

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL / NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**JOINT COMMITTEE FOR SHARED SERVICES  
BETWEEN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE AND  
NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS**

**FUTURE DELIVERY OF LOCAL TAXATION & BENEFITS SERVICES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES IN NORTH & NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To consider new staffing structures to support the future delivery of Local Taxation & Benefits (LT&B) and Customer Services in North and North East Lincolnshire.
- 1.2 The key points are:
- Staff in North and North East Lincolnshire have redesigned the delivery of LT&B and Customer Services in response to customer needs, the rise of online channels and significant budget pressures
  - We need to implement new staffing structures to support and embed a new 'digital first' delivery model
  - We have drawn up and consulted on proposed new structures for each of the services involved
  - The proposals will improve service to the customer, reduce processing times, maximise efficiency and improve value for money
  - We aim to implement the new structures from 1 July 2016.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 Local Taxation & Benefits (LT&B) services in North and North East Lincolnshire are delivered through:
- the LT&B Shared Service back office for both councils
  - Customer & Information Services in North Lincolnshire
  - Communications and Customer in North East Lincolnshire
- 2.2 LT&B services involve high volumes of customer contact. Customer services have delivered frontline LT&B services through face-to-face interviews on a drop-in basis and telephone service. Staff are trained to deal with and advise on a wide range of LT&B routine and more complex enquiries.
- 2.3 Shared Service back office staff assess and process claims, manage debt recovery and resolve complex case queries.

- 2.4 The existing model is resource intensive and has led to inefficiencies. The majority of contact is through the more costly face-to-face channel, and the drop-in model often led to long waiting times for customers. Specialist staffing resource has been spread across both the Shared Service and Customer Service teams. This has resulted in duplication and unnecessary repeat contact.
- 2.5 All three services face significant budget challenges and needed to review and redesign services to improve the service for customers and maximise efficiency. The availability of online LT&B forms and changes in legal requirements such as Risk Based Verification also offered scope to transform the delivery of LT&B services.
- 2.6 In response to these issues, officers from both councils have worked together to develop a new customer-focused and end-to-end model for the delivery of Local Taxation and Benefits (LT&B) services. The Shared Services Board and relevant Cabinet Members in each council endorsed the business case for the development of a new LT&B service delivery model in 2015.
- 2.7 The new LT&B delivery model will create a more integrated, customer-focused, 'digital first' service. The key elements of the model are:
- Online LT&B forms will be the primary method of customer contact, with access to digital assistance/support where needed
  - Telephone as the secondary channel for customer contact and advice
  - Support for more vulnerable customers or those with complex cases through face-to-face appointments with service specialists
  - Revised / simpler end-to-end processes
  - Consolidation of specialist staffing resources

Appendix 1 provides an overview of the new service model.

- 2.8 The functions of services in the new LT&B service delivery model have been redefined as follows:

**Customer Service (in each council)**

- Promotion of self-service access
- Digital assistance and support for customers to access online forms
- Initial customer triage and signposting to Shared Service
- Identification of vulnerable clients / complex enquiries and booking of appointments
- Quick query resolution
- Evidence checking

**LT&B Shared Service**

- Assessment and processing of new LT&B claims and changes in circumstances
- Management of the Council Tax billing and collection function
- Debt management and recovery
- Direct debits and payment handling
- Telephone information and advice to customers
- Specialist face-to-face appointments in frontline settings for vulnerable clients and complex cases in relation to Benefit claims

