Overview & Scrutiny (Service Delivery) **2 December 2008**

Cabinet **18 December 2008**

Customer Services in St Ives and St Neots

(Report by Head of Customer Services)

1. Introduction

1.1 Members will recall that Cabinet at its meeting on 22 February 2007 approved the change in role of the former cash offices in St Ives and St Neots to satellite customer service centres. Since then, the new Customer Service Team has been established, consisting of all front line face-to-face services and the Call Centre, now managed under one Head of Service in accordance with the Customer Service Strategy approved by Members in February 2008.

1.2 Part of the Customer Service Strategy required officers to review services being delivered by the St Ives and St Neots Customer Service Centres. This report summarises the findings of a study by the Customer Service Manager and contains recommendations arising from the study.

2. Background

2.1 At present HDC offer a limited range of services from our existing Customer Service Centres.

2.2 Customers who require more than the limited range of services we provide in these two areas have to travel to Huntingdon to access them.

2.3 In St Neots the Customer Service Centre is in the Priory Centre and HDC also have a Tourist Information Centre in the Museum. Both locations have no High Street presence. This means that attracting new customers is difficult and customers are unsure of how to find the service centre.

2.4 In St Ives, a similar problem exists. Our Customer Service Centre is in the Town Hall, which is rather small and due to it being a listed building and in a conservation area means we are unable to apply any branding to the Centre.

2.5 In Huntingdon, Ramsey and Yaxley we provide an excellent range of services in one place tailored to the needs of those local communities. We have a successful presence with big shop windows promoting the range of services that customers can expect to receive which is very eye catching and encourages people to go in, as well as raising HDC’s profile within those communities. The latest satisfaction surveys show that 99% of customers in Ramsey and Yaxley and 86% in Huntingdon rate the service as good or excellent. We have limited data on customer satisfaction in St Ives and St Neots as there are fewer customers using the service.

3. Results of the research

3.1 Customer needs and expectations should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure we are continuously improving the delivery of customer services In order to gain an insight into our customers we have analysed a range of information from surveys, staff consultation and customer profiling to establish if there is a need to change and our findings are as follows.

3.2 Our existing St Neots & St Ives Customer Service Centres service mainly recurrent users. They experience few customers coming in for a first time. As time moves on we can therefore expect the number of users to steadily decline unless we can make our services more relevant to more people. Our intended audience for the suggested improvements are:

- Benefit and Housing customers currently travelling to Huntingdon to access these services. This is estimated to be 3500 - 4000 customers each year from the survey conducted at the Huntingdon Customer Service Centre. (See Annex B).

- Older or less affluent customers who have a greater preference for services to be delivered face to face. The customer profiling data suggests this customer type accounts for approximately 5000 households across St Ives and St Neots. (See Annex C).

3.3 The services they would like to see locally:

- Housing and Benefit advice
- What's on & Tourism East Anglia advice
- Information regarding Planning applications
- The opportunity to speak to Councillors
- Local campaigns to support recycling, how to stay active, safety, money/debt advice
- Work with local partners such as Citizens Advice
- Transport information.

(See Annex A – for the full survey results)

4. Summary of the proposal

4.1 In order to address our customer's demands we propose:

- To enable more Customer Service staff trained in housing and benefits to operate from St Neots & St Ives.

- To merge the tourist information work currently delivered by district council staff located at the St Neots Museum into each of the 5 customer service centres.

- Further develop the cross skilling of staff in our customer service centres to address the broader range of services proposed.

- To further the issue of Councillors Surgeries to the relevant Member Working Group.

4.2 This may require some further remodelling of the offices in St Neots & St Ives both of which are less than ideal. We should also investigate an alternative location – approximately 85% of the customers surveyed in St Ives and St Neots would like a central location for the Customer Service Centre. (See Annex A) A separate paper will be developed later should it prove advantageous to relocate these offices to other locations in the centre of St Neots & St Ives.

