

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the Coat of Arms of the City of Edinburgh. The crest includes a crown with four thistles, a shield divided into four quarters (top-left: a saltire, top-right: a stag's head, bottom-left: a ship, bottom-right: an eagle), and a motto scroll at the bottom with the text 'A'NE FOR A'.

Agenda Item 7

Local Advice and Support Hubs

Falkirk Council

Title: Local Advice and Support Hubs
Meeting: Executive
Date: 26th September 2017
Submitted By: Director of Corporate and Housing Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report updates the Executive on the Advice and Support Hub in the East of the Council area and seeks approval to roll this new service out across the West and Central areas. This new model of frontline counter service better addresses 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. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Executive is asked to agree to:-

- 1) Extending the Advice and Support Hub model to the West and Central areas, replacing the remaining One Stop Shops, Finance and Housing public offices with Central and West Advice Hubs and outreach services**
- 2) Carrying out detailed property survey work required to conclude the options for the locations of the West and Central Advice Hubs**
- 3) An engagement with communities to determine locations for outreach services**
- 4) Receiving a follow up report on specific locations of West and Central Hubs.**

3. Background

- 3.1 Over the last few years, the Council has reviewed the way services are delivered to ensure they are aligned to the needs of our customers. This work resulted in Council taking the decision to trial a new model of service delivery in the East of the Council area.
- 3.2 The new model of service delivery replaces the One Stop Shop model and focuses our face to face service on those who need the most support, whilst supporting those who can to self serve via the Council's website.

3.3 The Advice Hub and Outreach service aims to deliver against a number of principles previously agreed by Council:

- 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. CURRENT COUNTER SERVICE PROVISION

4.1 In December 2016 the Council replaced Grangemouth and Bo'ness One Stop Shops with an Advice and Support Hub serving the east of the Council area.

4.2 Prior to the roll out of the Hub the service within Grangemouth and Bo'ness One Stop Shop was limited to finance enquiries, payments and housing enquiries.

4.3 Based in Grangemouth town centre, the Hub provides an immediate service to those coming through the doors as well as outreach in Bo'ness Monday to Friday, at two locations (Bo'ness library and Weslo Housing Office).

4.4 The Advice Hub is staffed with a team of 'meet and greet' receptionists and 'multi-skilled advisers', supported and managed by an Advice Hub manager.

4.5 The receptionists:

- welcome customers arriving to the Advice Hub
- promote self service opportunities
- provide information and take straightforward service requests, including payments
- pass customers on to multi skilled advisers as appropriate.

4.6 An important feature of the receptionists' role is deciding who to target for self service and who would benefit from face to face interaction.

4.7 The multi-skilled advisers deliver a range of services within the Advice Hub and at outreach locations across the area to customers who require or may benefit from face to face support. This includes:

- helping customers to complete applications for support such as housing benefit, free school meals and clothing grants and Scottish Welfare Fund grants
- checking entitlement to benefits

- promoting income maximisation through understanding and checking basic entitlement to benefits
 - promoting uptake of money advice and budgeting support
 - identifying customers who would benefit from additional support, prioritising those support needs and facilitating uptake of support via direct introduction where possible
 - providing housing options initial advice and assistance
 - handling enquiries for rent and Council Tax
 - end to end processing of claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax reduction.
- 4.8 The multi-skilled advisers receive customers referred by the receptionists. Multi-skilled advisors aim to handle customer requests without signposting or passing customers over to other services, except for more complex cases requiring specialist support.
- 4.9 Specialists are available within the Hub to provide further support on:
- money and debt advice
 - welfare benefits applications and appeals
 - complex finance enquiries
 - housing options
 - general housing issues.
- 4.10 Appendix 1 details the service delivered by the Hub and Outreach Service since January 2017, including customer feedback, enquiry volumes and types and some case studies of customer experiences are also shown. In summary:
- there are over 4000 customer visits to the Hub and Outreach each month
 - in addition to taking payments, Hub receptionists are able to resolve approximately 600 enquiries per month
 - when asked for feedback, all customers indicated they were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service they received.
- 4.11 A customer feedback survey was carried out using post and online to ask customers about the service they received. Of the 65 customers who completed the survey, the majority were very satisfied with the service they received (57% very satisfied, 28% were satisfied). 77% of customers said that the advice and support they received had helped them improve their circumstances.
- 4.12 When asked how the service compared to the old One Stop Shop service, the majority said it was better (31% much better, 25% better) whilst 29% said it was the same.
- 4.13 Across the rest of the Council area (West and Central) a drop-in face to face service is delivered from six locations. The following table summarises the key counter services available across the Council area.

