues.**

- 3.1 Procurement. The Somerset Board (on which we are represented by Cllr Partington and the Chief Executive), have - through its officers - agreed a revised set of 'high level principles' for the project. These are contained in full in the TDBC Project Initiation Document. The development of these principles has allowed the production of an agreed Statement of Requirements, a document that allows potential contractors to understand what the project requires the software/ hardware to produce.
- 3.2 The procurement process is now entering its final phase, with a final 'no turning back' decision required by the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2003. It is at that point that a decision will need to be made to commit to the procurement of the software and hardware that will sustain the project into the future. Although the project is centrally funded, the selection of the suppliers will need to take into account the ongoing costs to which any contract will commit the partners. After that point of commitment, significant costs would arise were any of the partners to seek to withdraw from the project.
- 3.3 Five companies have been short-listed from the initial 30 who expressed interest in the notice inserted in the Official Journal of the European Community (OJEC). The OJEC procedure is a Europe-wide requirement designed to ensure that suppliers across Europe have full access to larger procurement contracts. The Notice was placed in OJEC by the County Council on behalf of the partnership. Site visits by the partners will be taking place shortly with the aim of understanding what each contractor has to offer.
- 3.4 Business Case. The business case is still being worked on. Much work needs to be done in order to establish how we shall ensure the project is cost neutral. Currently Mike McLaughlin (our IEG manager) is working on figures that will give the project a 'benchmarking' facility to pitch against final costs when they are declared by the suppliers. There are risks associated with the re-engineering of business processes (which step is necessary in order to enable the "back office/front office" split). Work is currently in hand on this. Current indications on cost suggest that they may not be as high as the project bid document at first envisaged.
- 3.5 Staffing. This council's Project Manager (David Gary) is currently working on the effects of staffing and business processes.
- 3.6 There is currently an issue upon which legal advice is being taken concerning some aspects of data protection principles.

### **4. Partnership Legal Issues.**

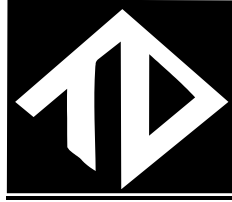
- 4.1 For the partnership to be successful it is essential that it works and that the partners are contributing and are fully committed to the project. That is not fully the case as this paper has gone to press. Currently, Sedgemoor District Council has decided to put a paper to its

Executive recommending that they cannot proceed with the project in its current form. The effect of that is still being clarified with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

- 4.2 Until now the partners are not legally bound into the project. There is, however, likely to be a memorandum of understanding that places obligations on the partners - particularly after the signing of contracts with suppliers.
- 4.3 Taunton Deane has previously signed up to the vision of this project and its objectives of enhancing the service given to our public. It is acknowledged that constant management and a robust costing will be required in order to produce a business case when prices become firm. The Council's Project Board (headed by the Chief Executive) will monitor these issues, and report to members on a regular basis.
5. Fall Back position
  - 5.1. There are several potential 'showstoppers' to the project:-
    - The withdrawal of a partner – and the potential for a domino effect being created.
    - The eventual overall cost of the project.
    - The partnership may find it needed to develop into a joint legal entity - which some of the partners may find unacceptable.
  - 5.2. In any of the above cases, we believe that this Council could build a solution for Taunton Deane alone, and contingency plans are being worked upon.
6. Recommendations
  - 6.1 Members note the report and support the continuation of the membership of the project subject to a robust business case.
  - 6.2 In the event of a partnership failure the officers should pursue the option of this Council putting in place a system similar to Somerset Direct using the same technology for Taunton Deane.

DAVID GARY  
Project Manager

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**TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

***LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN***

**Version Finalised  
5<sup>th</sup> February 2003**

## **PROJECT INITIATION DOCUMENT TDBC**

### **1.INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

#### 1.1 What is it?

- SD is a way of using technology to enable the citizen to access our information and services quickly and reliably.
- From the citizens' viewpoint our aim is that one call to one number will find one person who is enabled to deal with all their needs.
- From the Council's viewpoint it will mean that a wide range of staff (perhaps at varied locations) will be given access to greater knowledge and information to enable them to deal with most enquiries without the need to involve others.

#### 1.2 How is it done?

- Its done by making available the knowledge and expertise of our technical staff to those who regularly deal with the public.
- This is done by using the best of this expertise, the best of technology and making it available through those chosen and developed for the best skills in handling the public.
- To do this a range of our staff trained in these skills will have access – via our IT systems – to the wide knowledge base of information and services we have available. And they will have immediate access to that – whilst dealing with each caller.