4.3 Whilst considering alternative locations we will have regard to a number of criteria concerning the way we will deliver face-to-face services. These are:

- Services will be located on the ground floor with wheelchair and pushchair access.

- Separate rooms will be provided for confidential meetings or interviews with customers. Back office specialists will also be able to use these facilities to speak privately with customers.

- Opening times – We would initially like to open for our existing opening times but conduct further consultation to see if there is a customer demand to open for more days, out of hours and Saturday mornings.

- Timescales – Realistic timescales to find appropriate premises to deliver the services required and fit out with the relevant technology would mean that this should be able to happen within two years (subject to suitable premises and funding being identified).

5. Staffing implications

5.1 Due to the increased number of services that will be offered it is possible the job description for a number of staff would change. This will require support from the HR team and involve consultation with the appropriate staff and ELAG. Depending upon the extent of the changes we may also require the approval of the Employment Panel.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 We do not anticipate any additional costs as a result of increasing the range of services delivered at our existing St Neots & St Ives Customer Service Centres.

6.2 The relocation of staff from the St Neots Museum will result in a saving of the annual rental of that unit however this is likely to be offset by the cost of either remodelling the existing St Neots Customer Service Centre or relocating to another site.

6.3 Any proposal to relocate the Customer Service Centres will be subject to a detailed financial appraisal at that time.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Increasing the range of services would:

- Improve access to services for approx 32,000 residents in and around St Ives and St Neots. We could expect to see at **least** 4,000 customers across these sites each month.
- Enable partnership working to deal with more customer queries in one place and improve access to services.
- Improve customer service and customer satisfaction.
- Improve the reputation of the Council through a more visible presence.
- Reduce the number of journeys to Huntingdon by approximately 4,350 each year. (This number represents the customers currently travelling from St Ives and St Neots to Huntingdon.)

7.2 In the short-term, some progress towards these objectives can be made from existing premises. In addition, further opportunities may arise to relocate to more efficient premises, subject to a more detailed business plan.

7.3 Cabinet should note that the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny (Service Delivery) Panel requested that the third recommendation (below) be amended to include a requirement for the Director of Commerce & Technology to consult relevant Ward Members when considering alternative accommodation.

8 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is therefore recommended that:

- Cabinet note the proposed increased range of services in St Ives and St Neots.
- Cabinet approve in principle to the relocation of the St Neots Tourist Information Centre, merging staff into the main customer service team. What's on information will be provided by the teams in all six customer service locations.
- Cabinet approve the investigation of alternative accommodation in St Neots and St Ives with delegated authority given to the Director of Commerce & Technology in conjunction with the Executive Councillor for Customer Service to complete the move subject to the normal budgetary considerations.

Background Information

Survey Results – St Ives & St Neots
Mosaic Data analysis – St Ives & St Neots

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Appendices

Annex A – Survey results

Using the opportunity to survey local people about their current use and future aspirations for a Customer Service Centre in St Ives and St Neots a survey was designed and sent to a random selection of 6000 customers in and around these areas. Over 1,600 responses were received and the findings are set out below.

A total of 1051 responses were received from St Ives area

A total of 599 responses were received from St Neots area

Section 1 – The location of the Customer Service Centre

84.9% of respondents would like the premises to be in the centre of **St Ives**

84.5 % of respondents would like the premises to be in the centre of **St Neots**

Section 2 – Services required

St Ives

The most popular services requested to be part of the customer service centre scoring 40% or more were:

Local Information	73.5%
Citizens Advice Bureau	73.5%
Bus/ Rail pass enquiries	71.1%
Transport information	70.7%
Police issues	58.8%
Recycling/Green Waste and refuse	58.2%
Health information	52.2%
Planning issues	46.1%
Leisure/Tourism information	45.4%
District Councillors surgery	44.1%
Council Tax and Housing Benefits	43.7%

Ethnicity

46% of respondents were White British
Less than 1% of respondents were from other Ethnic backgrounds
Over 50% of respondents chose not to say