	Finance Enquiries	Housing/Access to Housing Enquiries	Payments	Scottish Welfare Fund Applications	Initial General Enquiries	Specialist Support	Self Service Support
Advice Hub – Grangemouth	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Hub Outreach (Bo'ness)	√	√		√	√		√
Callendar Square One Stop Shop	√	√	√	√			
Camelon One Stop Shop		√	√				
Denny One Stop Shop	√	√	√				
Stenhousemuir One Stop Shop	√	√	√				
Bonnybridge Finance Office	√		√				
Dawson Centre	√	√	√				
Post Offices			√				
Shops with PayPoint			√				

4.14 As the above table shows, counter services across the West and Central vary between locations and is limited compared to the services that are now available in Grangemouth and Bo'ness. The current One Stop Shop model does not include resources for :

- general enquiries,
- Scottish Welfare Fund applications
- digital self service.

4.15 The current model of service delivery in the West and Centre is funded from a variety of budgets. Total staff costs of the One Stop Shop model of service delivery were c£939,000. Full roll out of the Advice Hub model would result in annual staff costs of c£900,000. The change in service delivery is about improving customer service and upskilling staff rather than reducing staff numbers, whilst delivering property savings.

5. FUTURE MODEL OF SERVICE PROVISION

5.1 Falkirk Council has an opportunity to improve our customer experience by changing our counter service provision to meet the needs of our customers. Our proposal is to create Advice Hubs in the West (Denny) and Central (Falkirk) areas with outreach spokes in local communities, in line with the new service already in place in the East. This will reduce overheads by rationalising our build estate and will increase footfall in other facilities such as libraries which will be used for outreach.

5.2 Appendix 2 shows the footfall and property costs of our counter service locations across the west and centre of the district.

5.3 Currently a One Stop Shop has two functions: providing a counter service to customers and as a base for staff when they are not meeting with customers. In future the Housing Neighbourhood Office staff currently working out of one stop shops will use mobile technology to be out 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 and will use the Hubs for pre-booked appointments with tenants where this is the most suitable venue.

- 5.4 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 local shops with PayPoint in the Falkirk Council area. A list of the Post Office and Paypoints is available at <http://www.allpay.net/outlets>.

PayPoint Transaction Numbers	16/17	17/18 (to 30 Aug 17)
Rent	3 286	2 613
Sundry accounts	98	204
Council Tax	3 084	2 629
Total	6 468	5 446

- 5.5 The above table shows the number of payments made via PayPoint. To date we have received 12 719 PayPoint payments. This uptake of payment by PayPoint has occurred without significant promotion to encourage customers to use this route, as it is only cost effective to take payments via PayPoint if we reduce our cash collection costs by closing some of our own payment locations.
- 5.6 Providing space for partner organisations to deliver services within these hubs gives customers a facility where they can go to get a range of support services. So far the East Hub has been used by Falkirk District Credit Union as a collection point and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency for public engagement. Discussions are ongoing with the Scottish Government over using this facility as part of the local delivery of their new Scottish Social Security Agency.
- 5.7 Over the past few months the Council has significantly increased access to services online with 21 new or improved online services now available via MyFalkirk, allowing people to access services 24/7 from their computer, tablet or smartphones. Since this service was launched in November 2016:
- 8,303 people have set up or been supported to set up a MyFalkirk account
 - 2,132 people have used MyFalkirk to set up a direct debit to pay their Council tax
 - 1146 have applied online for free school meals and/or clothing grants
 - the average customer experience rating is 4 out of 5.
- 5.8 It is notable that the above use of our digital services has happened mainly through customers seeking out these digital channels and without significant promotion of the service other than at the East Hub and the Customer Contact Centre.

- 5.9 We are currently implementing a project to support people to develop their digital skills. This will increase digital inclusion, supporting people to access digital services, make the most of their money and use social technologies to reduce isolation. This work will promote uptake of the Council's digital services and will include support for our own employees to help them develop their digital skills.

