

# Practice In-Tray Exercise

## Answers and Candidate Guidance Booklet

June 2011

## Answers and Candidate Guidance

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There follows an item-by-item account of the in-tray's main themes and some of the recommended actions/ideas for addressing them. This aims to demonstrate how providing a broad range of informed ideas and effective actions could address the key issues identified from individual and linked items. This answer models an effective approach for answering the in-tray. This is not intended to be the *only* correct answer. The length of the answers given are not intended to reflect an ideal answer length – that will very much depend on the number of items and amount of time given.

You can answer in bullet-points or paragraphs – the important thing is *what* you say, as assessors will be looking to see whether you correctly identified the pertinent issues and overriding themes. Also whether you have provided action plans that are clear and follow-on from the information provided.

Whilst the actual scenario for each in-tray can vary greatly, the overarching task remains the same – to show an understanding of the issues and to come up with realistic solutions to the range of problems outlined in the exercise. Some of the solutions are specific to this in-tray, but some are more generic solutions. For example, those relating to managing others and customer service which may well be relevant to other in-tray answers.

Typically, competencies are used as the underlying measures to score an in-tray. A competency is a set of knowledge, skills and behaviours, such as *Managing Other People*. Assessors marking an in-tray look for evidence in your answer that you are addressing one or more competencies. In the case of this practice in-tray, the following competencies would be relevant across the set of 13 items:

- *Financial Management*
- *Planning and Organising*
- *Analysis and Problem-Solving*
- *Leadership potential*
- *Customer Service Focus*

This model answer tackles each item in the order in which it has been presented. An equally effective approach would be to tackle the highest priority items first – since under strictly timed conditions it would then be the lowest priority issues that were left till last (and potentially uncompleted). Themes across the items are described. In fact, responding to several items at once – grouped together into a theme – is another possible approach to answering an in-tray.

Please note that each “hand-written” answer is followed by a *Note* section highlighted in yellow. These are not part of the model answers – they provide additional explanation(s) of particular issues, alongside any other useful pointers.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority By Item
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1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Send group email to my new team explaining my background at Rest Well Lodges, stating how excited I am about starting and working with the excellent team here. Make clear that my remit is to turn hotel performance around within the next 6 months. I will be setting up a meet and greet session, inviting ideas. Need to make an impact and to demonstrate my enthusiasm/commitment to all staff. Emphasise my confidence in individual staff having the best ideas for improving their own working environment.</li> <li>From reading the other items it is apparent that extra marketing, especially to business customers, could benefit the hotel's profitability. However from the organisational chart there doesn't seem to be anyone responsible for marketing. Consider assigning this task to someone or even, in the long term, recruit someone for this role.</li> </ul>	Low
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Note: The organisational chart tells you who your new colleagues are and the managerial responsibilities of the five team leaders and the two managers. This makes the organisational chart a very useful document to refer to throughout the in-tray exercise. Keep it on one side to refer to later.

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Call Area Manager (Chris) to say thanks for the useful note and to confirm that I look forward to catching-up next Wednesday. Advise Chris that I am committed to turning the hotel performance around and am focussing on improving profitability from the outset. Reassure Chris that I've made it a priority to meet with Susie Desai and to discuss how we can most effectively work together. I will keep Chris fully informed over the next few weeks as our working relationship develops.</li> <li>Request copy of last month's Food Hygiene inspection report. Speak to Brian (Restaurant Manager) about how to improve hygiene.</li> <li>Meet the Restaurant Manager and Hotel Manager this morning and set-up an introductory meeting as soon as possible. Ask them to bring to the meeting notes on where they see there are current issues to resolve.</li> <li>Note that internet marketing could be one area to improve given that it had been neglected to date.</li> </ul>	High
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Note: This “scene-setting” item follows on from the exercise instructions. Once you read the other items, you have these overall aims/objectives:

- Watlington Hotel is a struggling hotel outlet, whose income has declined in recent years. It has been granted a 6 month grace period in which to turn its performance around. You need to suggest ways to reduce staff costs and increase profits.
- As a mid-range hotel chain Rest Well Lodges is being squeezed by high- and low-range chains. One of the possible reasons given is that it has been slow to pick up on trends in hospitality such as outsourcing and online check-in.
- Some of the Watlington staff are demoralised – in particular the Hotel Manager Susie Desai. You will be expected to demonstrate in the exercise how you would motivate others, particularly your two immediate managerial reports.

