

Dear Councillor

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) -  
THURSDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2011**

I am now able to enclose for consideration at the above meeting the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

**Agenda Item  
No.**

**6. CUSTOMER SERVICES (Pages 1 - 12)**

To consider a report by the Head of Customer Services.

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# Agenda Item 6

## Overview & Scrutiny (Economic Well Being)

10 February 2011

### Customer Services in Ramsey & Yaxley Report by the Head of Customer Services

#### 1 Introduction

1.1 Cabinet (18<sup>th</sup> November 2010) resolved that Chief Officer's Management Team be authorised after consultation with the appropriate Executive Councillors to prepare and implement plans for changes and reductions in services to achieve targeted savings plans for 2011/2012 and future years. The savings proposals were partly based on the Simalto customer survey, which showed that access to services was not a priority.

1.2 Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 13 January 2011 proposed the following motion;

“The Panel has asked the Executive Councillor for Finance and Customer Services to take into account their proposals regarding options for the long term delivery of customer services during the decision making process on the future of the services including alternative methods of delivery, the possibility of using a roving officer funded from the existing Customer Service Centre budget and delivery through libraries, the post office and other mechanisms”.

1.3 Following this motion, the Head of Customer Services has reviewed the options, which are now presented for consideration.

#### 2 Proposed service provision

2.1 Our options relate to the level of staffing that we devote to each of the customer service centres. In essence we can devote between zero to three days of general customer service assistants time to each centre. This level of staffing is in addition to the specialist and visiting staff and partner organisations to each centre. The following Partner and specialist sessions are planned to continue. Some of the Yaxley service will be provided in the library.

	<b>Ramsey</b>	<b>Yaxley</b>
Monday	Connexions Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries Public meeting room	Computer Training Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries
Tuesday	Luminus Hunts Mind Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries Public meeting room	Luminus Street Representatives (every other Tuesday) Job Search Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries
Wednesday	CAB Public use PCs Transport enquiries	CAB – debt advice CAB – general Public use PCs

	<b>Ramsey</b>	<b>Yaxley</b>
	Tourism enquiries Public meeting room	Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries
Thursday	Housing Benefits (alternate Thursdays) Housing (alternate Thursdays) Cambs Child & Adolescent Substance Use Service (CASUS) Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries Public meeting room	Housing Benefits (alternate Thursdays) Housing (alternate Thursdays) CASUS HDC Councillors surgery (1 <sup>st</sup> Thursday) Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries
Friday	Library learning service – Beginners ICT courses Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries Public meeting room	Yaxley PC Surgery (1 <sup>st</sup> Friday) Public use PCs Transport enquiries Tourism enquiries

2.2 The main impact of removing a full time member of staff from Yaxley and Ramsey will be the removal of first hand assistance in filling in forms, copying evidence and reporting fly tipping & missed bins.

Last year, Yaxley also had many visitors in relation to Planning matters. The Great Haddon proposals relate to Peterborough City Council and there was a reaction to the Gypsy and traveller consultation, which is now completed. It would be our intention to that should similar peak load issues be encountered in the future these issues would be serviced by staff reallocated from other areas for the duration of the peak demand.

2.3 It is also proposed that HDC's involvement in arranging local events be reduced. This will affect events like Family Learning Week, Adult Learning Week, BBC Educational events etc.

