

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: LOCAL ADVICE & SUPPORT HUBS
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 15 MARCH 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a vision for frontline counter service that enables us to respond more effectively to the needs of our customers and makes more efficient use of the facilities in our communities.
- 1.2 Counter services are defined as Council services that customers can access on a drop in basis without an appointment, referral or sign up.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Over the last number of years, the Council has been looking at the way they deliver services to ensure they are more aligned with the needs of our customers. This work includes a review of advice services undertaken some years ago, work looking at the needs of our most vulnerable customers that was reported to Members last year and also engagement last year with the wider community on the budget and its implications for services.
- 2.2 The messages from these engagements suggest that there are a number of areas where we could improve our counter services. These areas for improvement include:
- More joined up advice and support within One Stop Shops and across the Council area;
 - More access to specialist advice services;
 - More focussed support for the most vulnerable;
 - Additional and more convenient means by which to do business with the Council e.g. digital self-service;
 - More effective ways to follow up on advice and support for customers; and
 - Making more efficient use of existing assets within communities.
- 2.3 Consideration of this feedback from Customer Surveys, budget consultation and a review of good practice within other Councils has led Officers to develop a revised model of counter service delivery.

- 2.4 A number of factors mean that the existing model of service delivery is no longer fit for purpose and will result in a redesign of our services. These factors include:
- The budget decision to remove the Customer First service from One Stop Shops from 2016/17;
 - The introduction of mobile working that will allow staff to collect and process information at the point of contact with customers; and
 - The growing desire to access Council services 24/7.

3. CURRENT COUNTER SERVICE PROVISION

- 3.1 Currently a face to face 'One Stop Shop' service is delivered by Customer First, Finance and Housing from eight locations as follows:
- Five One Stop Shops with Customer First, Finance and Housing:
 - Bo'ness;
 - Callendar Square;
 - Denny;
 - Grangemouth; and
 - Stenhousemuir.
 - One One Stop Shop with Customer First and Housing – Camelon;
 - One Finance office – Bonnybridge; and
 - One Finance and Housing office- Dawson Centre.
- 3.2 The scope of service provided in each office varies. In addition the number of access points/local offices varies significantly across the Council area as these have been developed incrementally over many years and without any significant review.
- 3.3 In addition to One Stop Shops, the Council and its community planning partners have a variety of offices and buildings that members of the public use for a variety of purposes e.g. social work offices, libraries, health centres, police stations, community centres/halls etc. These offices/buildings are often used by the third sector, including CABs, to provide advice services.
- 3.4 There is scope to rationalise the provision of local service to make more efficient and effective use of the various premises across communities. One of the key outcomes of a new model of service delivery is to maximise existing community facilities and increase the number of locations where customers can access payment and advice services beyond the current eight locations listed in paragraph 3.1.

4. PRINCIPLES AND FUTURE MODEL OF SERVICE PROVISION

4.1 Falkirk Council has an opportunity to improve the counter customer service experience through realigning our counter service provision to meet the needs of our customers.

4.2 In developing this model the following principles of service delivery, previously agreed by the Council (Falkirk Council Welfare Reform Update - March 2013), have been taken into account and built upon. These principles lie at the heart of the new model of delivery. They are:

- There should be one point of contact for the Customer;
- We should use existing models of good practice;
- Work between services should be invisible to the customer;
- We must ensure that we are taking account of the principles and priorities of the Council's poverty strategy;
- The model(s) must also ensure that services do what they can to:
 - maximise household income;
 - support people to manage what they get;
- Prevent citizens from getting into unnecessary debt whilst maintaining vital income streams for the Council.

4.3 The work on 'Understanding our Customer Requirements' (Jump Research Ltd), that was reported last year to Members also highlighted the following recommendations in relation to our counter service provision:

- Consider adopting a more holistic approach to dealing with customers such that additional services can be recommended and accessed;
- Consider implementing a key worker system where a single staff member takes responsibility for finding solutions to the full range of a customer's needs;
- Explore the possibility of offering an 'outreach' system to specific groups who require additional support to access services;
- Implement practical solutions within one-stop-shops to improve the customer experience; such as increasing privacy, providing greater clarity around queue systems, increasing flexibility within service provision for those with multiple issues and providing access to specialist advice in smaller shops through a rotation system.