Age Group

18 – 25	1.2%
26 – 35	3.3%
36 – 45	10.7%
46 – 55	11%
56 – 65	17%
Over 65	33.6%

Annex A – Survey results

23.2% chose not to say

Employment status

Full Time Employed	20%
Part Time Employed	2.7%
Self Employed	2.2%
Full Time Education	0.2%
Unemployed	1.7%
Permanently sick	0.3%
Retired	23.5%
Looking after the home	0.7%

48.7% chose not to say

Section 2 – Services required

St Neots

The most popular services requested to be part of the customer service centre scoring 40% or more were:

Citizens Advice Bureau	72.6%
Local Information	71.1%
Transport information	69.1%
Bus/ Rail pass enquiries	63.3%
Recycling/Green Waste and refuse	62.9%
Health information	55.8%
Police issues	54.9%
Leisure/Tourism information	49.9%
Council Tax and Housing Benefits	48.1
District Councillors surgery	40.1%
Planning issues	40%

Ethnicity

46.9% of respondents were White British
Just over 1% of respondents were from other Ethnic backgrounds
Just over 50% of respondents chose not to say

Age Group

18 – 25	0%
26 – 35	0.8%

36 – 45	4.1%
46 – 55	10.8%
56 – 65	19.8%
Over 65	41.1%

Annex A – Survey results

23.4% chose not to say

Employment status

Full Time Employed	13.3%
Part Time Employed	3.8%
Self Employed	2 %
Full Time Education	0 %
Unemployed	0.8%
Permanently sick	0.5%
Retired	30.4%
Looking after the home	0.7%

48.5% chose not to say

Survey summary

The majority of responses were received from Retired resident over 65 and those in Full time employment aged 46 – 65 in St Neots and 36 – 65 in St Ives. Of the responses we received about ethnicity in both areas the majority of responses were from White British residents and only around 1% from other Ethnic backgrounds.

In both St Ives and St Neots a high percentage of responses (over 40%) highlighted a need for local provision of more services provided by HDC, e.g. benefits, planning, council tax queries, refuse queries, district councillor surgeries, bus and rail pass enquiries and other local information.

It also highlighted that residents would like a local presence for services provided by other organisations representing a great opportunity for partnership working. In particular a high percentage of responses (over 50%) were interested in police issues, health information, transport information and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Conclusion

These survey results in conjunction with other research provides a good starting point for the range of services to be offered locally in St Ives and St Neots but this would need to be reviewed to ensure we are always meeting the needs of the community. The survey only accounts for the opinions of 0.5% of the community in and around St Ives and St Neots and for this reason we have not used these results alone to base our recommendations for improvements.

Annex B – Visitor Survey

Throughout the month of August 2008, staff from the Huntingdon Customer Service Centre recorded the number of customers travelling from St Ives and St Neots to get an indication of how many journeys could be saved by providing more services into these areas.

The table below shows the results of Huntingdon customers who were asked where they travelled from for the month of August. Not all customers were asked.

	Huntingdon	St Neots	%	St Ives	%
Service					
Payments	221	14	6	26	12
Housing	185	30	16	24	13
Planning	10	1	10	2	20
Self serve PC's	42			1	
Other callers	40	3	7.5	2	5
Benefits	716	70	10	190	26.5
Totals	1214	118	10%	245	20%

By conducting this research we have learnt that as many as 10% of customers had travelled from the St Neots area and 20% from the St Ives area. If this were the case for a whole year it would lead to approximately 1,400 customers travelling from St Neots and approx 2,950 customers travelling from St Ives.

The table above also highlights that a small percentage of customers travel from St Ives and St Neots to make payments when this is a facility available already these areas but this could be for the following reasons:

- Due to our current location customers are not aware of the presence of the Customer Service Centre in these locations and the services provided.
- They were in Huntingdon for other reasons and it was more convenient to use that Customer Service Centre.
- Due to St Ives Customer Service Centre only open 3 days per week.