### **3 Options and Issues**

#### **3.1 Staffing trade offs.**

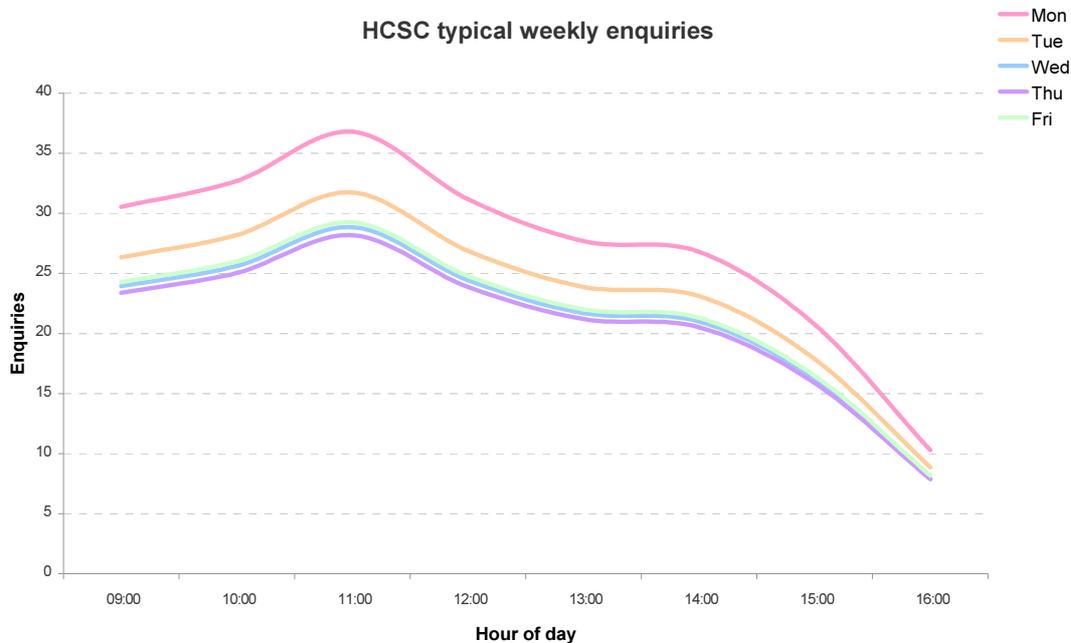
At its last meeting members of the Overview & Scrutiny panel suggested that staffing levels at Ramsey and Yaxley could be maintained by reducing staffing levels at St Neots and Huntingdon. This section explores the impact on each of those centres.

3.2 Overview & Scrutiny members suggested that staff be taken from Huntingdon to cover Ramsey and Yaxley. Unfortunately this is not possible as the graph below indicates that only in the afternoons towards the end of the week Huntingdon theoretically may be able to spare an advisor to staff Ramsey and Yaxley.

However, this is not recommended for the following reasons...

- The figures in the graph are current enquiries. However effective the actions taken to signpost customers away from Huntingdon for locations closing or with reduced opening times there will nevertheless be an increase in enquiries... for example St Ives customers travelling to Huntingdon as their nearest HDC office

- Staff will need to be taken away from the service counters for Benefits and Housing training over the coming months
- We currently have 95 hours per week (2.5 FTE) at Huntingdon that is funded by the DWP to handle extra Housing Benefit queries. These posts will disappear when the funding goes.
- The majority of extra enquiries at Huntingdon will be Housing and Housing Benefits. These enquiries are the most complex and take the longest time to deal with.
- If there is actual spare capacity because of full time contracts the better action would be to continue to move towards part time contracts that would allow higher staffing in mornings, lower in afternoons
- Huntingdon will have to pick up the data input work from St Neots if their hours reduce. This needs to be completed on a daily basis.
- Staff time spent travelling to Ramsey or Yaxley would eat into the time available to deal with customers and lead to a very short afternoon session at those offices.
- The visitor rate of up to 35 customers per hour in Huntingdon is far greater than that of Yaxley or Ramsey.



**3.3** Another option is to maintain a presence in Ramsey and Yaxley 2 days a Week by reducing staffing levels in St Neots.

This is a good option for the following reasons...

The charts at Appendix 1 show that staff at St Neots are sometimes under utilised in terms of customer contact. However, this time is filled by the staff inputting daily financial transactions (part of the old cashiers function, which still continues in the back office).

