

**CUSTOMER SERVICES IN ST IVES AND ST NEOTS
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery))**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting on 2nd December 2008, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) considered a report by the Head of Customer Services on the outcome of a review of customer services in St Ives and St Neots. Item No. 4 of the Cabinet Agenda refers.

2. COMMENTS

- 2.1 In noting the findings of the review of the services offered in St Ives and St Neots, the Panel expressed general support for the recommendations proposed within the report and made a number of additional comments, which are now set out.
- 2.2 The Panel discussed the evidence provided in the report to support the conclusions reached. A low number of residents have responded to the survey, which formed the study's main information base. Members have stated that even though a standard response rate has been elicited, it is important that the survey data is augmented by other research data.
- 2.3 The Panel has recognised the importance of providing customer services facilities that incorporate a private area to enable customers to talk openly in a confidential environment. Members also have supported a suggestion that the provision of other services and facilities should be considered, such as the Shopmobility Scheme. Members have stressed the importance of providing customer service facilities in an accessible location, which will be highly visible in St Ives and St Neots town centres, so as to attract passing customers.
- 2.4 As part of the discussion the Panel has acknowledged that there will be financial implications for St Neots Museum if the two current offices located in St Neots are amalgamated in one building. Nevertheless, the Panel has concurred with the suggestion that the customer service facility should be in a single unit as it will enable efficiency savings to be achieved.
- 2.5 In deciding on the location of the customer service facility in St Neots, the Panel has suggested that long term planning developments and proposals for St Neots should be taken into account as they are likely to affect how the town centre is construed. The view also has been expressed that users would prefer to see shops in the town centre and that it might be preferable to remain in the Priory Centre area. Moreover the Panel has suggested that clarification should be sought regarding the Town Council's position on the District Council's facility, which is currently located in the Priory Centre.
- 2.6 Generally, Members have stressed the importance of consulting ward councillors when alternative accommodation for the customer service centres is being considered and of informing them of proposals as they develop. In

addition, comment has been made that the option to pursue alternative accommodation is timely as it will enable negotiations on rent and rates to be undertaken with prospective landlords in a potentially advantageous market for the Council.

- 2.7 A further suggestion has been made that, given that they attract a high number and diverse range of customers, relocating the customer service centres to the Leisure Centres should be included in the range of options considered as part of the proposals.
- 2.8 Looking to the future, it has been suggested that the provision of outreach services in larger villages should be investigated as part of the proposals. Existing customer service facilities are already viewed positively by residents of surrounding villages. It was held to be important that this is done as part of the investigations as it might affect how they materialise and, as the St Ives office currently opens on three days each week, there might be scope to provide a full time service but use the remaining two days to provide a travelling service.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Cabinet is invited to consider the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of Customer Services.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) held on 2nd December 2008.

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