Staff members in St Ives and St Neots have worked in these locations for many years and offered information regarding the areas for improvement for the areas based upon their experience. They highlighted the following:

- A need for a Benefits officer to work from St Ives and St Neots on set days each week.
- There is no job centre in either location at present and they believe if we could work in partnership with the job centre this would be a real asset to the community.
- Customers are often unsure if they are in the right place and they see very few new customers, as few as 2-3 each working day.

Conclusion

The results above highlight a great opportunity to reduce the number of journeys to Huntingdon and improve access to services for at least 2,950 customers each year by adding Housing and Benefit services to the range of services provided in St Ives and St Neots.

It is clear from the staff consultation that having a Benefits service locally has been something that customers had been requesting for some time. The small number of new visitors suggests that we should review our location and presence.

Annex C - Mosaic background information

In addition to the customer and staff consultation we have also used customer-profiling data from a company called Experian who specialise in using a range of data to effectively profile customers. We have used this data to give us an insight into the types of customers that prefer to use face-to-face services.

Mosaic Public Sector Data Sources

54% of the data used to build Mosaic is sourced from the 2001 Census. The remaining 46% is derived from their Customer Segmentation Database. It includes the edited Electoral Roll, Experian Lifestyle Survey information and Consumer Credit Activity, alongside Post Office Address File, Shareholders Register, House Price and Council Tax information. All of this information is updated annually.

Qualitative research was also undertaken covering the whole of the UK. This validated the accuracy of Mosaic ‘on the ground’. Experian employed a number of the UK’s leading experts in the field of consumer psychology, human geography and economics to interpret the classification.

This research also links to a number of authoritative sources of the market research, including BMRB’s Target Group Index (TGI), The British Crime Survey, MORI’s Financial Research, The Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS), Forrester’s Techno graphics and Internet User Monitor, the English and Welsh index of Multiple Deprivation, National Pupil Database, Health Survey for England and Hospital Episode Statistics.

Mosaic Public Sector classifies all citizens in the United Kingdom by allocating them to one of 61 Types and 11 Groups. The Groups and Types in these profiles paint a rich picture of UK citizens in terms of their socio-economic and socio-cultural behaviour.

Annex C - Mosaic background information

mosaic™
Public Sector

Mosaic Public Sector Descriptions

A

Type 1 Financially successful people living in smart flats in cosmopolitan inner city locations
Type 2 Highly educated senior professionals, many working in the media, politics and law
Type 3 Successful managers living in very large houses in outer suburban locations
Type 4 Financially secure couples, many close to retirement, living in sought after suburbs
Type 5 Senior professionals and managers living in the suburbs of major regional centres
Type 6 Successful, high earning couples with new jobs in areas of growing high tech employment
Type 7 Well paid executives living in individually designed homes in rural environments

B

Type 8 Families and singles living in developments built since 2001
Type 9 Well qualified couples typically starting a family on a recently built private estate
Type 10Financially better off families living in relatively spacious modern private estates
Type 11Dual income families on intermediate incomes living on modern estates
Type 12Middle income families with children living in estates of modern private homes
Type 13First generation owner occupiers, many with large amounts of consumer debt
Type 14Military personnel living in purpose built accommodation

C

Type 15 Senior white collar workers many on the verge of a financially secure retirement
Type 16 Low density private estates, now with self reliant couples approaching retirement
Type 17 Small business proprietors living in low density estates in smaller communities
Type 18 Inter war suburbs many with less strong cohesion than they originally had
Type 19 Singles and childless couples increasingly taking over attractive older suburbs
Type 20 Suburbs sought after by the more successful members of the Asian community

