

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :		
Any especially affected Wards NONE	Mandatory	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide	NO	
		Need to be recommendations to Council	YES	
		Is it a Key Decision	NO	
Lead Member: Cllr Nick Daubney E-mail: cllr.nick.daubney@west-norfolk.gov.uk		Other Cabinet Members consulted: Cabinet Briefing, R & P Panel 29.9.15		
		Other Members consulted:		
Lead Officer: Honor Howell – CIC Manager E-mail: honor.howell@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial: 01553 616550		Other Officers consulted: Cllr Nick Daubney, Management Team, Ross Hefford, Vicki Hopps, Hannah Wood-Handy, David Parkin, Corporate Channel Shift Project Team, Corporate Equalities Group		
Financial Implications YES	Policy/Personnel Implications YES	Statutory Implications NO	Equal Impact Assessment YES If YES: Pre-screening / Full Assessment YES	Risk Management Implications NO

Date of meeting: 3rd November 2015

CHANNEL SHIFT & COUNCIL INFORMATION CENTRE

Summary

The Council has embarked on a channel shift programme which aims to reduce the cost of delivery of council services by shifting the channel used by customers to contact us to the most efficient and appropriate for that service.

Significant progress has been made in relation to the council's corporate channel shift project, resulting in:

- The launch of an online housing benefit and council tax support claim form
- Risk based verification for benefit applications
- Implementation of an interactive voice response system (IVR)
- 85% of planning applications are now made online
- Over 99% of council job applications are now made online
- Online Support Officers helping with assisted self-service
- 1,000's of online forms submitted

More digital services will be launched over the next few months.

The development and implementation of digital services, together with the need to make budget savings has resulted in a review of our existing model of service delivery with a view to managing demand for services.

The CIC offices at Kings Court, Downham Market and Hunstanton operate a walk in enquiry desk facility. 7 members of staff are needed on the ground

floor of Kings Court and one at each area office to respond to customer enquiries. These staff are required to be trained in every service offered so that they can respond to any enquiry which is presented.

With new technology and processes available online, the need for customers to visit the offices in person will reduce. There will not be a need to retain all enquiry counters but equally we need to provide a face-to-face service where this is the best option for that customer.

Recommendations:

Members:

- Agree the withdrawal of a drop in service for enquiries at Kings Court and to offer pre-booked appointments to customers who are unable to resolve their enquiry by telephone or online
- Agree to reduce the opening days at the Downham Market Office to 2 days per week (Monday and Friday)
- Agree to reduce the opening days at the Hunstanton Office to 2 days per week (Tuesday and Thursday)

Reason for Decision

To manage the demand for council services more effectively, provide an improved service for customers and ensure that resources are directed at the customers who, for a variety of reasons, may require a more personal service.

1. Background

The council has embarked on a channel shift programme. This aims to reduce the cost of delivery of a wide range of council services by shifting the channel used by customers to contact us to the most efficient and appropriate for that service.

With the development and implementation of digital services and the requirement to make significant budget savings, we need to review existing service provision and manage the demand on our services, which will inevitably increase over the next few years.

2. Current Provision

The Council Information Centre (CIC) offices at Kings Court, Valentine Road in Hunstanton and the Priory Centre in Downham Market currently operate a walk in enquiry desk where customers can visit any of the offices during opening hours and speak to a member of staff on the full range of council services.

The counter service at Kings Court's town centre location makes it convenient for customers to visit to make an enquiry or hand in documentation. Other

Norfolk authorities situated in less central locations do not experience the same volume of customer visits. 7 members of staff are required on the ground floor each day to cover the counters and reception. It is very difficult to predict the numbers of customers on any particular day along with the variances in the times they attend but some days are much busier than others and waiting times can very often exceed an hour and a half to speak to an advisor.

Staff are required to be trained in every service the council offers so they are able to respond to any customer enquiry which may be presented to them. This is challenging for the CIC to manage rotas, annual leave and sickness and often results in staff being moved between the Contact Centre and the Enquiry Counters during the day.