Consideration should be given to the fact that 4,000 new homes are due to be built in St Neots and this will impact on the number of customers using St Neots CSC. However, we have previously reviewed where customers travel from to access our services and found that very few customers from Loves Farm use the St Neots

customer service centre as many of them are buying homes or renting and do not seem to be customers that require our face-to-face services. We believe this may be the same for the new development but will of course continue to review this.

## **4 Shared Services**

### **4.1 Libraries**

- The libraries already offer a great many of the services provided by the Ramsey and Yaxley customer service centres. The main opportunity for the libraries to assist us with our service deliver is in Housing and Housing Benefits advice and evidence verification. The advantage of a shared service with the library service is that it may be available from a greater number of locations (libraries are currently located in Yaxley, Buckden, Ramsey, Sawtry, St Ives and well as St Neots and Huntingdon). Some of these libraries are under threat of closure and a shared service may have a small part to play in justifying their retention.
- The library service wanted £18,000 pa to handle scanning of documents for just 3,000 customers. In addition, they expected HDC to provide the hardware (scanner, computers etc) and meet the costs of them. There would be a huge training issue (and cost) to equip librarians or post office staff as customer service advisors, and there would be problems as these staff do not have access to our (HDC) IT systems.

### **4.2 Peterborough**

- Peterborough City Council are able to offer a housing benefit 'verification' service for HDC at a cost of £10k pa. This service may be convenient for any Huntingdonshire resident who has reason to travel to Peterborough in the normal course of their day.

### **4.3 Post office**

- The DWP are planning a national roll out of verification services from the Post Offices from 2013. The Post Office is not part of the Government's security standard (Government Connect) and so would be specifically excluded from accessing our systems even if the Council were to allow access in principle. As a result, it is not feasible to progress this further at the present time.

## **5 Other issues**

**5.1 Bus journeys** - Ramsey – Huntingdon Stagecoach route 30 every hour(ish) from 7.40 – 14.20 and takes approx 30 mins this costs £3.40 which is stagecoach's dayrider price which gives unlimited travel on stagecoach buses for the day.

Yaxley – Huntingdon stagecoach route 46 every hour(ish) from 7.58 – 16.08 and takes approx 48 mins this costs £3.40 which is stagecoach's dayrider price which gives unlimited travel on stagecoach buses for the day.

Yaxley – Ramsey. Need to go to Peterboro and change. Total time 45 minutes.

St Ives – Huntingdon. Several buses run all day, every 20 – 30 minutes. Journey time is 25 – 35 minutes (depending on route)

For more information go to CCC website. This timetables are valid until 9 Feb 11.

**5.2 HR Issues.** Although it is feasible to plan services to a timetable in six locations, there are many problems in terms of staffing, including location, contracted hours, covering for sickness and holidays, training and specialism (not all staff deliver all service types), travelling time etc. Some of the staff concerned have requested voluntary redundancy, and this will have to be finalised once members have decided on the scope of the service delivery required.

It is likely that, in the event of staff being absent from a particular location, that cover will not be able to be provided on every day that normal service usually is.

## 6 Future provision

Ramsey is secure as a location from which to provide services.

Yaxley – the lease expires July 2013. Members have asked that we consider future options beyond that date. This will depend on whether the Library has closed. If not, we can consider moving one or two days per week to there. Alternatively, we could consider the lease on the current premises or examine what other options are available in Yaxley at that time. Something for the service plan.

## 7 Budget proposals

7.1 The budget proposals that went to Cabinet on 18 November included the following proposals for the Customer Service Centres. Member should note that these proposals were designed to maximise the possible savings that could be made.

<b>18 November 2010 Cabinet</b>	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
# Close Yaxley Customer Service Centre	-35	-35	-55	-55	-55
# Close St Ives Customer Service Centre	0	-35	-43	-43	-43
# Close Ramsey Customer Service Centre	0	0	-45	-45	-45
# Close St Neots Customer Service Centre	0	-55	-55	-55	-55
<b>Total savings proposed</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-125</b>	<b>-198</b>	<b>-198</b>	<b>-198</b>

The total savings over the five year plan were £754,000

7.2 The figures have been revised for the Cabinet due on 17 February in preparation for the Council Tax setting on 23 February.