D

Type 21 Mixed communities of urban residents living in well built early 20th century housing
Type 22 Comfortably off manual workers living in spacious but inexpensive private houses
Type 23 Owners of affordable terraces built to house 19th century heavy industrial workers
Type 24 Low income families living in cramped Victorian terraced housing in inner city locations
Type 25 Centres of small market towns and resorts containing many hostels and refuges
Type 26 Communities of lowly paid factory workers, many of them of South Asian descent
Type 27 Multi-cultural inner city terraces attracting second generation settlers from diverse communities

E

Type 28 Neighbourhoods with transient singles living in multiply occupied large old houses
Type 29 Economically successful singles, many living in privately rented inner city flats
Type 30 Young professionals and their families who have gentrified terraces in pre 1914 suburbs
Type 31 Well educated singles and childless couples colonising inner areas of provincial cities
Type 32 Singles and childless couples in small units in newly built private estates
Type 33 Older neighbourhoods increasingly taken over by short term student renters
Type 34 Halls of residence and other buildings occupied mostly by students

F
Type 35 Young people renting hard to let social housing often in disadvantaged inner city locations
Type 36 High density social housing, mostly in inner London, with high levels of diversity
Type 37 Young families living in upper floors of social housing
Type 38 Singles, childless couples and older people living in high rise social housing
Type 39 Older people living in crowded apartments in high density social housing
Type 40 Older tenements of small private flats often occupied by highly disadvantaged individuals

G
Type 41 Families, many single parent, in deprived social housing on the edge of regional centres
Type 42 Families with school age children, living in very large social housing estates on the outskirts of provincial cities
Type 43 Older people, many in poor health from work in heavy industry, in low rise social housing

H
Type 44 Manual workers, many close to retirement, in low rise houses in ex-manufacturing towns
Type 45 Older couples, mostly in small towns, who now own houses once rented from the council
Type 46 Residents in 1930s and 1950s council estates, typically in London, now mostly owner occupiers
Type 47 Social housing, typically in 'new towns', with good job opportunities for the poorly qualified

I
Type 48 Older people living in small council and housing association flats
Type 49 Low income older couples renting low rise social housing in industrial regions
Type 50 Older people receiving care in homes or sheltered accommodation

J
Type 51 Very elderly people, many financially secure, living in privately owned retirement flats
Type 52 Better off older people, singles and childless couples in developments of private flats
Type 53 Financially secure and physically active older people, many retired to semi rural locations
Type 54 Older couples, independent but on limited incomes, living in bungalows by the sea
Type 55 Older people preferring to live in familiar surroundings in small market towns
Type 56 Neighbourhoods with retired people and transient singles working in the holiday industry

	Type 57	Communities of retired people and second homers in areas of high environmental quality
K	Type 58	Well off commuters and retired people living in attractive country villages
	Type 59	Country people living in still agriculturally active villages, mostly in lowland locations
	Type 60	Smallholders and self employed farmers, living beyond the reach of urban commuters
	Type 61	Low income farmers struggling on thin soils in isolated upland locations

Annex C - Mosaic background information

The next two pages show how the population in St Ives and St Neots fit into each group.

St Neots – Number and percentage of profile types

The table below shows the number and percentage of each profile type for St Neots and its close surrounding areas

Mosaic Public Sector Groups		Your area/file	%
A	Career professionals living in sought after locations	2,193	14.12
B	Younger families living in newer homes	3,891	25.05
C	Older families living in suburbia	2,611	16.81
D	Close-knit, inner city and manufacturing town communities	2,676	17.23
E	Educated, young, single people living in areas of transient populations	589	3.79
F	People living in social housing with uncertain employment in deprived areas	108	0.70
G	Low income families living in estate based social housing	130	0.84
H	Upwardly mobile families living in homes bought from social landlords	1,860	11.98
I	Older people living in social housing with high care needs	449	2.89
J	Independent older people with relatively active lifestyles	775	4.99
K	People living in rural areas far from urbanisation	249	1.60
	Total	15531	100

