

CABINET MEMBERS DELEGATED DECISION

Open/Exempt		Would any decisions proposed :		
Any especially affected Wards	Mandatory/	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide		<u>YES/NO</u>
	Discretionary /	Need to be recommendations to Council		<u>YES/NO</u>
	<u>Operational</u>	Is it a Key Decision		<u>YES/NO</u>
Lead Member: Cllr Kathy Mellish E-mail: cllr.Kathy.Mellish@west-norfolk.gov.uk		Other Cabinet Members consulted: Cllr B Long		
Lead Officer: Honor Howell E-mail: honor.howell@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial: 01553 616550		Other Members consulted:		
Other Officers consulted: Management Team, Extended Management Team				
Financial Implications <u>YES/NO</u>	Policy/Personnel Implications <u>YES/NO</u>	Statutory Implications <u>YES/NO</u>	Equal Impact Assessment <u>YES/NO</u> If YES: <u>Pre-screening/</u> Full Assessment	Risk Management Implications <u>YES/NO</u>
If not for publication, the paragraph(s) of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Local Government Act considered to justify that is (are) paragraph(s)				
Date meeting advertised: 24 th May 2017			Date of meeting decision to be taken: 1 st June 2017	
Deadline for Call-In: 8 th June 2017				

COUNCIL INFORMATION CENTRE OPENING TIMES

Summary

The Council Information Centre (CIC) operates the council's front-facing customer service function. The office opens at 8.45am – 5.15pm Monday – Thursday (except on a Wednesday when CIC Advisors are in training until 9.30am) and 8.45am – 4.45pm on a Friday. The opening hours are in line with office based staff contracted hours, which for a full time member of staff is 37 hours a week.

Traditionally, CIC Advisors have responded to telephone enquiries, operated the council's main reception service and switchboard function and dealt with face to face enquiries on a wide range of council services. However, with the introduction of more digital access channels for customers to use for enquiries and requests for service, the role of the CIC Advisor has changed considerably and this has occurred against a backdrop of reductions in staff numbers to contribute towards the councils efficiency savings programme.

Another driver for change is the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) occupation of the ground floor of King's Court. Customers of the Borough Council and the DWP will be using the same entrance and facilities. The DWP open their offices 9am-5pm and the proposed change will bring the council into line with the DWP so as to avoid customer confusion at different opening times for the two services.

Recommendation

That the Council Information Centre (main switchboard, telephone enquiry service and face to face function) is available to the public from 9am-5pm Monday to Thursday and 4.45pm on a Friday.

Reason for Decision

The reduction in opening hours will enable the CIC Advisors to have more time to deal with digital enquiries before the telephone enquiry and face to face service is available. This is also in line with the council's priority of encouraging customers to access our services online and reducing the volume of contacts made via more expensive channels such as telephone and face to face. The change will also bring the council's opening times in line with the DWP who will be occupying the ground floor of King's Court.

Background

The Council Information Centre (CIC) operates the council's front-facing customer service function at King's Court. The office opens at 8.45am – 5.15pm Monday to Thursday (except on a Wednesday when the CIC Advisors are in training until 9.30am) and 8.45am-4.45pm on a Friday. The opening hours are in line with office based staff contracted hours, which for a full time member of staff is 37 hours a week.

Traditionally, CIC Advisors have responded to telephone enquiries, operated the council's main reception service and switchboard function and dealt with face to face enquiries on a wide range of council services. However, with the introduction of more digital access channels for customers to use for enquiries and requests for service, the role of the CIC Advisor has changed considerably and this has occurred against a backdrop of reductions in staff numbers to contribute towards the council's efficiency savings programme.

As well as telephone calls and face to face enquiries, customers now use email, e-forms, web chat and social media to make their enquiries. As these access channels are fairly instantaneous, the customer expectations in respect of the speed of our response are high and it is becoming ever more challenging to meet these expectations. In the past, the telephone calls and personal visits have driven the workload of the CIC. This has changed immeasurably over the past few years with the workload being presented in many different ways but the times the telephone and face to face service are available has remained unchanged. This has resulted in an Advisor sometimes juggling many different tasks whilst responding to telephone calls.

As the advisors spend an average of 80% of their working day speaking to customers, it can be difficult for their supervisors to cascade important information to them and carry out training. The advisors also struggle to catch up with their work email and absorb the information in them due to the constant interruptions. The CIC carry out training each Wednesday morning from 8.45am – 9.30am but the telephone lines are still open so some advisors are not able to attend each week.

In order to enable CIC Advisors to have the time to carry out administration tasks and deal with digital enquiries before the office opens to the public, it is proposed that the time the telephone and face to face enquiry service is available is changed to 9am-5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am-4.45pm Friday. This will give advisors 15 minutes at the start and end of their working day to deal with emails, e-forms and complete any administration tasks which have arisen from customer enquiries.

The proposal will result in the main council telephone switchboard not being available until 9am and after 5pm. This equates to 30 minutes a day that staff will be at work, but the office is not open to the public. However, departments are able to promote their direct dial telephone numbers if they are expecting a telephone call before 9am or after 5pm. If a customer rings the council during this time, they will hear the out of hour's automated message. If the call is an emergency, they can telephone the out of hour's emergency number as they would do at any other time the offices are closed.

The current opening hours were implemented before the introduction of online services. Customers are now able to find information, make payments, carry out requests for service or find out information via the council's website 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In the near future, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) will be moving their services to King's Court and open 9am-5pm. Their customers will share an entrance with the council's customers; therefore it makes sense to match their opening times to avoid confusion.

Options Considered

Desktop research has shown that many councils have a standard opening hours of 9am-5pm. Some open for longer, some for less. Many have withdrawn face to face services altogether or close their telephone lines early one afternoon a week. It is felt that it is important that we offer the same opening times as the Department of Work and Pensions. These are standard office working hours and in line with customers general expectations.

Policy Implications

There are no policy implications.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications. The CIC is subject to ongoing cost reductions within the published efficiency plan. This proposal will help mitigate some of the impact of the resource reductions.

Personnel Implications

None

Statutory Considerations

None

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(Pre-screening report template attached). Full assessment not required

Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications

Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

There are none

Background Papers

None



Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment

Name of policy/service/function	Council Information Centre				
Is this a new or existing policy/ service/function?	Existing (delete as appropriate)				
Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened. Please state if this policy/service rigidly constrained by statutory obligations	Amend the opening hours of the Council Information Centre from 8.45am-5.15pm Monday to Thursday and 8.45am-4.45pm Friday to 9am-5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am-4.45pm Friday. Remove the late opening of the face to face service on a Wednesday for training which does cause confusion for customers (and internal staff)				
Question	Answer				
1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service? Please tick the relevant box for each group. NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age			x	
	Disability			x	
	Gender			x	
	Gender Re-assignment			x	
	Marriage/civil partnership			x	
	Pregnancy & maternity			x	
	Race			x	
	Religion or belief			x	
	Sexual orientation			x	
	Other (eg low income)			x	
Question	Answer	Comments			
2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?	Yes / No				
3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	Yes / No				
4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	Yes / No				
5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section	Yes / No	Actions:			
		Actions agreed by EWG member:			
Assessment completed by: Name	Honor Howell (Member of EWG)				
Job title : Assistant Director	Date 16th May 2017				

Please Note: If there are any positive or negative impacts identified in question 1, or there any 'yes' responses to questions 2 – 4 a full impact assessment will be required.