6. NEXT STEPS

Central Hub

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Central Advice Hub will be located in Falkirk town centre close to the main bus stops. Work is underway with Development Services to identify the preferred property option. Options under consideration include a refurbishment of Old Burgh Buildings or taking on a new lease within the town centre. The next stage of the options analysis requires detailed survey work to be undertaken by Development Services. This will provide information on the costs and timescales to create a Central Hub.
- 6.2 In addition to the Central Hub, Multi Skilled Advisors from the Hub will provide an outreach service into surrounding areas and community locations. Libraries and other community locations will be used as outreach locations. The timings and locations of the outreach service will be based on customer demand identified over the coming months.
- 6.3 The Central Advice Hub will replace Callendar Square and Camelon One Stop Shops and the Dawson Housing and Finance Office. The Camelon One Stop Shop lease expires in March 2018. It is proposed that the Counter Service at Camelon and Dawson is withdrawn in December 2017 and the enquiry services currently delivered there would be delivered on an outreach basis from Callendar Square until the Central Hub is in place.
- 6.4 Details on the exit strategy for the properties affected by these changes are provided in a separate report by Development Services as part of an update on the Strategic Asset Review.

West Hub

- 6.5 The West Advice Hub will be located in Denny. It is proposed that it will be located within Carronbank House, replacing the existing One Stop Shop. A refit of the existing premises is required to create the Hub. As part of this work we will explore the opportunity to use the Hub as the reception for all Council services within Carronbank House. The next stage is for Development Services to carry out detailed survey work on Carronbank House. This will provide information on the extent of work required to create the Advice Hub and improve public access to the building and the costs and timescales.
- 6.6 In addition to the West Hub, Multi-skilled Advisors from the Hub will provide an outreach service into surrounding areas and community locations. Libraries and other community locations will be used as outreach locations.

The timings and locations of the outreach service will be based on customer demand but is likely to will focus on Bonnybridge, Larbert/Stenhousemuir and Banknock.

- 6.7 The West Advice Hub will replace the One Stop Shops in Denny and Stenhousemuir and the Bonnybridge Finance Office. Details on future plans for these properties are provided by Development Services as part of an update on the Strategic Asset Review.

Implications

7. Financial

- 7.1 Capital funding of £380k has been allocated to cover fit out and set up of the West and Central Advice Hubs. An additional capital bid application was submitted for 2018/19 to cover the additional work needed should the Burgh Buildings premises prove to be the best location for the Central Hub.
- 7.2 Ongoing running costs for the Hubs will be covered by the budgets used to cover the existing One Stop Shops and other counter service locations, with any savings being returned to services for consideration under general budget planning.

8. Resources

- 8.1 No change to existing resources.

9. Legal

- 9.1 The legal implications of the property leases will be led by Development Services

10. Risk

- 10.1 Whilst any changes to services carry a degree of risk, the Advice and Support Hub has been in place in the East since December 2016 with no negative impacts.
- 10.2 There is a risk that we fail to identify a cost effective location for the Central Hub. However work with Development Services has identified several options within the town centre that could be used should the old Burgh Buildings prove to not be cost effective.

11. Equalities

- 11.1 An Initial Equalities and Poverty Impact Assessment has been undertaken for this project. No negative impacts were identified. Indeed the purpose of the Hub and outreach service is to improve services for the most vulnerable.

12. Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 12.1 We will consider sustainability and environment impact as part of the refurbishment of the properties for the West and Central Hub. Processes and procedures within the Hubs will work to Council sustainability principles such as electronic filing and only printing when required.
- 12.2 Promoting digital self service within the Hubs reduces printed material by taking applications directly into systems removing the need for paper application forms.

13. Conclusions

- 13.1 This report provides an update on the Advice and Support Hub and seeks approval to role this model out to the West and Central areas.

Director of Corporate and Housing Services

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Date: 15 September 2017

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Hub Performance

Appendix 2 – Footfall and Property Costs

List of Background Papers:

Local Advice and Support Hubs – Falkirk Council Executive, 15 March 2016

Advice Hub and Outreach Service

The Advice Hub and Outreach Service was launched in December 2016. This paper provides information on the service delivered at the Hub from January to August 2017.