You are expected to adhere to the brand values – so make a mental note to look out for these when they appear later in the exercise. For example, Item 2 mentions compliance with health and safety regulations and providing a satisfying customer experience.

The Watlington outlet has just struggled through its Food Hygiene Inspection. Make a mental note to look out for any other references in the in-tray items relating to the same issue.

Start to keep a list of your ideas for local or regional/national initiatives that could attract more income.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the Website Manager and ask for changes to the second page – at the moment it is too family-focussed, which will exclude valuable business customers.</li> <li>• Speak to Susie to find out about the function room with a view to hurrying along any repairs.</li> </ul>	Low

Note: This Website item provides a lot of background information for you to take in, including corporate brand values – you would be expected to spot any deviations from these in the other items.

The first Website page provides a list of the qualities that Rest Well Lodges looks for in its Graduate Trainees. This indicates the type of competencies that the exercise is assessing i.e. leadership potential, ability to motivate others, customer service orientation, being innovative. At interview you must have displayed these qualities but have them in the back of your mind as qualities seen by Rest Well as being desirable.

Based upon the Welcome text and the second Webpage of Room/Hotel Facilities, it's clear that the hotel has been family focussed - rather than say business customer focussed. Note those facilities that are not offered in case reference is made to these later in the in-tray: concierge, early check-in, late check-in, swimming pool. Also, there are a number of facilities that you would expect to be offered if the hotel wanted to attract business customers: conference rooms, business centre, trouser press, Wi-Fi, newspaper. Another important point to note is that the Function Room is closed pending essential repairs.

The "extensive renovation programme" is mentioned again in Item 10.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
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4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write to John Powell to apologise for the delay in responding (letter was dated just over three months ago) and to thank him for his useful feedback – stating that he highlighted a number of improvements that I am considering taking further. Stress that, as the new General Manager, I am aiming to make the hotel more attractive to business customers. Consider offering him a free stay whilst next on business in the area, but make sure the improvements are in place if he accepts.</li> <li>• In my joint meeting with the Restaurant Manager and Hotel Manager, use this complaint letter to raise several key issues. Establish Watlington's procedure for responding to such letters and why the letter was not responded to earlier. Stress the need to have a set turnaround time to such complaints in future – particularly in the light of the hotel's threat of closure.</li> <li>• When meeting Brian, ask for his opinion about whether the customer's specific restaurant-related feedback (offering a self-service, take-away breakfast option) would improve the restaurant's facilities. Ask Brian to investigate this proposal and to feedback his findings to me when we meet next week i.e. how easy would it be to offer such a service? Would there be any potential staff cost savings? Could external catering suppliers be used at a cheaper price?</li> <li>• When meeting Susie, discuss how offering Wi-Fi in the guest rooms could be something that business customers take for granted now and that business custom is needed for the hotel to turn performance around. Ask Susie to establish costs and put together a basic business case for installing Wi-Fi in the guest rooms by next Tuesday – so I can present it to Chris next Wednesday.</li> <li>• Also, explore with Susie possible reasons with Susie why the Reception staff member showed such a poor attitude towards such simple, everyday customer requests as giving directions/restaurant recommendations. How effectively is the Reception Team Leader managing his staff? Are Reception staff aware of the brand value of customer service? Additional training in this area may be required. Tell Susie to investigate the date that this particular guest stayed at the hotel with those staff members concerned and to report back to me within a week. Discuss Reception staffing levels and whether Susie believes these to be adequate – particularly at busy check-in and check-out times.</li> </ul>	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate whether the Watlington branch offers favourable corporate rates – as room price is mentioned in the customer's letter.</li> </ul>	

*Email Marketing Director, copying in Area Manager, to enquire about adopting corporate rates - and other ideas for attracting more business guests e.g. loyalty schemes or group bookings. Area Manager asked for innovative ideas so present a range of these.*

- Take this complaint letter to my Area Manager meeting. Whilst I hope that this is a one-off I suspect that there may be other business customers having similar experiences at the hotel. Explore Chris's perspective on orientating the hotel more towards business customers.*

