

**EXPANSION OF CUSTOMER SERVICES IN ST IVES AND ST NEOTS**  
**REPORT BY HEAD OF REVENUE SERVICES**

**1 PURPOSE**

1.1 This report seeks to advise members of the proposal to re-badge the cash offices as Customer Service Centres, and to expand the range of services on offer at St Ives and St Neots.

**2 BACKGROUND**

2.1 Members approved the Customer Service Strategy in 2003, which demonstrated that people would like to access services where it is convenient to them.

2.2 Following the approval of this strategy, Members approved the establishment of a customer service centre in Huntingdon as part of the Customer First programme. This centre is due to go live in the summer of 2007. The changes in working practice that are being implemented at Huntingdon have highlighted the possibility of expanding the service we offer at the satellite offices.

2.3 The customer service centre will absorb the duties of the cashiers, so that customers have a single point of contact for both enquiries and payments. Work is under way to establish the new service, and staff will transfer to the new service from their current roles. This transfer will include the cashiers at St Ives and St Neots.

**3 CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION**

3.1 It is fair to say that the cash offices in St Ives and St Neots already offer a wider service to their customers than handling payments. The range of services provided includes;

- Payments Handling
- Housing Benefit Verification and Scanning
- General enquiries and referrals for most council services
- Administration and issuing of bus passes
- input to E-Financials of parking ticket information of excess charges
- Mailing out of Housing Benefit letters
- Administration and issuing of rail passes
- Issue of dog waste disposal bags
- Electricity payment cards for mobile home park (St Neots)
- Telephone payments (now mostly transferred to the call centre)

3.2 One of the main services provided by the cash offices is the verification and scanning of the Housing Benefit documents. Before we installed the Anite Electronic Document Management system at these remote sites, any paperwork for Benefits was sent each day by post to Pathfinder House. Now, these documents are scanned immediately and become available to the assessment team at PFH.

3.3 This is a vital service that directly contributes to the speed of processing of benefit claims and the safety and security of customers' documents. For this service alone, St Ives see over 600 benefits visitors per year, and take over 8,000 scans of benefits information. St Neots see 2,000 visitors per year, and take 30,000 scans of benefit information. Without these services, customers would have to travel to Huntingdon or send valuable paperwork through the post.

3.4 At present, we have a purpose built cash offices in the Priory Centre and St Ives town hall. Offering an open plan style of premises would be conducive towards moving towards a customer service centred environment. St Neots town council are keen to revise the layout of the Priory Centre to increase office space and provide one service counter for all customers. A separate project (led by the town council) is being developed on this.

## **4 GROWING SUCCESS**

4.1 In considering how we could develop our presence in St Neots and St Ives the following aims from Growing Success are considered.

### **Access**

Enabling people to have access to services. Whilst it is particularly important to residents who need to claim benefits or who wish to pay their council tax instalments directly to the council to be able to have an office near to their home other customers may also benefit from a broader range of service provision from these offices.

### **Carbon Emissions**

By providing essential face to face services in the main market towns, the Council will contribute towards the reduction of carbon emissions by reducing the number of journeys by car bus to Huntingdon.

### **Sustainable Communities**

Promoting the development of sustainable communities by bringing people into these towns and villages to carry out their council business, they are likely to use the shops and other facilities available in the towns

## **5 PROPOSED SERVICE PROVISION**

5.1 The service provided by the satellite offices will be as now (as per Paragraph 3.1 above) and will be expanded by the introduction of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This will enable the customer service centres to handle the same range of services as the call centre (see Appendix A).

5.2 The satellite offices will not be as fully able as Huntingdon to provide a comprehensive service where Huntingdon relies on back office support – for example

homelessness matters and viewing Planning documents. The physical location of either service support or paperwork will enforce some restrictions. However, where IT access is enabled, customers in the market towns will receive a greater range of services than they do now. It is also hoped that space will be available to allow officers from Huntingdon to work at the Customer Service Centres, for example Housing Benefit assessors, when required.

## **6 FINANCIAL**

6.1 Most of the costs involved with setting up the CSC in Huntingdon have already been approved by Members as part of the Customer First and New Headquarters programmes. This paper therefore only highlights the additional costs of establishing St Ives and St Neots as satellite offices of the Customer Service Centre.

6.2 No account has been taken of communications or advertising costs. Such costs will be met from existing budgets.

6.3 To convert St Neots and St Ives Cash Offices to Customer Service Centres there will be additional costs over and above those already approved for Huntingdon. Specifically, the installation of the Customer Relationship Management System to two additional sites will be £4,000, which will be met from additional underspends and savings.

## **7 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that

- Members note the approach to developing the Customer Service team and approve the change in name of the cash offices at St Ives and St Neots

Contact officer

Julia Barber  
Head of Revenues Services  
01480 388105

## Appendix A

Services currently provided by the Call Centre that would be available to CSC staff via the CRM system

- Request or remove Bin or bags
- Notify missed collection
- Order bulky collection
- Street cleansing
- Grounds and Trees
- Change of Address
- Assisted rubbish collection request
- Clinical collection request
- Street name plates problem reporting
- Change of name
- Various other Streetscene issues

In addition to these service requests the call centre also log quick queries when we provide the customer with the information or correct number to call. There is quite an extensive list for the quick queries which include:

- Car Parks
- Dogs
- Electoral Registration
- Housing - Home energy advice
- Pest Control
- Planning
- Streetscene - inc - Assets, Domestic refuse, Recycling, Street cleansing and Trade waste
- Land Charges
- Other HDC department information
- Other non HDC - including CCC, Highways, Luminous group, recycling centres etc.