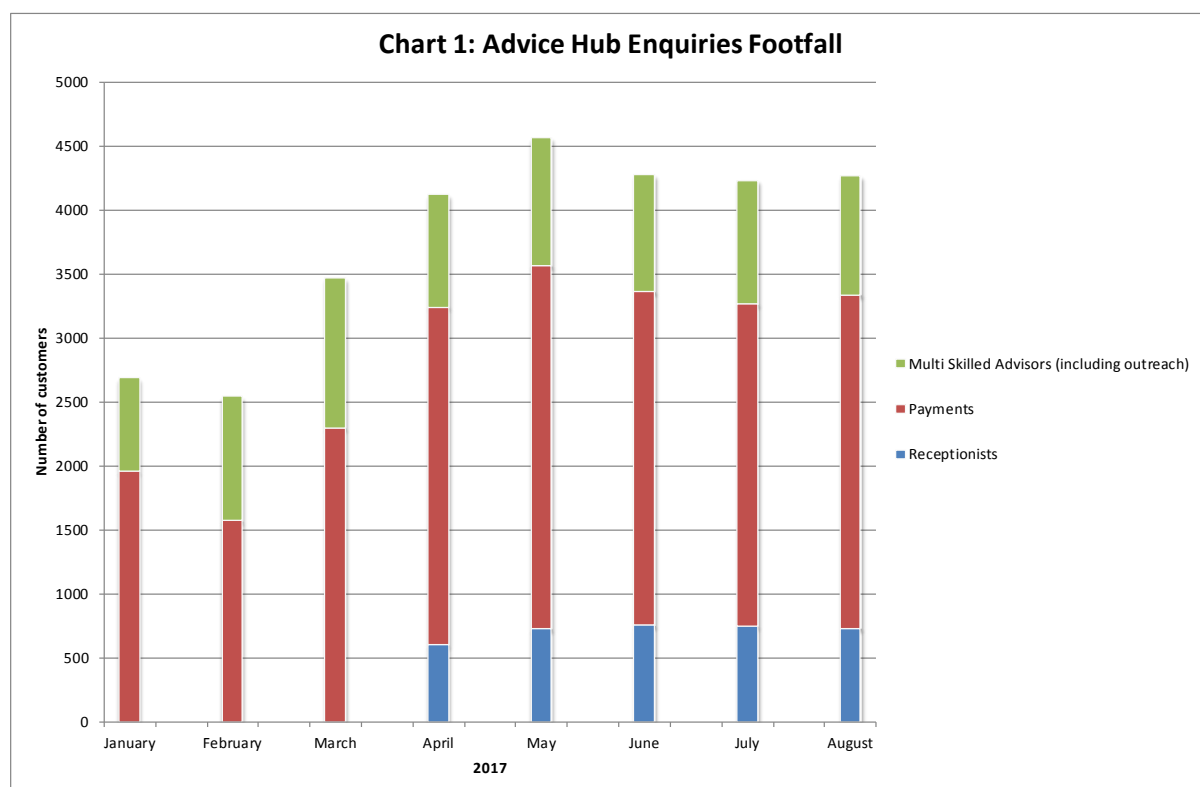
Customer feedback

Hub receptionists complete feedback surveys with a random sample of Hub and Outreach customers either by telephone or face to face. Of the 24 customers who provided feedback in the past three months, 16 were 'very satisfied' with the service they received and eight were 'satisfied', with no one selecting 'not satisfied'.

When asked for any comments, one customer said *"from start to finish staff very welcoming and knowledgeable. I like the meet and greet idea and I am not wasting time sitting in a wrong queue like before in the One Stop Shop."*