Note: As a customer complaint item this is an excellent opportunity for you to demonstrate your customer service skills – in particular your awareness of how to handle a dissatisfied customer. The letter is dated 21 April 2010 and you need to have demonstrated that you have realised that there has been an unnecessary delay in responding to the complaint. You also need to cross-reference this information to see if similar complaints appear elsewhere in the in-tray.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
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5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email Adam to investigate the allegation that he is willing to employ temp staff without work permits. Ensure that he understands the need to always adhere to all legal requirements.</li> <li>• Email both the Restaurant Manager and Hotel Manager to establish if any staff have been employed without work permits. Run immediate checks on all current temporary staff who may need work permits. Check that Team Leaders are fully aware of legal requirements when employing temporary staff.</li> <li>• Send a group email to all staff emphasising the importance of following all food hygiene regulations. Stress that I intend to monitor this situation by carrying out my own regular checks. Include this as a feature of my regular walks around the hotel to keep myself “visible” to staff.</li> <li>• In my meeting with the Restaurant Manager, talk through the most recent Food Hygiene Inspection Report. Set deadline for urgent deep clean – must be completed within 1 week, even if this needs to be outsourced. Instruct Brian and Paolo to conduct this on a regular basis in future.</li> <li>• Set Brian clear action to complete against urgent deadlines for all outstanding recommendations made in the inspection report. Make sure that Brian takes responsibility for each of these. He must be aware of this being of the utmost importance, as the inspectors could return any time. Ask for Brian to confirm each of the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ All kitchen and restaurant staff have received sufficient food hygiene training. If not, then implement full training ASAP. Staff will need to cover for each other, so run 2-3 separate training sessions.</li> <li>○ All kitchen/restaurant staff are adhering to the hotel’s food hygiene standards.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Call Chef Paolo today to explain that Brian and I are concerned that the hotel’s legal requirements for food hygiene and work permits are not being adhered to. Also, explore whether kitchen staffing levels are affecting health &amp; safety/food hygiene. Insist that Paolo takes up my offer of the additional training that I’ve arranged for him next month.</li> </ul>	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask Brian to arrange a meeting next week with Paolo and me. In the meeting, congratulate them both on their innovative ideas –</li> </ul>	Medium

particularly the theme nights. As long as customers can still order from the standard menu, these theme nights may increase revenue and improve the hotel's financial performance. Propose running 2-3 theme nights a week in the restaurant. Stress that each theme night needs to be as profitable as possible. Explain that we will only be pursuing ideas that do not require investment in new facilities – so no pizza ovens or Korean charcoal grills. Each week, we will review restaurant takings to evaluate whether the theme nights proved successful – and will only continue with those that meet targets.

- Advertise theme nights both internally throughout the hotel and externally (e.g. local newspapers and online).
- Ask Paolo to present a new children's menu to me and Brian in two week's time. Consider why he didn't respond to Brian's initial request.
- Investigate current procedures for stock control/ordering. Discuss the effectiveness and regularity of Brian /Paolo's communication regarding ordering. Why are last minute orders being placed (outside normal stock ordering procedures)? How often is this occurring? Emphasise the need to manage costs and to keep the use of more expensive delivery options to a minimum.

Note: This item covers several issues that form core aspects of a managerial role in the hotel/leisure industry: ensuring that efficient and cost-effective stock control processes are in place; the effective performance management of all staff; and the need to adhere to strict legal requirements in several areas.

When considered alongside items 9 and 11, there is clearly a failing company standards/controls theme.

The theme of employing unsuitable temporary staff is addressed in more detail in the answer to Items 11 and 13.