- 2.9 Elements of the new model are already in place. Bespoke online LT&B forms were introduced in May 2015. This has already resulted in decreases in face-to-face and telephone contact in both councils.
- 2.10 A significant reorganisation of staffing resources is now required to further embed the 'digital first' approach and fully implement the new LT&B service delivery model. This involves:
- Extension of the LT&B Shared Service through transfer of frontline specialist face-to-face and telephone staffing resources into the Council Tax, Benefits and Debt Management teams
  - Reconfiguration of remaining frontline staffing resources in each council to best deliver the customer service functions of the new LT&B model
- 2.11 Officers have considered the level of specialist resource required to deliver the new LT&B delivery model. An additional 21 FTE posts will be added to the establishment of the Shared Service (12 North Lincolnshire and 9 North East Lincolnshire). Frontline customer service staff with appropriate specialist skills from each council will fill these additional posts.
- 2.12 In both councils, Customer Service staff deliver frontline LT&B services in the context of their wider customer service remit and functions. The proposed structures are designed to deliver the new LT&B service model and improve flexibility and efficiency of the wider service. Key proposed changes include:
- Transfer of specialist LT&B frontline resource to the Shared Service
  - Rationalisation of resources to meet anticipated future customer demand and ensure service continuity across customer access points
  - Amalgamation of some frontline roles into a single job profiles
  - Identifying other opportunities to develop digital and agile working
  - Integration and rationalisation of management requirements needed to support a reduced and more generic frontline service.
- 2.13 In total there is a proposed reduction of 17.5 FTE staff from the Customer & Information Services establishment in North Lincolnshire and 12.5 from the Communications and Customer establishment in North East Lincolnshire. Taking into account the additional LT&B Shared Service posts set out in 2.12 above, the changes proposed will result in a total net reduction in establishment staffing of 5.5 FTE in North Lincolnshire and 3.5 FTE in North East Lincolnshire.
- 2.14 The new LT&B service model and structures across all three services will aim to deliver the following outcomes:
- Improved customer access and service:***
- 24/7 access to online LT&B forms for customers to complete at their convenience
  - Increased self-service access points
  - Reduced waiting times for customers
  - Digital assistance to support customers to access and use self-service
  - Telephone support with staff enabled to resolve more customer queries at first point of contact
  - Specialist support for our most vulnerable customers

- Information in advance for customers about what evidence to bring in
- Quicker processing of claims and access to benefit entitlements

***Improved service efficiency and resilience:***

- Consolidation and integration of specialist staff and ‘once and done’ to increase capacity to deploy staff more flexibly and effectively
- Improved capacity to deploy staff in response to service peaks and troughs
- More joined up and end-to-end processes will reduce duplication and repeat contact, and speed up processing times
- Increasing take up of online forms and reduction in repeat contact offers scope to further reduce the overall level of resource required in future
- Customer Services in each council continuing to operate within their own local context and brand
- Reduced levels of face-to-face contact to free up space in frontline facilities for integration with other services and partners

2.15 Concurrent reviews of each of the three services involved in the delivery of LT&B services were undertaken using the Shared Services review protocol. Job descriptions and role profiles were created or amended to support the new delivery model. Grades were subsequently confirmed and factored into analysis of costs and savings.

2.16 Proposed structures for all three services are set out in Appendix 2.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 The recommendation is to approve the proposed structures for LT&B Shared Service and Customer Services in each authority to enable the delivery of the new LT&B service model (Option 1).

3.2 The alternative is not to approve or request changes to the proposed structures (Option2).

### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 Option 1 is the preferred option. The key supporting factors are that the proposals will: :

- enable the delivery of the new LT&B service delivery model
- improve customer access and service
- improve service efficiency, flexibility and resilience
- contribute to ‘digital first’ agendas and programmes to transform customer access in each council
- foster customer independence and community resilience
- achieve substantial budget savings for both councils

4.2 Option 2 would not enable the implementation of the new LT&B service delivery model and would fail or delay capacity to achieve significant savings targets in both councils.

## 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 The proposals will result in the following changes to staffing establishments:
- Increase of 21 FTE to the LT&B Shared Service
  - Net reduction of 5.5 FTE staff in Customer & Information Services in North Lincolnshire (reduction of 17.5 less 12 moving to LT&B Shared Service)
  - Net reduction of 3.5 FTE in Customer & Communications in North East Lincolnshire (reduction of 12.5 less 9 moving to LT&B Shared Service)
- 5.2 The new delivery model and proposed structures will achieve estimated permanent annual savings of:
- £174,000 in Customer & Information Services in North Lincolnshire – staffing reduction arising from new LT&B delivery model and review of wider C&IS service
  - £110,000 in Communications & Customer in North East Lincolnshire – staffing reduction arising from the new delivery model and cessation of a fixed term post
  - £211,000 in the LT&B Shared Service (£97,000 North Lincolnshire; £114,000 North East Lincolnshire) from cessation of some fixed term posts, other staff changes in the service, and reduced printing costs as a result of the new 'digital first' approach.
- 5.3 Salary protection will apply to some posts in the new structures, which may impact on capacity to realise some of the savings immediately. We aim to implement the proposed structures with effect from 1 July 2016. The LT&B Shared Service has set aside £107,000 of grant funds to support both councils with the costs of implementing the new model in the period between 1 April to 30 June 2016.
- 5.4 There are a number of current vacancies across all three services involved. This will help to minimise the need for redundancies, particularly in respect of frontline posts. Any redundancies will be managed and funded in line with policies for each council.
- 5.5 Some staff transferring into the Shared Service may need to change their work base. Some staff in Customer & information Services may also need to move to other service points subject to availability of posts.
- 5.6 Staff transferring into the Shared Service will be subject to the same terms and conditions that currently apply for staff in each council within the Shared Service.