The numbers of customers visiting each of the CIC offices are detailed below:

Kings Court

Enquiry	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Reception*	12,556	27,592	23,615
General**	27,597	27,399	24,987
Planning & Licensing	3,879	4,454	5,975
Total	44,032	59,445	54,577

* Reception enquiries have risen due to the sale of caddy liners

** Enquiries for benefits, council tax, environmental health etc

Downham Market and Hunstanton Offices

14/15	No.	Benefits	Housing	Waste	Ctax	Other	TIC
Downham	10,008	24%	9%	34%	4%	22%	7%
Hunstanton	7,622	32%	9%	30%	7%	22%	N/A

Although the number of visitors to the council's main reception has increased, this is due to the sale of the food waste bags, introduced in 2013. Overall, general enquiries have reduced, although personal visits in relation to Planning and Licensing have increased

Kings Court has 6 counter positions (one is allocated for Planning and Licensing enquiries) and a reception desk, manned by a CIC Advisor and the CIC Floorwalker. Over recent months, following the launch of the online housing benefit and council tax support form, the CIC has reduced the number of staff behind the counters and have placed them in the CIC waiting area, with an iPad to encourage and assist customers to apply online with their assistance to avoid them waiting to see an advisor at the counter and completing a paper form. If the customer completes the online form, any supporting documentation (if required) can be photographed and the image uploaded with the claim. This change has seen a decline in the average number of tickets issued per week from 550 to 300.

3. Channel Shift – Progress to Date

Significant progress has been made in relation to the council's corporate channel shift project resulting in:

- The launch of an online housing benefit and council tax support claim form (a change in circumstances form is being tested)
- Risk based verification for benefit applications
- Implementation of an interactive voice response system (IVR)
- 85% of planning applications are now made online
- Over 99% of council job applications are now made online
- Online Support Officers helping with assisted self-service
- 1,000's of online forms submitted

Many customers visit Kings Court personally to hand in paperwork to support a claim for benefit or an application for Homechoice. In recent weeks we have introduced a 'Document Drop Box' for customers to leave paperwork without the need to take a ticket and see an advisor. The box is emptied twice daily and the documents scanned directly to the customer account and returned to them by post the same day.

4. Forthcoming Developments

Over the next few months, more improvements will be made to our digital services, including:

- A new, fully responsive design council website will be launched. This will be more task orientated
- Online benefit change in circumstance form
- Online Revenues forms (change of address, set up a direct debit, apply for a single occupier discount, apply for an exemption and report a change in circumstances)

- Launch of an online customer account enabling customers to view, submit and track service requests as well as viewing personalised account information
- Applications to join the housing register (Homechoice) will be available online
- The launch of an internal programme of service transformation encouraging all staff and managers to review their processes to assess what can be made available online to customers, where this is the most appropriate channel

5. Implications

Improvements to services available on the council's website along with plans to introduce more digital services in the near future mean that more and more customers are able to submit service requests and enquiries and find information online at a time convenient to them. Each of the CIC offices offers a self-service facility. The CIC in Kings Court has an Online Support Officer (OSO) available at all times to assist people using either the self-service pc's or an iPad which the OSO has with them at all times. This assistance is also available at the area offices.

With new technology and processes being available online, the requirement for people to visit the council offices will reduce. It isn't practical or commercially viable to keep 6 counters open and fully staffed if people are no longer using them, but equally we need to provide a face-to-face service where this is the best option for that individual customer.

6. Proposals and Recommendations

In order to continue to meet our customer needs but to realise savings and greater efficiencies from our digital services, it is proposed to cease the drop in service for enquiries at Kings Court and to offer customers who are unable to resolve their enquiry by telephone or online an appointment with a trained advisor who will be able to assist them with their enquiry at a pre-arranged time.

Introducing pre-booked appointments for customers would be a major change for the Borough Council but it is standard practice in most sectors. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), GP's, opticians, banks, hairdressers and most other services all operate appointment to manage the customer demand on services and to avoid customer waiting long periods of time to be seen.

An appointment system is intended to improve the service to customers. Currently, a customer could wait in excess of 1.5hrs to see an advisor at busy times. This is because it is impossible to predict the number and nature of enquiries we receive. Some enquiries are straightforward and will take just a few minutes. Others are complex, often with elderly or vulnerable people which require time to resolve. By providing the customers with an appointment at a time convenient to them, they can be assured that they will be seen at

their allotted appointment time and will not have to waste time waiting to be seen.