With email chains it is a good idea to start reading from the end, i.e. start with the oldest and work towards the most recent.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
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6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Watlington hotel's weekend occupancy rates (63.5%) are only just below the national average (64.7%) but slightly above the Rest Well Lodges average (62.9%). This may reflect Watlington hotel's focus on family bookings which are more likely at weekends. However the weekday booking rate (47.2%) is significantly below both the national average (60.2%) and the Rest Well Lodges average (57.8%). Must focus on improving the weekday booking rate, by making the hotel more attractive to business customers.</li> <li>Competitor statistics show that Starfun Inns is achieving the highest occupancy rates of the 3 chains shown even though it charges more per room. Research the room pricing structures of competitor hotels. Investigate the prices that Starfun Inns advertise online and the services offered on the Starfun Website. Watlington is charging less for its rooms (£65 on average) than the Rest Well chains average (£70). If Watlington is a typical Rest Well outlet then it appears that it could increase its average price to £70 per room without necessarily impacting weekday occupancy levels (Rest Well average occupancy = 57.8%). Forward my findings to the Finance Director, copying in my Area Manager, and suggest a trial of higher room prices to raise revenue once other improvements have been made. Trial is to be for weekend room rates where the Watlington occupancy (63.5%) is already above the Rest Well Lodges average.</li> <li>The 2 key Room Service trends for Watlington are: (i) peaks and troughs in demand which are roughly in line with the Rest Well average; (ii) usage is around half the Rest Well average. Also that the salary range is above the average Rest Well salary average. Clearly it is not cost effective to offer this service 24-hours a day. There are two options: increase uptake of room service or reduce the room service staff head count (suggest from 3 to 1). Investigate why usage of room service is lower than Rest Well average. If it seems to be purely customer demand or demographic the only option is to reduce number of room service staff. Consider re-training these redundant staff for jobs in other areas of the hotel instead of just loosing them. Remaining member of room service staff to be trained up to help on Reception at busy times.</li> <li>Ask Finance Director, copying in Area Manager, to calculate the associated cost savings for reducing room service staff numbers and for removing the Room Service Function altogether (radical but worth seeing the numbers, especially after competitor Premium Hotels have done this according to Item 10). Ask HR Director for a comparison of Watlington staff salaries compared to the Rest Well average salaries for each job function.</li> <li>Ask my Area Manager for the full Half-Yearly Report. Analyse the findings for other areas where Watlington's costs differ from the</li> </ul>	Medium
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*Rest Well Lodges average. There are likely to be other indications of costs savings related to reducing staff numbers.*

Note: Look for trends in the data and comparisons with other hotels to help identify areas of strength and weakness.

The low usage of the Room Service and recommendations made on the basis of this are reinforced by Item 9's figures for room service usage (9%).

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority

7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In response to the Finance Today article, take a copy to the meeting with the Restaurant Manager to remind him that, given the Milton Keynes outbreak, we need to be extra vigilant that a food poisoning outbreak does not arise from the Watlington's kitchens or the restaurant staff's poor hygiene procedures.</li> <li>• In response to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Articles, contact extramile.com to investigate using them for marketing purposes: check that the article's claims are true; and obtain pricing information to compare against potential benefits. This option – as the article suggests - could increase single room occupancy on weekdays and multiple room occupancy during the weekends. The opening of the new business park supports this business proposition/business case. Put together pricing strategy for offering discounted rooms via internet travel agencies. In summary, the number of the hotel's business customers could be increased by adapting the hotel's current marketing focus away from families towards business customers i.e. rebrand the Watlington outlet by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Adapting the Website;</li> <li>○ Using extramile.com to target business customers; and</li> <li>○ Incorporating business customer feedback ideas, such as making Wi-Fi available in all guest rooms.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Closure of local theme park will reduce the family and tourist trade that uses Watlington hotel. This supports my earlier comments to improve hotel facilities for business customers.</li> <li>• Write to all tenants at new Watlington Business Park and offer special corporate rates for their business visitors. Important to develop such relationships.</li> </ul>	Medium
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Note: Each article raises important points. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> are the most important since they are directly relevant to possible Watlington initiatives. The 4th Article regarding the Keswick outlet, which may or may not resemble the Watlington hotel, highlights that the brand can be perceived as old-fashioned.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
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8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Feedback from both the managers highlighted the same problem of insufficient contact with their General Manager. Need to have regular meetings, and to start weekly team meetings across hotel staff. I need to set a good example here. Establish a time for regular 1-to-1's with the Restaurant and Hotel Managers for them to follow by establishing times for regular 1-to-1's for their own Team Leaders to raise issues/problems. Advise them of the need for this to be cascaded down with team meetings led by Team Leaders. I will speak at the start of the first one of each of these and use this as an opportunity to personally introduce myself to each individual hotel employee. May need to run three separate sessions over a 36-hour period to allow all employees to attend whilst covering for each other. Important to use these to give each member of staff some feedback about how they/the business is doing (in order to get reassurance and team buy-in to turn around performance).</i></li> <li><i>Set-up meetings with each manager, starting next week, to discuss their last appraisal. Discuss the personal targets they would like to achieve before their next annual appraisal. Offer my support towards improving their ratings. Use this structured process as an opportunity to improve each manager's motivation. This will also help them see that they are valued.</i></li> <li><i>Coach both my managers on how to improve morale/motivation e.g. keep Team Leaders and managers informed about promotion opportunities, more staff rotation across job roles in order to make their work more interesting; and more opportunities for staff development.</i></li> <li><i>Discuss with Susie why she (and her staff) may feel de-motivated and how you can best work together. Share the information about the possibility of hotel closure in 6 months time and promise to keep her informed of developments. Delegate a project to investigate whether the level of training offered here by Team Leaders and at Head Office is adequate for those trainees for whom English is not their first language. Ask her to report back in 2-3 weeks and to work with Brian to come up with alternative ideas for training i.e. graphic posters, handouts. This will give Susie an opportunity to work with Brian and his team – an area where I would like to see increased cooperation.</i></li> <li><i>Congratulate Susie on the high appraisal ratings for financial management, and rule-following. Discuss the relatively low ratings for innovation, planning and organising, and customer service focus - classified as "Needs to improve". Put together a plan with Susie</i></li> </ul>	Medium
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*where I can coach her to improve here. Emphasise the need for effective Rest Well managers such as herself to score at least a "3" for customer service focus on future appraisals. Set target to raise 2's to 3's by next appraisal. Suggest that Susie could also learn from Brian in the area of Innovation. Ask her to take note of how he works with new ideas and changes in working practices.*