## 6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

- 6.1 An integrated Impact Assessment was completed for the new delivery model. The aim is to extend and improve access for customers, and process claims more quickly. This can positively impact on customers by enabling digital access for those unable to make a physical visit to the service, thereby enabling customers to claim financial support, inform of changes in circumstances and reduce likelihood of financial pressures arising from

failure to do so, and maintaining tenancies and reducing the possibility of homelessness.

- 6.2 Some people may struggle to use online forms and the service regularly deals with vulnerable clients with complex needs. Digital assistance and specialist appointments for vulnerable clients are built into the new service model to address these issues.

## **7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DECLARED**

- 7.1 We have fully consulted on the proposed structures with staff and trade unions in line with the Shared Service Implementation Protocol. Human Resources staff from each council were involved throughout the review process.
- 7.2 We have previously briefed staff on the vision for the new LT&B service and development of the delivery model. The main issues raised during the review consultation period were around the detail of the review process itself and the practicalities of implementing new structures.
- 7.3 We have responded to the issues raised on an individual basis, through formal consultation sessions and by providing additional detail about the structure. A few minor changes to job descriptions and configuration of post hours were made as a result of comments received.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

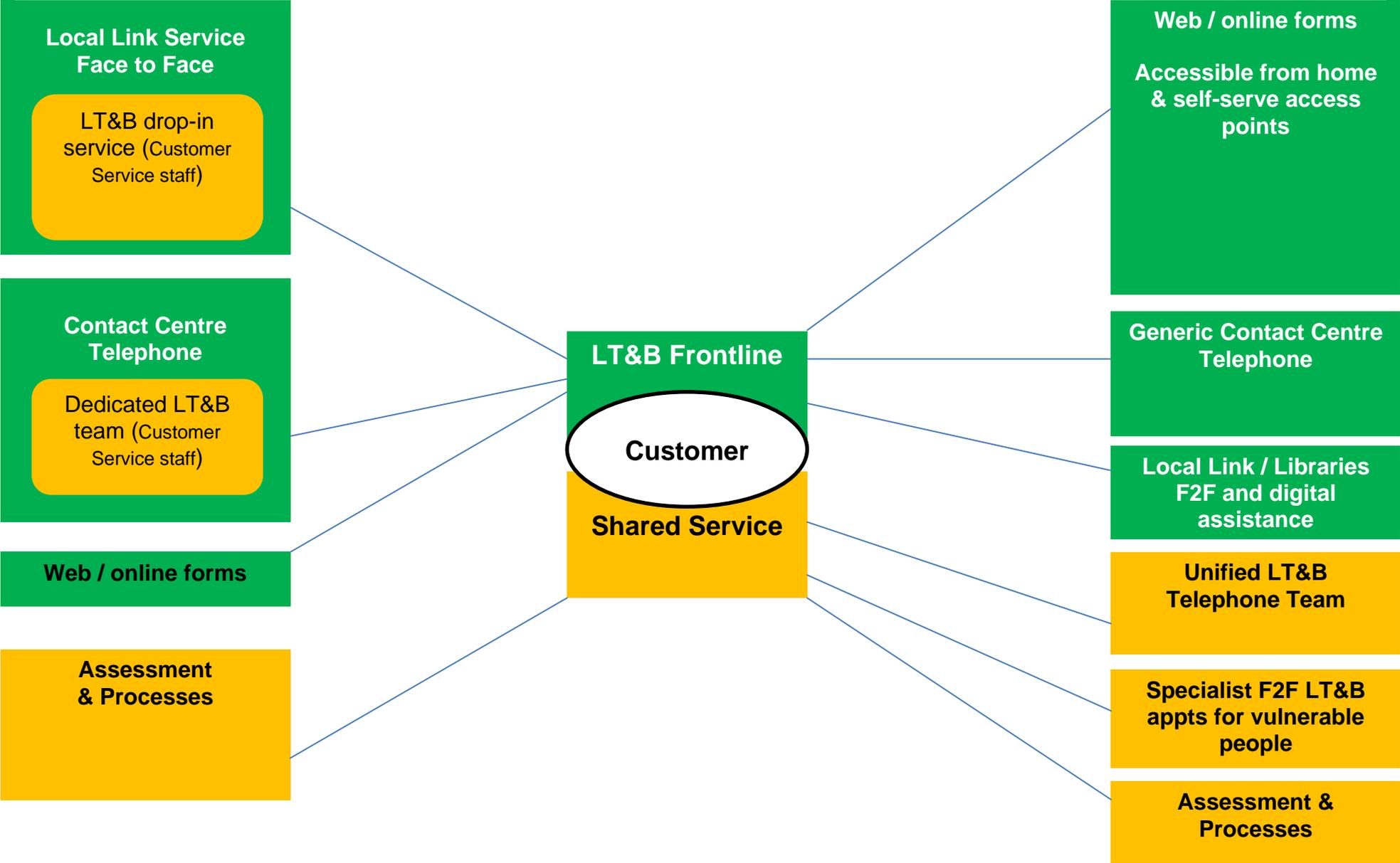
- 8.1 To approve the proposed structures, posts and grades set out in the appendices to this report.
- 8.2 To approve the next steps and recruitment necessary to have the new structures in place in each authority for 1 July 2016.