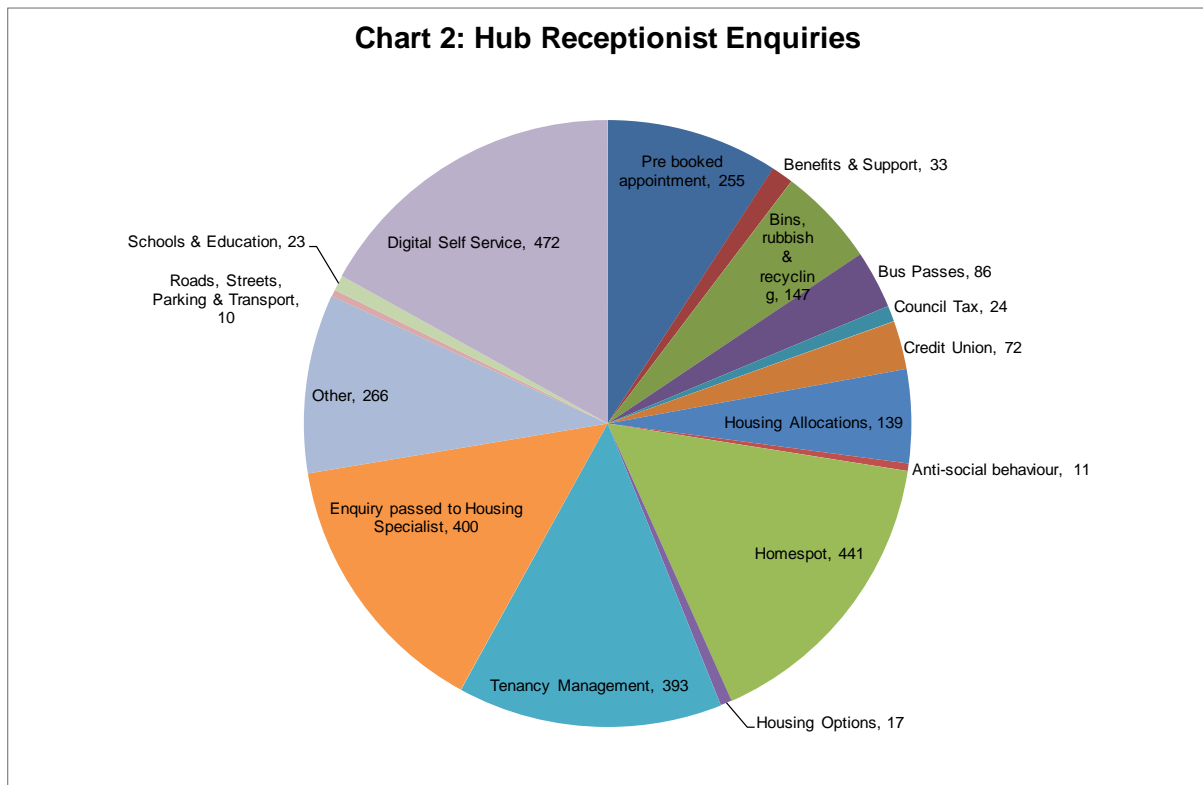
Advice Hub Footfall

Chart 1 shows the footfall into the Hub and outreach by month. Receptionist footfall was not recorded from January to March.



Types of Enquiries

Chart 2 shows the types of enquiries that the Hub Receptionists are handling in the Hub.



The above chart does not include payments, also handled by the Hub Receptionist. The number of payments by month is shown on Chart 1.

The 'other' category includes:

- blue badges
- dog poo bags
- pest control
- lock-ups
- planning and building standards
- law and licensing
- health and social care
- jobs, careers and training,
- births, deaths and marriages
- homes and property
- children and families
- buyback scheme

Chart 3 shows the types of enquiries that the Multi-skilled Advisors handle.

Chart 3: Multi-skilled Advisors Enquiries

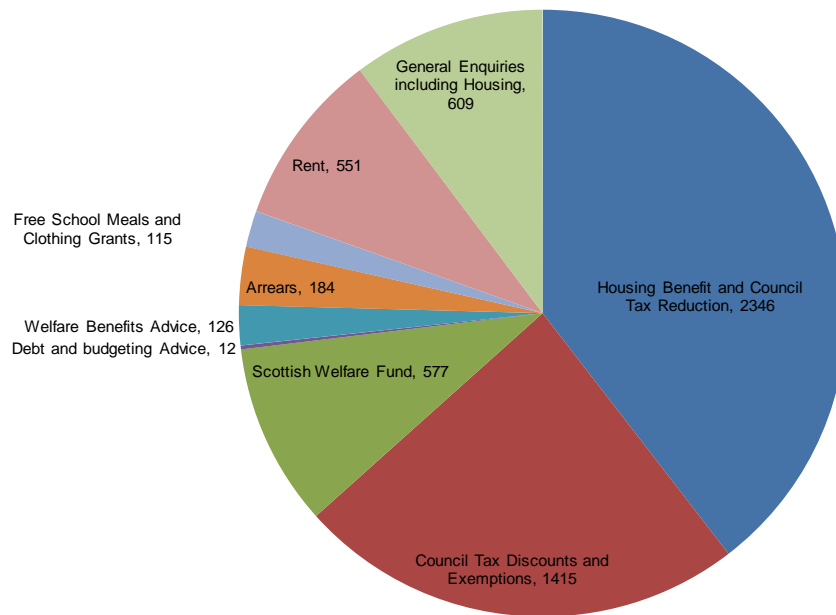
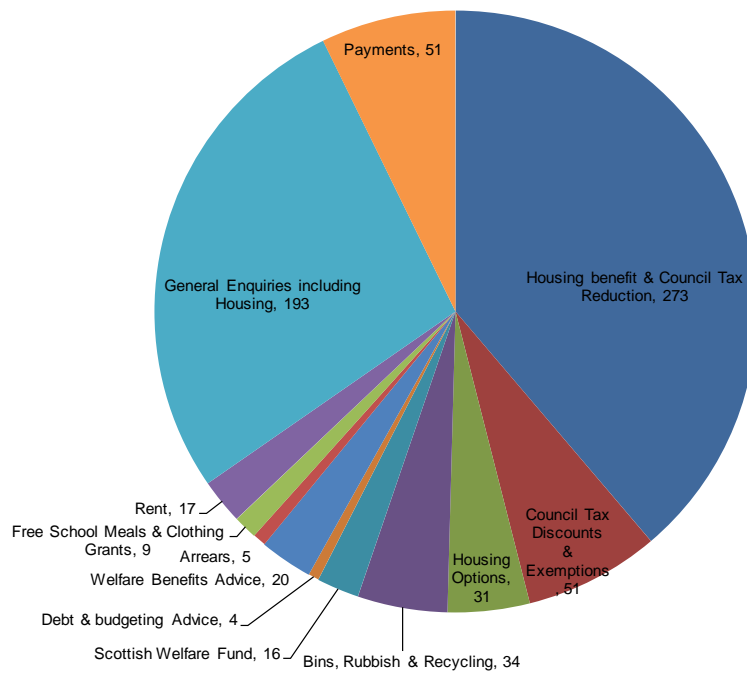