Annex C - Mosaic background information

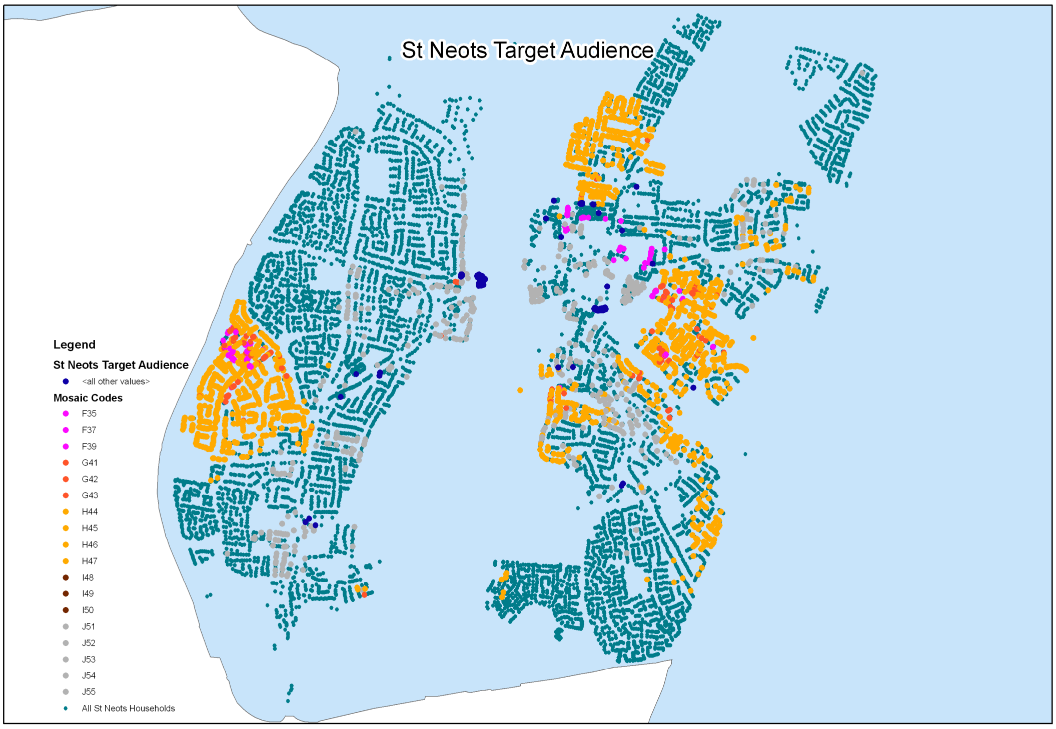
St Ives – Number and percentage of profile types

The table below shows the number and percentage of each profile type for St Ives and its close surrounding areas