### **2. PROJECT SCOPE**

2.1 The project's scope will need to fundamentally examine the way every service within Taunton Deane BC deals with enquiries from the public.

2.2. SomersetDirect will provide technology to enable staff to deliver improved services to the public, and provide citizens with quicker and easier access to all council services.

2.3. The project is a joint project with our partners being Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, West Somerset District Council and South Somerset District Councils. Financial arrangements and overall management are with the project manager who is based at the County Council.

2.4. This document deals with the implementation of Somerset Direct within TDBC. Reference to the overall project is limited to the issues that affect the TDBC implementation.

### **3. SOMERSET DIRECT PRINCIPLES**

The Officer Steering Group has drafted the following principles that underpin the project and give further clarification for those working on the project. The principles are not in any order of importance.

1. There should be themed telephone numbers:
  - based on public consultation
  - kept to the smallest possible number
  - variations in approach between authorities not being ruled out.
2. Minimum standards to be agreed for all services that will be represented in the front office:
  - basic information which all authorities will need to be able to provide
  - a phasing in programme with different authorities piloting different services in an agreed sequence
  - all services to be included in the front office by 31st December 2005
  - 80% of all enquiries to be fulfilled by the front office by 31st December 2005 (this includes completion of transactions)
3. Partner authorities to share knowledge and experience openly:
  - all knowledge and experiences to be shared as required and within reason to enable partners to benefit from learning elsewhere and to avoid having to reinvent solutions
  - an issue of concern for one partner will be treated as an issue that concerns all partners.
4. Strong emphasis will be placed on equipping staff to provide an enhanced customer service:
  - programmes of cultural change will be implemented by each partner authority
  - training will be provided by the partnership
  - each partner will make its own arrangements to organise back office staff and achieve savings in time.
5. Ongoing costs arising from the project will be kept to a minimum and the project is to be delivered within the agreed capital budget.
6. Simple and fair charging arrangements will be established for operational costs relating to the use of Somerset Direct:
  - wherever possible costs should be locally managed and controlled.
7. Each partner is to initially answer their own calls and provide their own badged service:
  - a more ambitious approach should be developed over time as experience grows
  - partners should actively explore possibilities for call sharing
  - the technical capacity to share calls needs to be built into the system from the outset
  - each local authority to be allowed to trade calls by negotiation from dates agreed between themselves.
8. The aim will be to provide extended working hours and availability of Somerset Direct during evenings and weekends:
  - subject to demand and results of public consultation
  - subject to available finance (i.e. achieving savings from the initial implementation of the project)
  - each authority will produce its own business case for this part of the operation before proceeding
  - it will be desirable to start with a pilot in one authority.
9. Local resilience will be built into the project:
  - local customers will be helped irrespective of adverse circumstances (eg, loss of power within one partner authority)

- local delivery will not depend upon the entire system being available across Somerset
  - partner authorities will provide support to others in times of crisis.
10. Somerset Direct will be designed to be locally sustainable:
- the design needs to provide for local management and operation to continue irrespective of the ongoing performance and commitment of other partners once the project has been delivered.
11. Customer information will be shared across Somerset:
- subject to data protection and other legal requirements
  - the levels of such information will need to be negotiated
  - information will be available to staff at the front desk, websites, and Somerset Direct operators.
12. A project contingency strategy will be drawn up:
- to deal with the possibility of a partner withdrawing during the project development and implementation stage
  - to determine notice periods and allocations of costs should a partner withdraw
  - to deal with other contingencies that may adversely affect the project, either at project development and implementation stage or later.
13. Best project management practice to be used by each partner authority:
- each partner to maintain its own project plans
  - individual project plans to be compatible with the overall plan for Somerset Direct.
14. The project should comply with national standards.
15. Each partner is to be able to make best use of their existing software and hardware without compromising the other overall principles of the project.

#### **4. OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS**

- To significantly improve the effectiveness and the quality of public service for all the people in Somerset.
- To provide improved, consistent and up-to-date information
- To provide flexible and cost effective phone call services
- To obtain savings from electronic service delivery
- To contribute to less abled and rural employment
- To improve 'back office' efficiency by reducing interruption
- To provide extended hours of phone call handling
- To streamline the phone numbers published for services
- To assist all Somerset local authorities in meeting the national 2005 ESD target.

The bid aims to be translated into the following terms for TDBC.