- *Congratulate Brian on the high appraisal ratings for innovation and leadership. Given his high leadership rating, how is he applying this when managing Paolo, the Chef. Would he find any advanced managerial training useful? Discuss the "Needs to improve" ratings for the three competencies: financial management, planning and organising and rule-following. Suggest that Brian learns from Susie in the areas of financial management, and rule-following. Set target to raise 2's to 3's by next appraisal. Delegate to Brian my pet project to improve stock taking processes, to collaborate with Susie and to report back on possible cost savings in 2-3 weeks time. Discuss the issue Brian raised about high staff turnover and that I believe this will improve when training is improved and a new temp agency is used.*
- *Both managers to be given training in effective planning and organising, starting with my coaching during 1-to-1's.*
- *Set-up meeting with HR Director to discuss staff levels (compared to other similar-sized Rest Well outlets). Use this information to help decide if there are any staff cost-savings to be made.*

Note: There is a failing performance management theme, when considered alongside items 4 and 11. As hotel manager you need to lead, motivating and coaching your immediate managerial team. Your Area Manager pointed out to you why Susie was demoralised in his Introductory note.

Assessors will be looking for you to delegate to your subordinates and to show that you can set clear objectives.

The idea of using a new temp agency links with Item 6.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In summary, there are many customer suggestions which add support to my analysis/actions on other items: staffing levels and/or</i></li> </ul>	High

*rotas need to be reviewed (long queues in Reception, overworked Restaurant staff, long waits for food); additional hotel facilities offered e.g. Wi-Fi in rooms); and an extramile.co.uk relationship to be investigated.*

- *No. 3 Room facilities score could relate to lack of Wi-Fi. No. Reception tallies with Item 4 complaint.*
- *Email HR Director, copying in Area Manager, to ask for a full copy of the Survey. State that I am analysing the figures and will be preparing an action plan, with my managerial team, to improve the poor ratings in time for the next survey.*
- *There are a number of poor results in the range 2.0-2.4, as follows: Your room facilities; warmth and friendliness of the Reception staff; availability and helpfulness of the Reception and Restaurant staff; the restaurant's speed and quality of service. Overall, Reception's results were particularly low (except for cleanliness). Forward these excerpts to the Restaurant Manager and Hotel Manager. Assign a high priority project to both managers to improve these low ratings. Set a target of achieving all 3's or above on next survey. Support them on any training required.*
- *Amongst those guests who responded the usage figures for both the restaurant (19%) and room service (9%) are low - particularly Room Service. Place a restaurant menu or flyer in the rooms to help increase customer's use of the restaurant.*
- *Arrange with the Reception Team Leader for additional customer service training for all Reception staff. The current high level of customer complaints cannot continue. Ask for their explanations of Reception staff losing a business customer's reservation; being rude to a customer's children and being uninterested in finding a taxi for another customer. Such behaviour is deserving of a verbal warning.*
- *Forward the results to the Housekeeping Team Leader and praise their positive ratings. Ask for their explanation of soap and coffee sachets not being replaced. Establish whether the current training offered to her team makes any allowance (e.g. using translators) for those trainees for whom English is not their first language. Demonstrate cultural sensitivity and highlight the need to adapt our processes accordingly.*
- *Praise Brian and Paolo on the quality of food. Highlight slow service and discuss if re-organising staff shifts could improve this.*