The main reception at Kings Court will continue to have two members of staff at all times, together with at least one Online Support Officer. They can resolve straightforward enquiries, signpost customers, help customers with self-service, receive deliveries, greet visitors, make appointments and continue to sell caddy liners as they do now.

Housing Options & Homelessness

Housing Options have a Duty Officer available to deal with customer enquiries. The customers firstly see a CIC Advisor who takes details of their situation and emails this information through to Housing Options with a request for them to see the customer. Introducing an appointment system would therefore not impact on this service as the customer would still see the Duty Officer if they need urgent advice. It is planned to introduce an appointment system for non-urgent enquiries but any enquiries of an urgent nature such as fleeing domestic violence would be seen as soon as the Duty Officer was available.

Planning & Licensing Enquiries

The introduction of the planning portal has reduced the requirement for customers to visit the office to view and comment on planning applications or to make a planning application.

As with Housing, the Planning Department have a Duty Planner available to respond to customer enquiries every weekday until 1pm. This will continue under the revised procedure but as with other services, if a customer wishes to speak to an advisor they will need to make an appointment.

Over the next few months, all applications for licences will be able to be made online. Again, other than handing in documentation, there are very few enquiries which cannot be resolved either online or on the telephone. It is therefore the intention to offer appointments for licensing enquiries.

Downham Market and Hunstanton Offices

The offices at Downham Market and Hunstanton have seen a decrease in the number of personal visits since 2011 when the cash offices at both offices were closed. This is not clearly represented in the number of visitors but this is heavily influenced by the sale of food waste liners which equate for at least 30% of transactions at both offices.

Both area offices are co-located with other public sector services. Downham Market office is located in the Priory Centre which is owned by Norfolk County Council, for which we have a 125 year lease. The library and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) are located in the same office. The Hunstanton office is located in Valentine House, which is a council asset. Some space is

also commercially let to Pay for Nannies, the DWP, Freebridge Community Housing and Social Services.

The DWP have reduced their opening hours at the Hunstanton and Downham Market offices as the service is available online. They now open at Downham Market on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday and Hunstanton on a Tuesday and Thursday. Their customers make an appointment to see an advisor on the days they are open. As the majority of enquiries made at the area offices (benefits, housing and council tax) are all online or will be in the very near future it is proposed to revise the opening times of the Downham Market and Hunstanton office to two days per week at both offices. A Monday and Friday at Downham Market and a Tuesday and Thursday at Hunstanton.

7. Context

The proposals made in respect of the delivery of service in the CIC's are linked directly to the following points:

- The increased use of online services and the customer's ability to self-serve
- Managing customer demand
- Channel management
- The need to make ongoing budget savings
- The availability of personalised customer information online
- Improving customer service
- Reducing wait times

By operating a drop in service, we are not managing the demand for our services effectively. At busy times a customer can have a long wait before speaking to a CIC Advisor. At other times, the CIC Advisors may be underutilised as there are no customers waiting. Introducing an appointment system would improve both these issues without reducing the service available to customers.

It is proposed to start the new arrangements from 1st April 2016, allowing time for a comprehensive communications plan to be put in place to advise customers, partners and stakeholders of the changes.

8. Policy Implications

There are no policy implications.

9. Financial Implications

As the channel shift and other transformation projects progress, it is anticipated that budget savings can and will be made. However, whilst we are in implementation phase and numbers of contacts have reduced as a result, it is difficult to be explicit in how much these savings can be.

As part of the online benefit forms and the online customer account (OneVu) the CIC has already committed to salary savings of one FTE per year for 16/17, 17/18 and 18/19. More efficiency will be possible from the introduction of an appointment system in the CIC's and this will be the subject of a further report in early 2016.

10. Personnel Implications

There are minimal personnel implications at Kings Court as staff are trained in the OSO and Contact Centre role and will work in these areas. In the area offices, the two members of staff located at Downham Market and Hunstanton office will continue to work at those offices on the days they are open and will relocate to Kings Court when they are closed. At the present time, the affected staff are supervisors but will become CIC Advisors as there won't be a need for extra supervisor cover. They will therefore be subject to the three year's salary protection procedure.

11. Statutory Implications

There are not statutory implications. We will continue to offer all statutory services.

12. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Attached at Appendix A

13. Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications.

14. Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

None

15. Background Papers

None