<b>17 February 2011 Cabinet</b>	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
# Reduce Yaxley Customer Service Centre costs	-35	-35	-55	-55	-55
# Reduce St Ives Customer Service Centre costs	-28	-28	-43	-43	-43
# Reduce Ramsey Customer Service Centre costs	-30	-42	-42	-37	-37
# Remove St Neots Customer Service Centre proposals	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total savings proposed</b>	<b>-93</b>	<b>-105</b>	<b>-140</b>	<b>-135</b>	<b>-135</b>

The total savings over the five year plan have been reduced to £608,000

The main changes are as follows;

- 1 Amend St Ives figure to reflect achievable saving, and bring forward one year
- 2 Amend Ramsey figure to reflect achievable saving, and bring forward two years
- 3 Remove cost savings proposed at St Neots

## 8 Revised proposals

8.1 The options to offer general customer services are as follows

	Number of days open for general enquiries		
	Current	Option A*	Option B*
Huntingdon	5	5	5
Ramsey	5	2	2
Yaxley	5	2	2
St Neots	5	5	3
St Ives	3	0	0
Call Centre	5	5	5
	<b>28</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>

	Full time equivalent staffing		
	Current	Option A*	Option B*
Huntingdon	13.32	12.52	13.32
Ramsey	0.76	0.38	0.38
Yaxley	0.95	0.38	0.38
St Neots	1.88	1.88	1.13
St Ives	1.22	0.00	0.00
Call Centre	13.20	13.20	13.20
	<b>31.33</b>	<b>28.36</b>	<b>28.41</b>

- \*Option A – move resource from Huntingdon to Ramsey & Yaxley
- \*Option B – move resource from St Neots to Ramsey & Yaxley

8.2 The impact of these changes will be

- Longer waiting times in Huntingdon CSC
- Longer waiting times at the Call Centre
- Customers will have to attend the satellite offices only on the days they are open
- Staff will be under greater pressure due to increased workloads, especially at the call centre around the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month
- The full amount of savings shown in the financial projection will not be achieved

Further information will be available at the meeting to provide data on some of these points.

8.3 It is not possible to fully calculate the extent of the costs of these changes as many staffing issues need to be resolved first. Contracted hours, location and

redundancy issues need to be discussed with the individuals concerned. However, it is proposed that the transition costs of implementation (around £20k pa for two years) will be met from the Redundancy special fund, thereby enabling the savings proposed in the budget paper for 17 February Cabinet to be realised.

## **9 Conclusions**

9.1 As mentioned within this report our options relate to the level of staffing that we devote to each customer service centre. We have explored the proposal to use a roving officer funded from the existing Customer Service Centre budget and delivery through other channels and come to the following conclusion.

9.2 Customers will have access to the same partner sessions, Housing and Housing Benefit surgeries as they have at present. With the closure of St Ives and reduced service in Ramsey and Yaxley to 2 days a week we would expect a significant increase in the number of customers using Huntingdon Customer Service Centre and the Call Centre so it isn't an option to take staff from either of these locations.

9.3 St Neots is under utilised at present which makes it a good option to reduce the opening hours to 3 days a week which in turn will partly fund the service delivery at Ramsey and Yaxley 2 days a week. New homes are due to be built in St Neots may have an impact on the Customer Service Centre but this will be monitored and reviewed.

9.4 Shared services with the library were explored to continue service provision to our customers but our findings are that this isn't an option due to IT, security, training issues and cost. Using Peterborough City Council to provide a Benefit verification service would work, but isn't necessary if Ramsey and Yaxley are staffed 2 days a week.

## **10 Local effect on service provision**

Ramsey – Most customers (85%) will continue to experience the same service provision as is. Only change is to staff 2 days a week rather than 5.