Note: There are poor customer service and health/safety themes, when considered alongside items 4 and 7 respectively.

The positive feedback about the restaurant food links with item 5.

The Room Service issues are addressed in full in Item 6's answer.

Note there is no date from this satisfaction survey excerpt. For the purposes of the in-tray exercise you can either assume that it is recent or endeavour to find out how recent (and therefore relevant) it is.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>Email Area Manager to establish the date of the next meeting and when his deadline is for ideas. Since today's date is 25<sup>th</sup> July and the last monthly meeting was held on 30<sup>th</sup> June, the next monthly meeting is likely to be in the next few days.</i></li></ul>	Medium

- Send a group email to all staff emphasising the importance of supporting company-wide initiatives, as well as generating our own ideas for turning performance around. Set up an ideas scheme for feeding in ideas to subsequent Area Manager meetings. Commit to circulating a summary of future Area Manager Meetings in order to get my staff more involved.
- Revenue was down again in both hotel and restaurant and Stuart King (ex-Watlington General Manager) blamed the fact that families "can't afford weekends away". This trend in revenue needs to be reversed. The fact that Roadside Rests have recently had to rebrand their family rooms as a value offering supports the idea that we should move away from families towards businesses. Take Competitor Review information to Area Manager meeting and use such information in support of my two proposals to 1) Market to business customers and to improve hotel facilities for business customers. This is in line with competitors such as Regal Inns offering premium executive rooms (with Wi-Fi) and express business breakfast at every location. 2) Investigate cost savings from replacing the 24-hour room service – as Premium Hotels have done with automated vending facilities.
- Prepare a business case to renovate the function reception room – this time as business conference rooms. If the hotel can offer such business space then this will make it considerably more attractive to business customers – for example new businesses at Watlington Business Park.
- Proactively volunteer to join both cost-cutting initiatives being trialled, especially as we plan to try on-line booking anyway. This will help to build relations with Head Office and to demonstrate that I am open to any opportunity to cut costs.
- Email the General Manager at West Homerton to investigate the selection process for the next phase of corporate refurbishment programme.
- Email Chloe Fraser (copying in Area Manager) to support her idea of pooling marketing resources to run Bank Holiday promotions. Say our branch requires more marketing but we don't have anyone on a dedicated post.
- Work with Restaurant Manager and Hotel Manager on building business cases for other ideas that have proved successful at other outlets and which the three of you agree could improve profitability and/or reduce costs at Watlington. Contact Michelle Gomez regarding her experience of using [www.extramile.com](http://www.extramile.com) and [www.UKlodgings.com](http://www.UKlodgings.com). Contact Sally Floyd regarding "kids eat free" promotion. Key contacts with whom it's vital to develop effective working relationships.

Note:	<p>There is a theme of needing to switch away from a family customer base, when considered alongside items 4 and 6. This item contains many ideas for what is working at other branches that can be adopted by Watlington.</p> <p>Note that the meeting minutes are from the most recent monthly area management meeting. It is also worth noting for future reference how many could not attend (the 'apologies') to gauge how important these meetings are.</p>
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Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call Justin (Reception Team Leader) to investigate the staff dishonesty issue. Investigate Gary's contribution to the large number of Reception complaints and why he hasn't been completing Reception logs in full. Ask Justin to document the attitude problems and Linda to document the missing room service money issue. Does Linda have any evidence about Gary mishandling any other cash?</li> </ul>	Medium

*Ask Linda to review the takings for those days when Gary was working. Begin disciplinary action – issue formal warning about attitude and incomplete logs. Notify HR Department accordingly.*