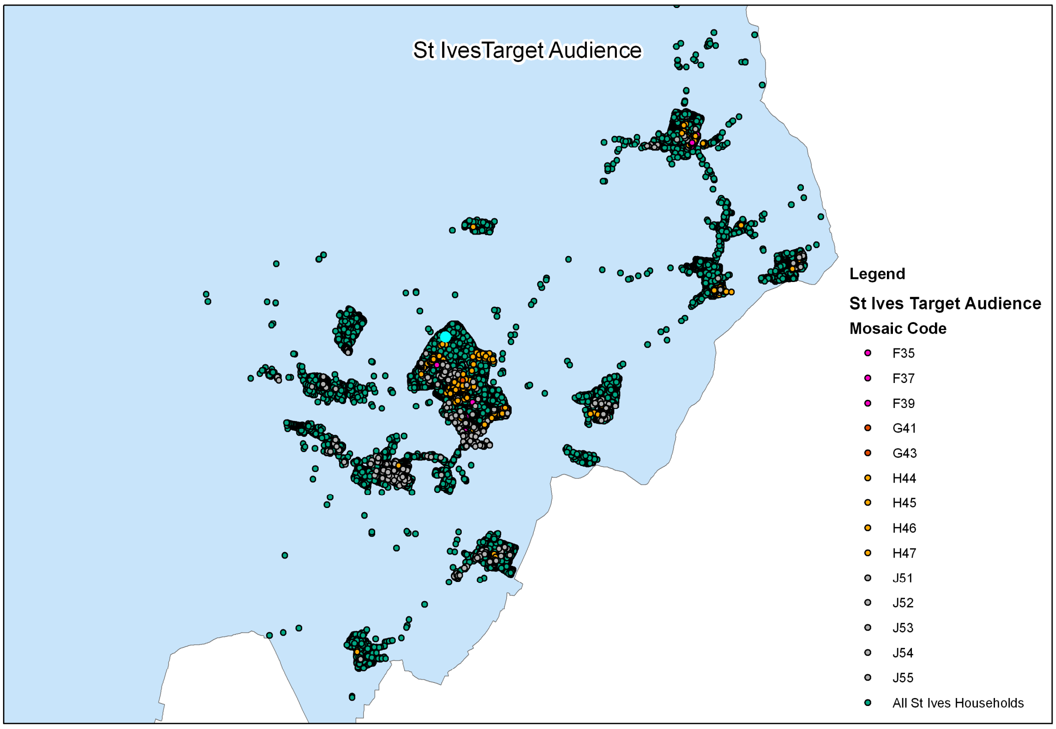
Mosaic Public Sector Groups		Your area/file	%
A	Career professionals living in sought after locations	3,707	22.76
B	Younger families living in newer homes	4,467	27.43
C	Older families living in suburbia	3,369	20.68
D	Close-knit, inner city and manufacturing town communities	1,269	7.79
E	Educated, young, single people living in areas of transient populations	646	3.97
F	People living in social housing with uncertain employment in deprived areas	15	0.09
G	Low income families living in estate based social housing	27	0.17
H	Upwardly mobile families living in homes bought from social landlords	419	2.57
I	Older people living in social housing with high care needs	382	2.35
J	Independent older people with relatively active lifestyles	1,107	6.80
K	People living in rural areas far from urbanisation	871	5.35
	Total	16279	100

Annex C - Mosaic background information

Mosaic – Map showing the location of different customer profiles in St Neots



Mosaic – Map showing the location of different customer profile types in St Ives



Annex C - Mosaic background information

Summary

Groups and types that prefer face-to-face services are:

F, G and I – These are the most deprived types with high levels of benefit take up and unemployment etc.

H and J – These groups prefer face-to-face contact in regards certain services. They will probably not be receiving all the same services as groups F, G and I.

More details about the number of these group types in St Ives and St Neots can be found below.

	Profile type					
Area	**F**	**G**	**I**	**H**	**J**	**Total**
St Ives	15	27	382	419	1107	1950
St Neots	108	130	449	1860	775	3322

The above table give us an indication of how many households have a preference for face-to-face services. The table indicates that more households have a preference for face-to-face services in St Neots than in St Ives.

Using the customer profiles in Mosaic we have established that 12% of households in St Ives have a preference to receive services face to face and 21% of households in St Neots have a preference to receive service face to face. This is against 7% in St Ives and 11% in St Neots currently accessing the service.

The customer profile types are different in both areas, which is what we would expect. The profile types identified as preferring face-to-face services are generally the most deprived types with high levels of benefit take up and unemployment etc and more of these customer types appear to be in St Neots (F, G &I). The second type was generally from the older community in retirement or close to retirement (H & J), which appear to be the main customer group requiring face-to-face services in St Ives.

Conclusion

The information we have taken from this data highlights that a significant number of households in St Ives and St Neots have a preference for face-to-face services and the customer most likely to use our services fall into two main categories:

- Deprived customers with high levels of Benefit take up and unemployment
- Older community in retirement or close to retirement

Mosaic data will be very useful to ensure we target them in the right way when promoting an increased range of services. Following the marketing of services in this way we will monitor the number of customers at each site to see if it has increased as a result of more effective marketing.