Chart 4 shows the types of enquiries that Multi-skilled Advisors handle at the outreach services.

Chart 4: Outreach Enquiries



Case Studies

Example 1

A customer dropped in to the outreach service at Weslo Housing Office, Bo'ness to check on a Housing Benefit overpayment. They got back in touch a week later for help completing a new Housing Benefit claim form and continued to drop in regularly for support.

Over the course of these visits the adviser learned the customer was recovering from mental health issues and was aiming to get back to work in the near future. As the customer became more trusting they revealed their mortgage was in substantial arrears and that they were in the process of returning the property to the bank. The adviser helped her apply for a crisis grant and food bank.

On a later visit the customer advised the food parcels had helped her immensely as she had not been eating well. Her new Housing Benefit claim has been processed and she has now started a phased return to her work.

Example 2

A tenant dropped in to the Hub, very upset and overwhelmed at the paperwork for her first Council tenancy. Her previous housing was a private let and she now needed to sort out her Housing Benefit, furniture for new property etc.

An adviser completed an application for a Community Care Grant to help tenant furnish her new property and a Discretionary Housing Payment. The tenant suffers from anxiety and subsequently dropped in regularly for reassurance that things are being dealt with.

The tenant has become comfortable with the adviser and asks for them in person every time she is in. She mentioned she would like to get back into work, and the adviser told her to get in touch when she felt ready to take this step.

A couple of months later the tenant got back in touch with the adviser to say she felt ready to consider taking steps to getting back to work. The adviser made an online referral to the Employment and Training Unit and is monitoring progress.

Example 3

A customer from Bo'ness with underlying mental health issues and had a history of failing to engage dropped in to the library outreach session. His benefits had been stopped as his health issues were not considered severe enough to stop him from working. He felt the opposite but did not have the necessary knowledge or

experience to appeal this decision on his own and had therefore had nil income for over a year.

The adviser helped him engage with Welfare Benefits to appeal the decision and request multiple crisis loans. The customer has received approx. £5,000 in backdated benefits.

Example 4

A customer called in with a council tax enquiry. The customer and her husband had recently moved to this area and English was their second language. The adviser explained what council tax was and how to pay, but also identified one of their children had special needs. The adviser made a welfare benefits referral to help them identify any additional entitlements due to their daughters needs and provided contact details for social work department so they could seek additional support.

The adviser also:

- referred the husband to the employment training unit as he was keen to start working
- helped with school placing requests
- provided information on how to register with a local doctor.

This was all able to be dealt with at the point of contact in the Hub.

Appendix 2

Falkirk Council Face to Face Service in West and Centre

Location	Services Provided	Annual Enquiries/ Transactions	Property Costs
Bonnybridge Finance Office	Payments Finance Office	12,553 1,539	£17,084
Callendar Square One Stop Shop	Customer First Payments Finance Office Housing Office	26,004 68,144 24,577 -	£273,320
Camelon One Stop Shop	Customer First Payments Housing Office	17,452 18,520 -	£115,007
Denny One Stop Shop (Carronbank House)	Customer First Payments Finance Office Housing Office	17,789 22,097 6,162 -	£52,906
Stenhousemuir One Stop Shop	Customer First Payments Finance Office Housing Office	20,451 25,546 7,801 -	£23,123
Dawson Centre	Housing Office Payments Finance Office	NA 6,691 2,080	£66,374

Property costs do not include staff costs and are split between the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.