

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Closure of the Customer Service Centres in Ramsey, Yaxley and St Neots

**Meeting/Date:** Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) 13th June 2017

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Member for Transformation and Customers

**Report by:** Head of Customer Service

**Wards affected:** All

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**Executive Summary:**

This paper is issued to support Overview and Scrutiny in their discussions on the decision to close Customer Service Centres at Ramsey, Yaxley and St Neots.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to note the information supplied in this paper and provide appropriate feedback on the decision to close the Customer Service Centres at Ramsey, Yaxley and St Neots.

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 Members of the O&S panel have elected to discuss the closure of the Customer Service Centres (CSC) at Ramsey, Yaxley and St Neots. This paper is intended to supply relevant information to the panel in order to help them in their discussions.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 A Zero Based Budget (ZBB) exercise was undertaken over a number of years in 2015 and 2016. This process delivered a systematic review of all HDC services and led to a number of changes to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 2.2 In the summer of 2015 ZBB looked at Customer Service and a range of options were discussed with the 'Star Chamber' of the Leader (Cllr Ablewhite), Deputy (Cllr Howe) and Finance Portfolio (Cllr Gray). The Customer Service portfolio holder at the time (Cllr Tysoe) presented the options. The Star Chamber, having looked at the range of options across the Customer Service team, asked for a number to be proposed in the MTFS for further consideration by Members. This included moving the Call Centre from St Ives, restructuring the team and also the withdrawal of the CSC service.
- 2.3 The outcomes of this process were taken through O&S and Cabinet in September 2015 and the savings were approved by Council in February 2016. They became part of the Council's MTFS and have remained so in subsequent budgets approved by Council.
- 2.4 The delivery of the CSC savings was phased to occur in 2017/18 and in March 2017, after the Council again approved the MTFS, actions commenced to prepare for closure. These actions included a briefing note issued by the Executive Councillor for Transformation and Customer Services to all Members.

## **3. ANALYSIS**

- 3.1 A briefing paper is included as Appendix 1. The paper is an updated version of the briefing paper issued to all Members in March. It provides some additional information and context to matters raised during feedback from Members and customers.
- 3.2 The paper covers in more detail the drivers for the decision, data on the use of the service, the plans in place to help customers and the impact on HDC staff.

## **4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

- 4.1 The paper is intended to help provide information to the Panel to aid the discussion by Members.

## **5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 5.1 Appendix 1 details a number of risks and the measures being taken to reduce them.
- 5.2 A key consideration that is being managed is the potential for the withdrawal of the service to impact on vulnerable customers. A range of measures are being taken to manage this risk. These include:

- 5.2.1 Staff on site are actively engaging with current customers and offering support to access HDC services through alternative means – such as calling the Call Centre or accessing service on-line.
- 5.2.2 Staff are also ensuring alternative suppliers of services are being clarified for customers. This includes, for example Citizens Advice, who offer ‘face to face’ help and advice on a range of Council Services.
- 5.2.3 Identifying any customers who have a genuine need for additional local support from HDC. The Council already offers a visiting service for Housing Benefits and Housing Officers regularly see clients within the District.

## **6. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- 6.1 Ramsey and Yaxley will close in August 2017 and St Neots in December 2017.

## **7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND / OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 7.1 This decision is related to the Council Strategic Priority of ‘Becoming a more effective and efficient Council’.

## **8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The proposal to close the CSC has followed the process for other decisions taken by Council. The MTFs has been consulted on via the process of O&S, Cabinet and Council prior to its inclusion in the MTFs.
- 8.2 Since the briefing paper was issued to Members a number of Members have raised questions which have received an individual response from either the Executive Member for Transformation and Customers or the Executive Leader of the Council.
- 8.3 In addition the Executive Leader of the Council was asked to attend St Neots Town Council in April and did so. This has informed the updated paper at Appendix 1.
- 8.4 The opportunity to appear at O&S is another helpful opportunity to engage again publically on the decision that has been taken.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no legal implications associated with this paper.

## **10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The MTFs contains the savings associated with the closure of the CSCs. This totals £94k per annum.

## **11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

- 11.1 O&S are asked to review the contents of this paper and Appendix 1, and to use this to help them provide appropriate feedback to the Executive Member for Transformation and Customers

## **12. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Briefing Paper for Members.

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