- Multiple issues and enquiries dealt with in a single call
- Life events dealt with at one point of contact (*eg. Moving home*)
- The back office staff being freed from routine enquiries.
- Front office staff will focus on giving excellent customer service
- May result in more staff being able to work from home

- Reduces journeys as telephone enquiry is fulfilled
- Provides consistent information
- Increases the number of services that are delivered electronically.

**5. SUCCESS MEASURES.**

The project will be deemed a success when in Taunton Deane we are able to say

- Information available on the prompting screens is useful, accurate and timely.
- 70% of all incoming calls from members of the public are answered without recourse to the 'back office'.
- Increased ongoing costs are met by consequential savings so that the project complies with the principle of cost neutrality.

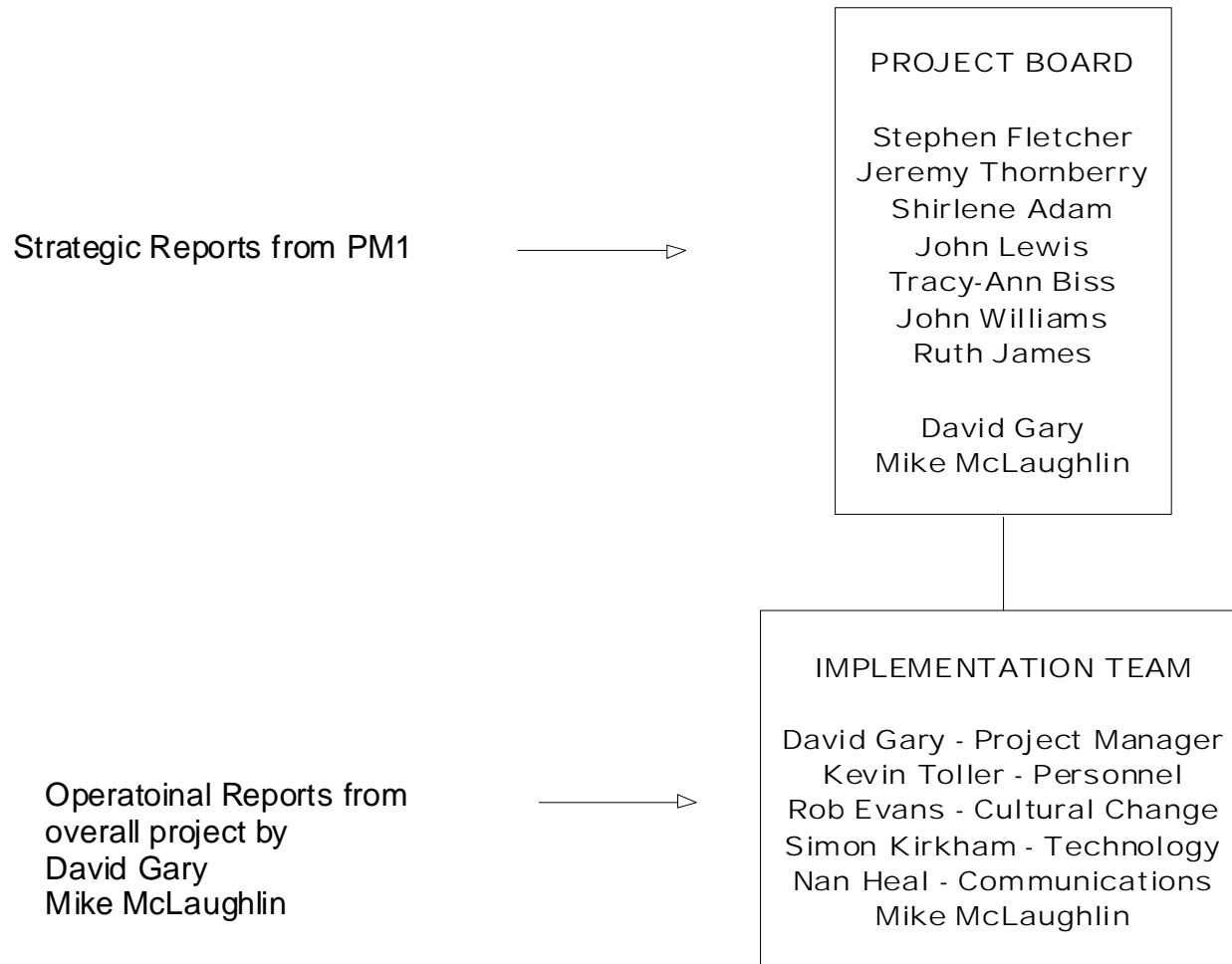
The following indicators are suggested as measures/benchmarks on which we will regularly monitor improvement:

INDICATOR	EVALUATIONS
Improved service and delivery gains	Number of alternative transactions saved Average length of telephone call from public Public satisfaction survey Total staff time saving which results in increased back office effectiveness and/or cash savings. Additional access hours, in consultation with the public. Measure the quality of information given to customers
Joined up Government	The percentage assessment of contribution to IEG Partnership practice and lessons learnt. What ability to support other members.