Yaxley – Most customers (69%) will continue to experience the same service provision as is. Only change is to staff 2 days a week rather than 5.

St Neots - Customers will continue to experience the same service provision as is. Only change is to staff 3 days a week rather than 5.

Huntingdon – will offer same services and absorb extra enquiries from other proposed changes. A deterioration in service levels can be expected.

St Ives – No HDC staff member will be available. We will however provide the same Housing Benefit surgeries. Travel time to Huntingdon is reasonable.

Call Centre – will handle more calls, especially payments, and a deterioration in service levels are expected

## **11 Recommendation**

It is recommended that;

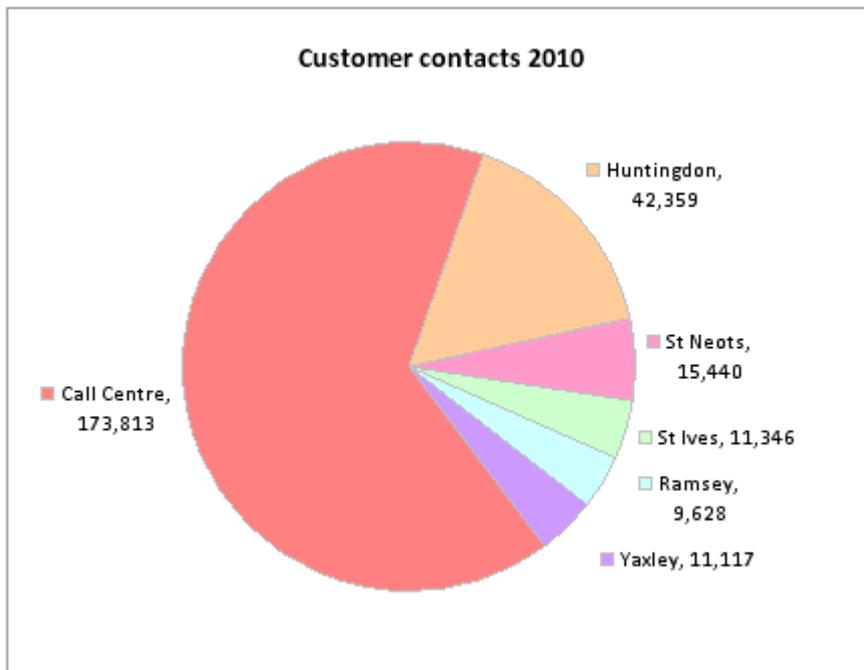
- 1 Members consider the options shown above and
- 2 The Head of Customer Services will review the impact of the changes to our customers after a year and consider options at that time.

Background papers Budget papers at Cabinet 18 November 2010

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Analysis of Customer Service provision