### **REPORT OF THE SHARED SERVICES BOARD**

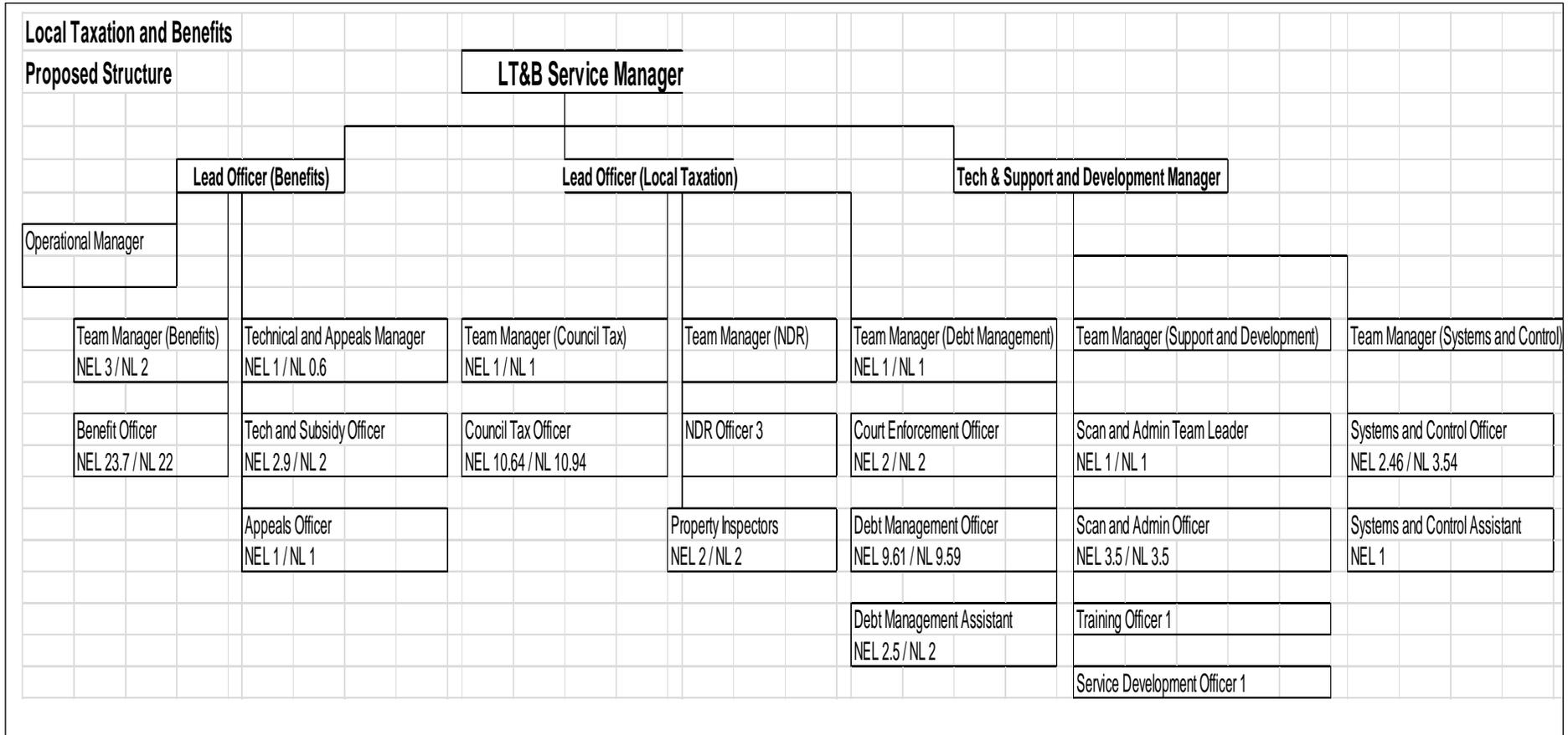
Author: Helen Rowe, Janet Stopper (North Lincolnshire)  
Cindy Laherty, Richard Catlyn (LT&B Shared Service)  
Susan Harrison (North East Lincolnshire)