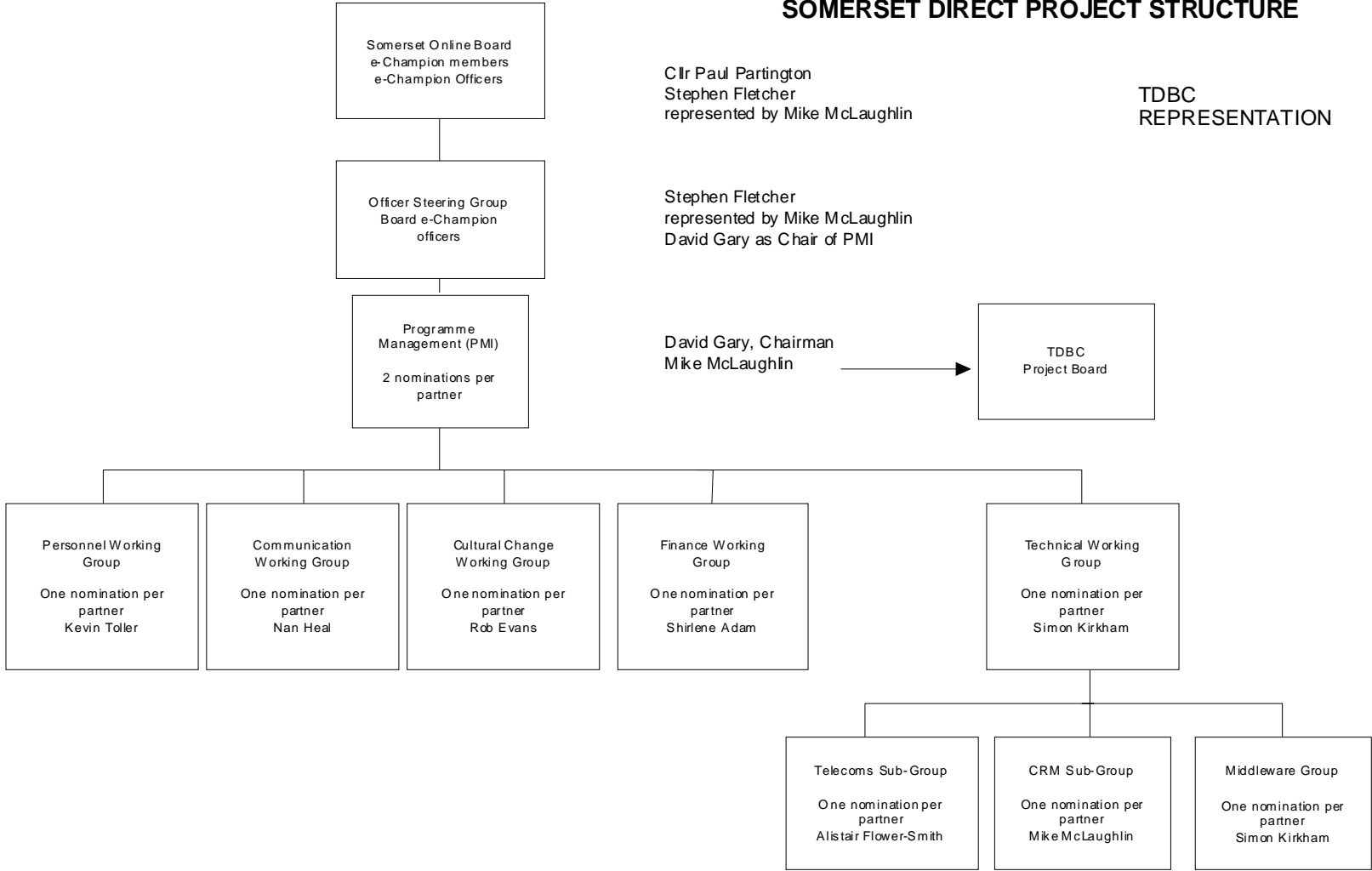


#### 4. MANAGEMENT OF THE PROJECT

### TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL SOMERSET DIRECT INTERNAL PROJECT



# SOMERSET DIRECT PROJECT STRUCTURE



The officer management structure of the project is as follows

GROUP/OFFICER	Responsible for:-
TDBC Project Board Chaired by Stephen Fletcher	Responsible to CMT/ members for the delivery of the project. (see terms of reference)
Project Manager David Gary	Responsible to the TDBC Project Board for the day to day implementation of the project
Egovt Manager Mike Mclaughlin	Responsible for egovt advice, technical support and financial aspects of the hardware/software delivery.
Culture/personnel group Chaired by Project Manger includes Kevin Toller Rob Evans, John Lewis Nan Heal	Responsible to the TDBC Project Board through the Project Manager for the raising and solution of issues relating to the people in the organisation, the impact on the Deane, its working methods and revised JDs
IT Group Chaired by Mike Mclaughlin includes Simon Kirkham David Gary John Lewis	Responsible to the TDBC Project Board for IT issues, and cost monitoring of that area.

Additionally Taunton Deane contributes in a positive way to the overall management of the project through the Somerset Online Board. Councillor Paul Partington and the Chief Executive both have voting places on this overall controlling group. In the absence of the Chief Executive the Egovt Manager attends.

Our Project Manager is also Chair of the PROJECT MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION GROUP, and attends the Somerset Online Board in that capacity.

The Deane is represented on each of the sub groups, which are;

COMMUNICATIONS,	Nan Heal
IT	Simon Kirkham
CULTURE	Rob Evans
PERSONNEL	Kevin Toller.

## **6.IMPLEMENTATION.**

There are various implementation options open to the TDBC Project Board. The project manager will develop the methodology and present a paper for discussion at a future Board meeting. In order to meet with the Project timetable the final decision must be taken by ?

## **7. MANAGEMENT OF COSTS**

### **7.1 SD Project Capital**

The original bid document showed a capital cost of the project of £3.8m. Around 75% of this is to be funded by central govt (Invest To Save Round 4), the remainder to be funded by the Partners. For Taunton Deane, this amounts to £100,000 which will be fully funded by our IEG (year 1 and year 2) money.

Partners also recognise that there will be ongoing revenue costs associated with this project. We believe that the worst-case scenario for Taunton Deane could be ongoing revenue costs of £100,000 per annum. Work is currently underway to identify and minimise the impact of these on each authority.

This Council is progressing on the basis that the ongoing revenue costs can be met from ongoing savings. Should this not be the case, then further reports will be presented to Members for consideration.

The County wide PMI will receive an account at each meeting of what monies have been spent, earmarked and what remains to be within the capital budget. Ongoing Revenue costs are a matter for each of the partners.