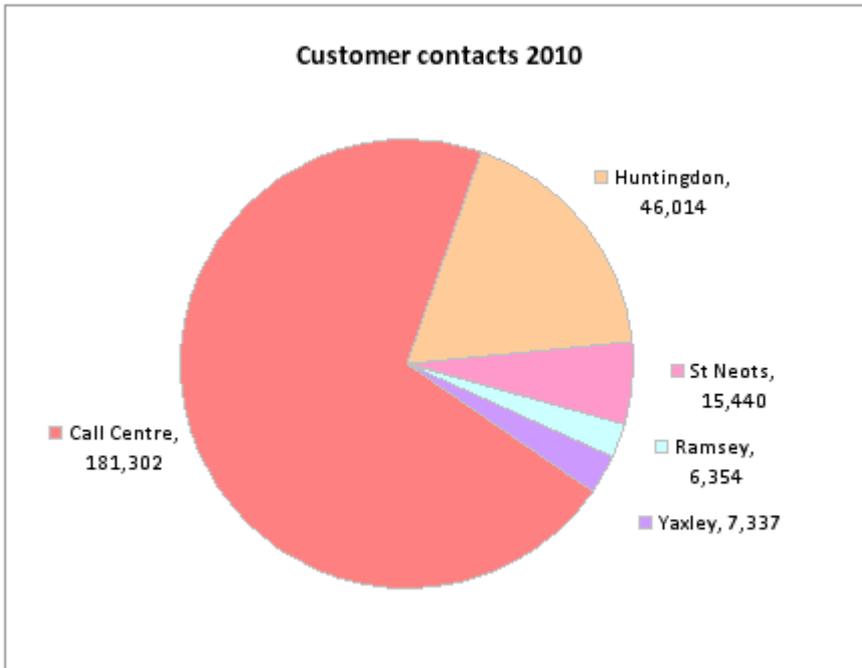
Current position



**RAG Score**

	Huntingdon	St Neots	St Ives	Ramsey	Yaxley	CCentre
Speed of response to customer enquiry?	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Availability of face to face services?	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
Main enquiries are key HDC services?	Green	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Green
Customer advisors fully utilised?	Green	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Green

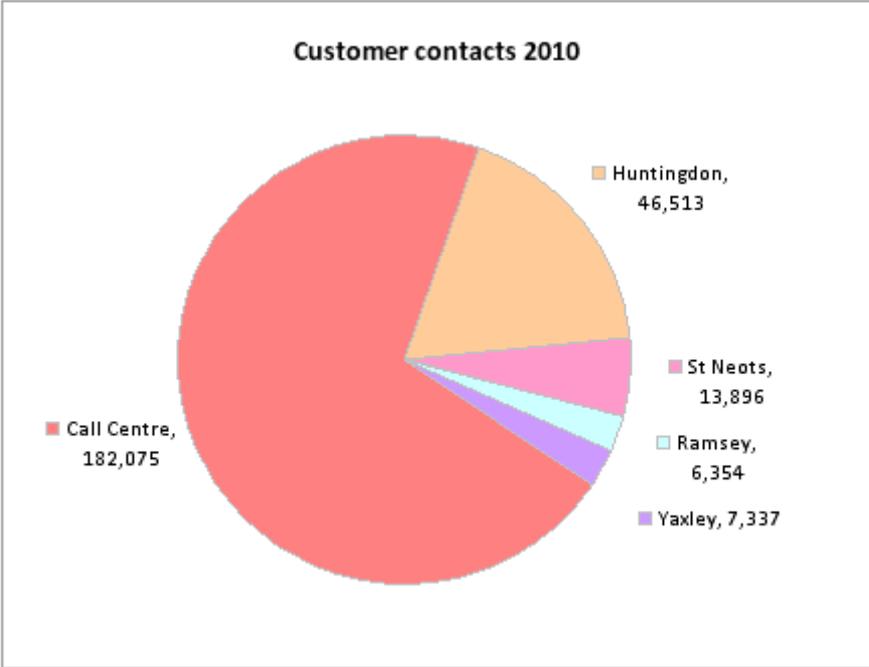
**Option A – Close St Ives, source 0.8fte from Huntingdon CSC for Ramsey/Yaxley**



**RAG Score**

	Huntingdon	St Neots	St Ives	Ramsey	Yaxley	CCentre
Speed of response to customer enquiry?	Red	Green		Orange	Orange	Orange
Availability of face to face services?	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Orange	
Main enquiries are key HDC services?	Green	Green		Red	Orange	Green
Customer advisors fully utilised?	Green	Orange		Green	Green	Green

**Option B – Close St Ives, source Ramsey & Yaxley 0.8fte by closing St Neots 2 days a week**



**RAG Score**

	Huntingdon	St Neots	St Ives	Ramsey	Yaxley	CCentre
Speed of response to customer enquiry?	Red	Green		Orange	Orange	Orange
Availability of face to face services?	Green	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	
Main enquiries are key HDC services?	Green	Green		Red	Orange	Green
Customer advisors fully utilised?	Green	Green		Green	Green	Green

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