- Set-up a meeting with all Team Leaders with an agenda to improve understanding of the work demands of each other's teams. Facilitate this meeting myself. Investigate as a group whether another team has the flexibility and suitable staff for assisting Reception at busy times (as a short-term measure). Inform them that you plan to meet with the HR Director to discuss staff levels in the longer-term.*
- Consider implementing better controls for handling cash – for example must be passed directly to the Team Leader responsible for the daily takings, and a form signed to acknowledge receipt. Must plan ahead to ensure appropriate controls are in place.*
- Prioritise replacing temporary worker Gary. Speak to the temp agency about dissatisfaction and consider using another temp agency with better vetting of candidates.*
- Establish whether the current training offered to Linda's team makes any allowance (e.g. using translators) for those trainees for whom English is not their first language.*

Note: There are poor leadership, team-working and performance management themes, when considered alongside item 8. Also, a failing company controls theme, when considered alongside item 9.

Justin's comment about being unable to hold a meeting with his manager for several weeks reinforces the recommendations made earlier in the in-tray about holding more team meetings (on a regular basis).

The points made about Reception and Room Service staff being busy at particular times are addressed in the next item's answer.

Full details of the switch to an alternative temp agency are provided for item 13.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>Whilst the rota meets each of the Working Time Regulations, advise Justin that he needs to circulate future rotas much earlier so as to provide staff with more notice. There are a number of other sources of unfairness that are probably affecting the Reception team's morale and motivation: paying staff the same hourly rate for each day is unfair to those working at weekends; one team member</i></li></ul>	Medium

*(Tim) has 3 non-working days rather than two; and Marie and Julia only have 1 non-working day rather than two. Justin himself has the easiest hours and he needs to be more flexible here in support of his team. Discuss whether he'd consider coming in earlier and leaving later on some days – even working some weekends for days off in lieu. He needs to revise the daily structure of the Reception rota firstly so as to provide more than 2 staff working at the 1st shift (05:30-11:30) for checking out guests and at the third shift (17:30-23:30) for checking in guests.*

- Email all Team Leaders to request a copy of their latest team rota. Ask all hotel staff for feedback about how effective they find their current rota system. Review each rota/rota system.
- Must ensure that each rota can be easily interpreted by any staff for whom English is not their first language. Feedback received that Tomas on Reception missed his shift last week because of this issue. Ask Team Leaders if any members of their staff are struggling to complete their job role's responsibilities because of a poor understanding of English? Any ideas for improving this situation?

Note: There is a theme of poor rota planning when considered alongside item 11. Planning effective rotas is a necessary requirement of managerial roles in the hotel/leisure industries.

Checking that the rota meets Working Time Regulations will take some time so consider only checking the hours at the end of your in-tray exercise if you have time.

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having reviewed other Rest Well outlets' use of suppliers, there is a need for Watlington to switch to better value services elsewhere. This is an excellent opportunity to cut costs.</li> <li>• Firstly, Watlington needs to switch to better value for money suppliers of Laundry services and toiletries. There are 2 options</li> </ul>	Medium/ High

*available in each category with the highest score of "4" (Gingley's and Kingsley's suppliers) and "5" (Richford and Maidenvale's suppliers). However taking the Reliability ratings into account, the best options are to switch to Tichford's supplier (for toiletries services) and to Kingsley's supplier (for laundry services).*

- Secondly, Watlington needs to switch to a temp agency that offers a lower percentage fee. Currently it is paying the highest of any of the regional outlets (34%). Contact the three temp agencies with the lowest % fees: Gingley (26%); West Homerton (27%); Maidenvale (25%). Each of these temp agencies charges a percentage fee below the average. Call to check that their recruitment/sifting procedures are suitable for Watlington's needs. Negotiate the lowest possible percentage fee with each of these. Proceed with the most suitable 1-2 agencies on a "trial" basis. Also advertising roles on the company website will attract a wider pool of applications.*

Note: There is a theme of poor financial management, when considered alongside Item 11. Switching suppliers in these categories will clearly reduce the running costs of the hotel. Thus the Medium/High priority.

In-tray exercise assessors will be looking for you to make such clear decisions, even if there is a calculated risk involved in some of these decisions.