### **7.2 Local Costs**

The TDBC Project board must receive an account monthly showing the following:

- Monies received from the central project
- What that money has been spent on
- Monies available from the central project
- What that money is earmarked for
- Any additional capital costs to be met from TDBC, and how those costs are to be met
- Ongoing Revenue commitments
- Ongoing Revenue savings identified to meet the above commitments.

The project principal is that cost neutrality is maintained, however the following issues indicate known areas of cost risk

### **7.3. ONGOING COST – SOMERSET DIRECT**

1. The project is cost critical at the procurement stage, (see risks).
2. Costs outside the direct control of TDBC.
  - a) The cost of the licence for the CRM system.  
(note; the project currently has formed a finance group to understand these costs better and to create a benchmark figure against which it can judge tenders. This figure should be available in late Feb) Cost within the remit of Taunton Deane.

Cost area	Offset by
<p data-bbox="280 268 826 331">Initial cost of staffing the first contact points.</p> <p data-bbox="280 401 613 432">Staffing of Contact points</p> <p data-bbox="280 835 826 898">Costs related to keeping the system current, relevant and accurate.</p> <p data-bbox="280 1234 826 1329">There may be small additional costs in employing some people from their homes.</p> <p data-bbox="280 1371 826 1434">There will be additional costs in the access hours available to the public</p>	<p data-bbox="842 268 1500 363">Met by £25k startup funding from the central project. This period is expected to last for approx 9 months.</p> <p data-bbox="842 401 1500 762">Staff currently employed to deal with just public enquiries are paid at the scale rate 11 to 15, max £13395. Other people who may access the system, and whose Job evaluations points have promoted them above that position will remain on their respective grades. It is the view of the Project Manager and the Chief Personnel Officer that nothing actually changes in a Job Description, only the methodology for dealing with customer queries. In our view the cost of staffing remains neutral.</p> <p data-bbox="842 804 1500 930">This area is about putting information on this one system, and if handled correctly should incur no more costs that currently incurred in updating the numerous systems around the council.</p> <p data-bbox="842 972 1500 1098">This area is also dependent on how well each IT system talks to the central SD system, particularly on information such as public ringing to talk about last nights planning application.</p> <p data-bbox="842 1140 964 1171">Costs £?</p> <p data-bbox="842 1266 1500 1434">These costs are very much dependent on the hours chosen to open. An important point of principal required here is 'is longer opening hours an important element of increased service delivery in the publics mind.'</p> <p data-bbox="842 1476 1500 1528">Hence, public consultation has been recommended by the 'communications group'</p>

