

Public
Key Decision – No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: **Appointment Based Face to Face Services**

Meeting/Date: Overview & Scrutiny – 5th February 2026

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor Stephen Ferguson

Report by: Michelle Greet

Ward(s) affected: All or list individual Ward(s)

Executive Summary

Purpose & subject: This report reviews how we provide face-to-face customer service and the plan to pilot a move from walk-in access to an appointment-only model for in-person support.

Key benefits & links to strategy: The appointment model will help us match capacity to demand, provide more focused support for complex needs, and make better use of staff time, supporting a modern, efficient and sustainable customer offer.

Key issues & risks: Main risks are excluding customers who are digitally disadvantaged or creating confusion during transition. These will be mitigated through clear communications, accessible booking routes, and additional support at Pathfinder.

This report is to provide an update on the operational change and the reasons behind it. There will be a 6-month pilot starting in May 2026, to transition council customer service face-to-face support to appointment-only, with an Equality Impact Assessment and close monitoring of demand, customer experience and efficiency.

Resources / staffing: The pilot will be delivered within existing resources. If successful, the model could enable a reduction of up to 1 FTE over time through redeployment or natural turnover.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Customers & Partnerships) is invited to note the contents of the report.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 We want to ensure the way we deliver face-to-face customer service reflects how residents interact with the council today. While many residents now prefer to access services online or by phone, some still need or strongly prefer in-person support.
- 1.2 This report sets out a single approach: piloting an appointment-only model for face-to-face customer service, while retaining appropriate support for residents who need help accessing services digitally or by phone.

BACKGROUND

- Footfall has reduced significantly since Covid.
- Walk-in demand is uneven across the week, resulting in inefficient use of resources.
- Face-to-face is the highest-cost channel due to staffing, space, and time required per customer.
- We must protect access for customers who are digitally excluded or have complex needs, while also improving efficiency and value for money.

CURRENT SETUP: WALK-IN ACCESS ALL WEEK

- 1.3 We are currently open Monday to Friday, all day, for walk-in support. Customers can attend without an appointment for enquiries including Housing, Council Tax, Benefits, and general advice.

1.4 What works well

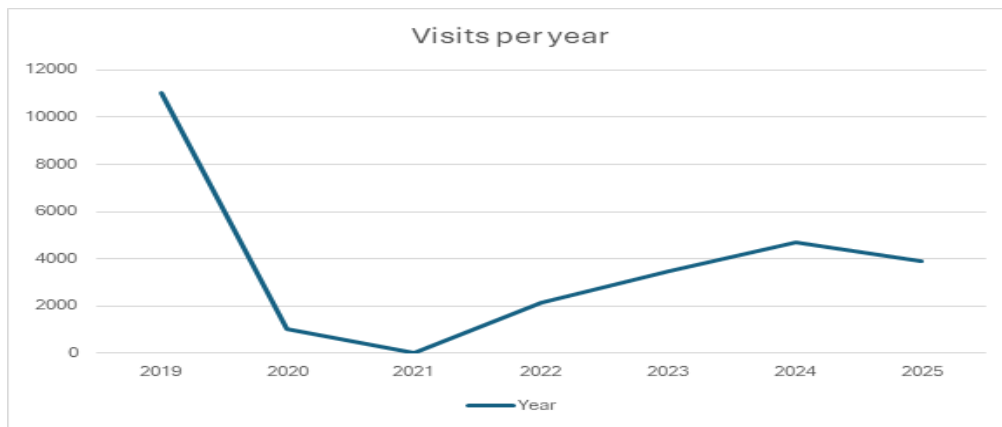
- Flexible access for residents
- Particularly helpful for customers who are less confident online
- Supports complex or sensitive queries

1.5 What are the challenges

- Inefficient use of resources - walk-in demand is inconsistent.

2. WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR

- 2.1 Customer footfall has reduced significantly; the table below summarises the trend;



- Around **40%** of customers supported at Reception are **not attending for an HDC service**
- **Mondays** and **Council Tax peak periods** are busiest
- **Fridays** and **midweek afternoons** tend to be very quiet

3. PROPOSED APPROACH: APPOINTMENT-ONLY MODEL (PILOT)

3.1 Customers that are unable to access services online or over the phone, will book a time slot to speak to someone in person.

3.2 Benefits

- Better matching of staffing to demand
- More planned, focused support for customers with complex needs
- Improved use of staff time and building space
- Supports wider channel shift while keeping a strong assisted offer

3.3 Key requirements for success

- Booking must be simple and accessible
- Clear guidance on what issues need an appointment vs can be resolved by phone/online
- Flexible handling for urgent, complex, or exceptional cases

4. SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS THROUGH THE CHANGE

4.1 To ensure the new approach remains inclusive and practical, we will introduce additional support at Pathfinder, including:

- A confidential phone line customers can use on site for sensitive or complex issues

- Supported digital access, with staff assistance to help residents complete online forms, set up accounts, upload evidence, and navigate key transactions
- Clear signposting and “warm handovers” to the right channel (phone, online, or booked appointment)

This will reduce barriers for digitally excluded residents and protect access for people who need extra support.

5. PEOPLE, EQUALITIES AND ACCESS

- 5.1 If the new model works well, it could allow us to reorganise the team and reduce staffing by up to 1 FTE over time through redeployment or natural turnover.
- 5.2 A full Equality Impact Assessment will be completed to ensure we do not exclude customers, particularly those who are digitally excluded, have disabilities, language barriers, or complex needs, and to confirm mitigations (including the Pathfinder support above).

6. KEEPING THE PANEL INFORMED

- 6.1 This paper is provided to keep the panel informed of an operational change to how face-to-face customer service will be delivered, and the reasons for the change.
- 6.2 In May 2026 we will proceed with a 6-month pilot to stop routine walk-in access for council customer service counters and transition to an appointment-only model for face-to-face support, with strengthened assisted access at Pathfinder (including a confidential phone line and supported digital use).
- 6.3 We will monitor demand, customer experience, equality impacts and efficiency throughout the trial, and will report back to the panel at the end of the pilot with findings, lessons learned and recommended next steps.

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