4.4 The vision is for service provision to be more aligned to meeting the needs of our customers through a variety of channels including single point of access advice hubs which meet the needs of people who need a variety of support. This holistic service would be provided to customers across the Council area, with specialist services being available in three central hubs and complemented by additional provision across the Council areas on a 'surgery' basis as appropriate. This is similar to the model the adopted already by the third sector and commended by the Scrutiny Panel that reviewed CABs as more effectively meeting the needs to people across the Council area.

4.5 The proposed model is to create three advice hubs across the Council area covering the East, West and Central populations, with spoke arrangements for customers to access services through existing facilities within their local areas.

This will reduce overheads by rationalising our built estate and will increase footfall in other facilities such as libraries which will be used as so called spoke facilities.

- 4.6 The Housing Neighbourhood Office staff currently located in the back office areas of the existing one stop shops will be using mobile technology to free up their time to be “out on the patch” working to deliver quality service to tenants and customers in their homes and neighbourhoods. They will have “touch down” facilities in a number of Council locations as required. This will increase accommodation capacity in the new advice hubs.
- 4.7 From October 2015 customers have been able to make payments by cash in certain local shops using PayPoint, significantly extending the number of locations where payments can be made to the Council. This offers improved convenience to customers, as there are over 85 PayPoint outlets across the Falkirk Council area. A list of the Post Office and local shop (Paypoint) locations across the Falkirk Council area is included in Appendix 1 and further information on the location of PayPoint outlets is available via <http://www.allpay.net/outlets>.
- 4.8 Additionally, provision of space for partner organisations to deliver services from within these hubs offers the potential to provide customers with a multi organisational facility where they can go to for a full range of support services, for example, Citizen’s Advice, Credit Unions and other 3rd sector support agencies.
- 4.9 It is notable that libraries have seen a significant change in their customer base over recent years, with more people using computers in libraries to search for jobs as part of their DWP claimant commitment. Providing access to services in libraries may help the Council to target support services at those who are more likely to be in need of additional help, whilst also supporting footfall into libraries.
- 4.10 Initial discussions have been held with the Falkirk Community Trust who have agreed in principle to provide space within their facilities, including libraries, for provision of outreach services.
- 4.11 The refocusing of our face to face service would be accompanied by an increase in availability and promotion of digital self service opportunities, ensuring we maximise use of the Council’s website to provide relevant information and allow customers to access services 24/7. This would increase the level of service people could experience by opening up self service services out with office hours.
- 4.12 This new provision would be complemented by access to a greater range of services online such as:
 - Checking account balances and confirming payments, for example rent and Council Tax
 - Notifying change of address for Council Tax
 - Applying for Council Tax discounts and exemptions
 - Applying for Housing Benefit
 - Applying for Council Tax Reduction
 - Initial application for Council housing
 - Applying for free school meals and clothing grants