Date: 23 February 2016

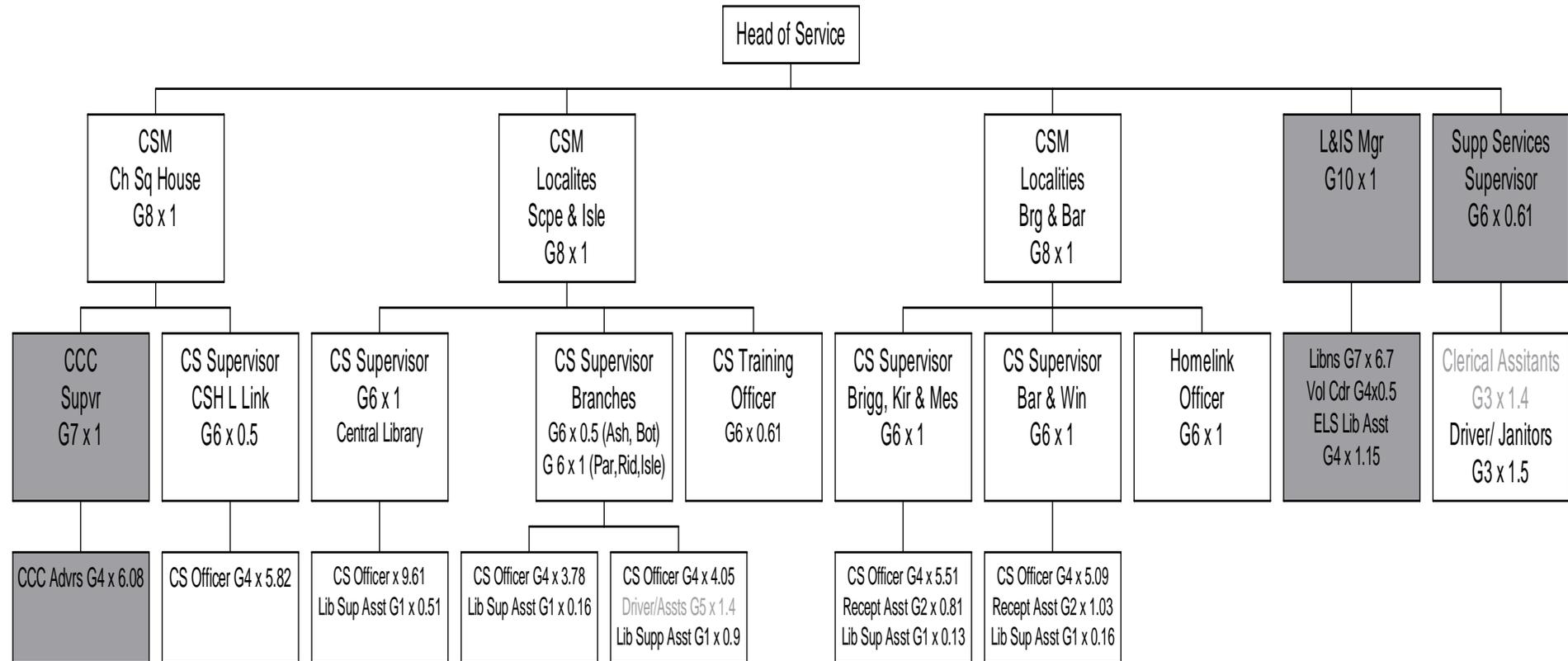
Background papers used in the preparation of this report - Nil