## **8. TIMETABLE AND LIKELY IMPACT**

See attached chart. CHART FROM MPM!

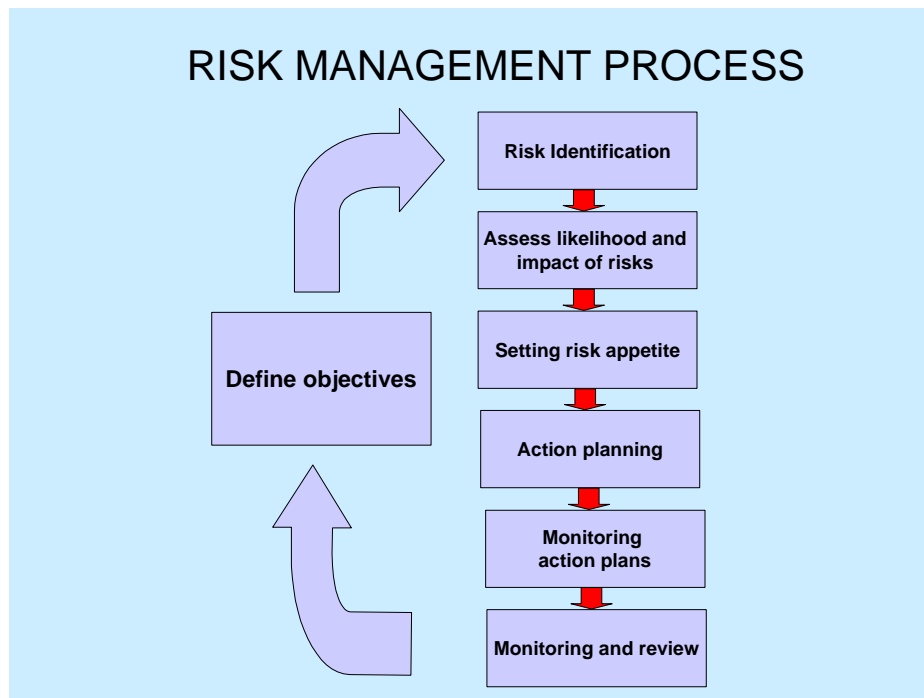
## RISK MANAGEMENT

Taunton Deane is about to approve a Risk Management Strategy and Implementation Plan that will embed risk management into its culture, processes and structure to ensure that opportunities are maximised. The Council will seek to encourage managers to identify, understand and manage risks, and learn how to accept the right risks.

The Strategy states that,

*“...the risk management methodology will also be adopted for significant individual projects and will be used to strengthen all decision-making processes.”*

The SomersetDirect project is a major project for this Council, and as such will be subject to our risk management process, as set out below. The Risk Management Team will be requested to lead the Taunton Deane Project Board through this process and assist them with the production of a risk register. This register will show clear allocation of prioritised risks and will be monitored by the Taunton Deane Project Board at regular intervals.



This exercise should be completed by the end of March 2003, when the risk register will be appended to this document.

## **9.PROJECT SIGN OFF**

The project will be signed off by CMT and the Executive when the success measures are deemed to be met.

## **Appendix A**

### Glossary of Terms

#### **Front Office.**

Refers to the staff especially selected and trained to deal with the public, either face to face or over the phone. It may also refer to the facilities given to these staff

#### **Back Office**

Refers to the staff and systems used to deliver services, as apposed to dealing with the public.

#### **Back Office Integration (BOI)**

Making available to front office staff facilities from computer applications normally only available to specialist (back office) staff. For example looking up a planning decision, or accepting a payment using a debit/credit card.

For Somerset Direct these facilities will be browser based.

#### **Browser based**

Using Internet type screen formats and facilities.