5. NEXT STEPS

East Area Pilot

- 5.1 It is proposed that this new model of service delivery will be delivered within the next six months, creating the first hub and spoke arrangement in Grangemouth and Bo'ness. The new model will be fully in place by December 2016, based in the current One Stop Shop in York Lane, Grangemouth, supplemented by additional outreach in other areas. It is anticipated that outreach will be provided in a number of facilities, possibly including Bo'ness Library, Bo'ness Community Education Base (within Bo'ness Academy), Bo'ness Recreation Centre and Kersiebank Community Project. In addition, there will be additional payment facilities offered in these areas with payment of rent, Council Tax etc being able to be made at ten local shops in Bo'ness and twelve local shops in Grangemouth.
- 5.2 There are experienced employees within the current Service who deliver the services that will be available through the hub and spokes. These employees will be offered the opportunity to undertake new roles within this model. Initial discussions have taken place with employees and their Trade Union representatives to explain the proposed model and the suggested new ways of working. It was important to undertake this consultation to ensure that employees were properly briefed on the report being considered by Members and to ensure that Members can be provided with feedback on their comments. This will be done verbally at the meeting of the Executive. Employees and Trade Unions have been made aware that the proposals are subject to Members considering this report and that nothing has been agreed until the Executive reach a decision. Further employee meetings will take place to advise employees of any decision reached by the Executive and on any practical implementation issues. Normal HR policies and procedures will apply in this regard.
- 5.3 In order to deliver this new model, maintenance and repairs will be undertaken over the coming months to the current Grangemouth One Stop Shop. The Housing Capital Investment Programme for 2016/17 already includes capital works of c£150k for works to be undertaken. It is important to note that these works are required regardless of the decision taken today and this work is scheduled to begin in the coming months. Work is underway to identify options for alternative service provision during the refit period.
- 5.4 The One Stop Shop facility in Bo'ness is leased from the private sector with annual running costs of c£46k. The lease for Bo'ness is due to expire on 03 January 2017. It is proposed that this lease is terminated at that time.
- 5.5 As outlined in paragraph 4.5, the Housing Neighbourhood Office staff currently located in the Grangemouth Office and in Bo'ness would be utilising mobile technology to work out in the neighbourhood to deliver a better, more accountable and more personalised service. The upper floor of the current Grangemouth One Stop Shop will be used as the "touch down" base for staff.
- 5.6 In order to deliver this pilot, account has been taken of the cost of the new hub accommodation and staffing, and the vision for an improved service can be achieved within existing resources.

Central and West Area Hubs

- 5.7 Following review of the East Area Hub, consideration will be given to rolling out the hub and spoke model to central and west areas. A further report will be presented to Members on the options for this.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 We know from our customers that they are looking to access our services in a very different way from that commonly used when we first established our One Stop Shops. In meeting our customers' expectations we can seek to achieve the principles previously agreed by Members, extend the service access points for our customers but rationalise our build estate by using existing community facilities for our counter services rather than having eight specific properties solely for this purpose.
- 6.2 In addition, the introduction of mobile and flexible working in Housing will enable staff to deliver services out in the neighbourhood and in tenants/customers' homes. This is valuable and important giving the ongoing difficult economic environment, coupled with the UK Government's welfare reforms which continue to challenge many of our tenants/customers.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Executive:

- 7.1 **Approve the implementation of a Local Advice and Support Hub pilot based in Grangemouth but covering the east of the District; and**
- 7.2 **Request a further report detailing arrangements for the central and west area hubs.**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

Date: 17 February 2016

Ref: ABB1215FC

Contact Name: Fiona Campbell/Sally Buchanan

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 506004 and ask for Fiona Campbell or Sally Buchanan.

Paypoint and Post Office Locations

- Paypoint Locations
- Post Offices
- Bo'ness One Stop Shop

Post Office Locations

4 Bo'ness Main	30 East Pier Street	Bo'ness	EH51 9AA
24 Maiden Park LM	1-3 Gilburn Place	Bo'ness	EH51 0BE
26 Newtown LM	Baker Street	Bo'ness	EH51 9BZ

Paypoints

12 Bo'ness Convenience Store	42 Bomains Road	Bo'ness	EH51 0PL
55 McColls	169 Dean Road	Bo'ness	EH51 0HF
93 U Save Store	45 Drumpark Avenue	Bo'ness	EH51 9QW
94 Grangepans Mini Market	14 Grangepans	Bo'ness	EH51 9PA
95 Grangepans Food Store	115-117 Grangepans	Bo'ness	EH51 9PH
96 Cadzow Mini Market	26 Cadzow Avenue	Bo'ness	EH51 9BT
97 Co-op Scotmid	66 Linlithgow Road	Bo'ness	EH51 0HX
98 A+J Newsagents	27 South Street	Bo'ness	EH51 9HE
99 BP - Crossroads	90 Dean Road	Bo'ness	EH51 0DL
100 Spar - C.J. Lang	Jamieson Avenue	Bo'ness	EH51 0JU