**LOCAL TAXATION & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE – PROPOSED STRUCTURE**

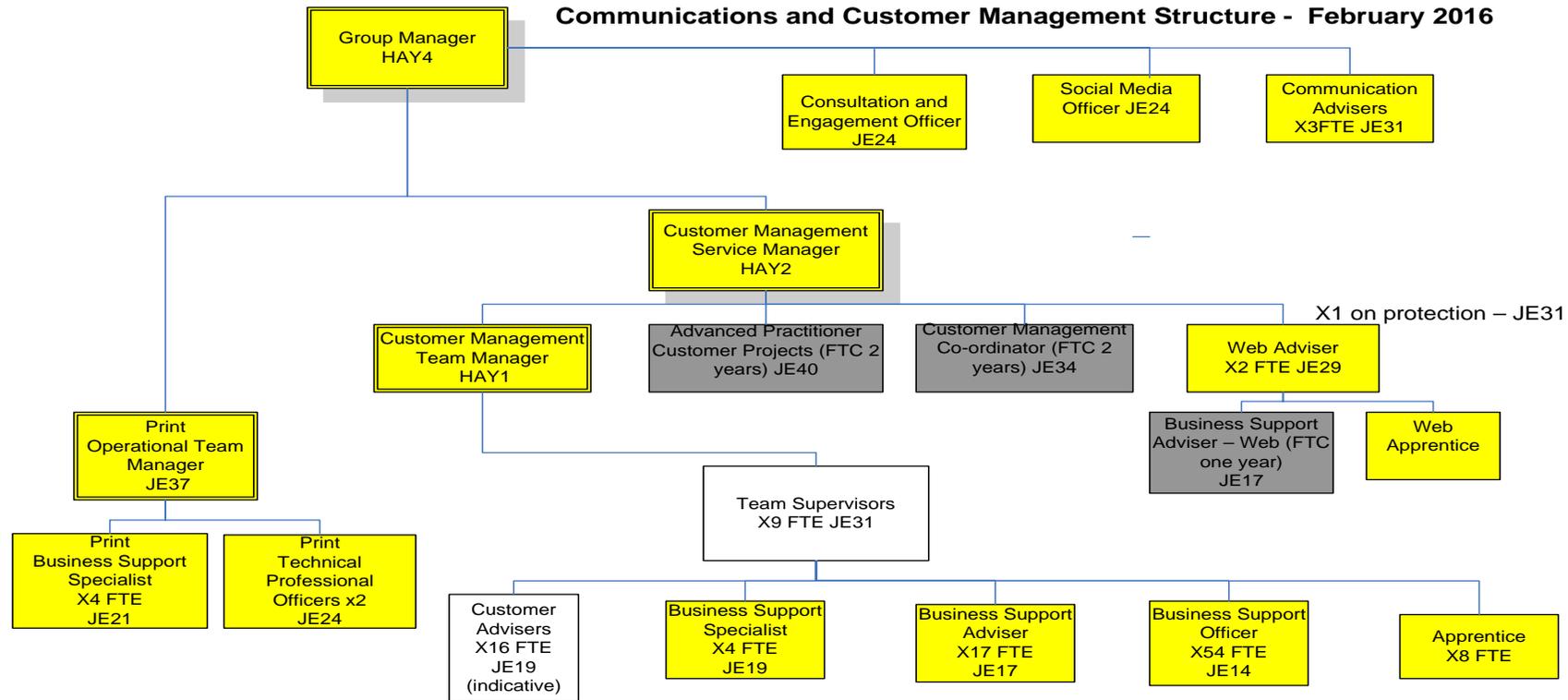


Posts added to LT&B Establishment = 21 (12 N Lincs; 9 NE Lincs)



Posts shaded in grey – not in scope for LT&B or C&IS review

Overall change to C&IS establishment = -17.5 FTE staff  
 Transferring to LT&B Shared Service = 12 FTE  
 Net change to C&IS = -5.5 FTE



Posts shaded yellow or grey – not in scope of LT&B or Customer Review

Overall change to Communications & Customer establishment = -12.5 FTE  
 Transferring to LT&B Shared Service = 9 FTE  
 Net change to Communications & Customer = -3.5 FTE