

**REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 23 FEBRUARY 2023**

**REPORT ON: REDESIGN OF CUSTOMER SERVICES FACE TO FACE PROVISION**

**REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES**

**REPORT NO: 38-2023**

## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1. To recommend the redesign of Customer Services to focus on digital and telephone service delivery.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Committee agree the revised arrangements for the delivery of Face to face Customer Services.
- 2.2. Note the proposed Face to Face appointment only service delivery will initially operate 9am – 1pm on Tuesdays and 1pm – 5pm on Thursday at a central location to be confirmed.

## **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1. Savings of £141K will be realised from the service redesign through natural turnover of six full time equivalents Customer Service Advisors within Customer Services and Benefit Delivery.

## **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1. The Council is facing and will continue to face in the years ahead significant financial challenges which mean existing models of service delivery are no longer sustainable. All areas of service provision are seeking new and more efficient ways of providing services which will continue to deliver good quality while seeking to minimise any negative effects on customers.
- 4.2. One of the areas which can potentially deliver efficiencies and improve services to and outcomes for customers, is in digital services. Digital services can deliver methods of transacting and receiving services from the Council which are less costly and can provide the customer with an improved service overall by enhancing the customer journey and their experience.
- 4.3. Customer Services currently offer a face to face service at Dundee House (for appointments only) and a drop-in service at East and West District Housing Offices.
- 4.4. The face to face services offered are
  - Reception services (for visitors to Dundee House);
  - Council Tax and Benefits;
  - General Services (National Entitlement Cards including bus passes, Blue Badges, and Parking queries); and
  - Housing queries
- 4.5. Dundee House is currently manned by two full-time receptionists and two full-time Customer Service Assistants (CSA); between them the East and West District Housing Offices are manned by two full time equivalents CSA's.
- 4.6. During the Covid 19 Pandemic front-line face to face services were suspended for several months. During this time Customer Services answered and supported customers via the telephone and online services. This demonstrated services can be delivered without face to face interactions with no detriment to customers.

4.7. A sample survey of the reasons which face to face services were being accessed shows that between June 22 and December 22 of the 381 customers surveyed:

- 10% Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit queries;
- 18% Council Tax queries;
- 14% Blue Badge enquiries;
- 27% Bus pass queries;
- 2% National Entitlement Card queries;
- 26% housing related; and
- 3% other enquiries.

4.8. During this same period the Council Tax and Benefit telephone team answered over 18,000 calls with an average call wait time of less than 5 minutes (it should be noted that this is higher than normal due to a period when experienced staff had left and new staff were in training). General Services answered over 17,000 calls with an average wait time of less than 2 minutes.

4.9. Demand for face to face service delivery has fallen for a variety of reasons including:

- Housing Benefit caseload falling due to the introduction of Universal Credit;
- an increase and availability of online forms and services; and
- hybrid working and the use of online meeting facilities.

4.10. Since reopening following the pandemic, East and West District Housing Offices have reopened as a part-time drop-in service only. The table below is a snap shot of face to face visitors, over a six-month period from 2018 to 2022. As the offices were closed for several months due to the pandemic, no figures have been populated for 2020.

Year	Dundee House	East DHO	West DHO
2018	23,489	8049	5950
2019	20,956	6720	5072
2021	3821	closed	closed
2022	3493	2732	1482

4.11. The table below shows the different types of interaction from customers since April 2021.

Year	Quarter	On-line	E-mail	Calls	F2F	% F2F
20/21	1	62,903	5380	46,692	1548	1%
	2	54,923	6420	30,869	1586	2%
	3	54,936	5473	35,055	1971	2%
	4	61,407	5870	36,835	1268	1%
22/23	1	54,005	5282	34,791	2561	3%
	2	52,515	4281	31,576	4044	4%*

\*Please note this increase is due to the reopening of the East and West District Housing Offices.

- 4.12. A Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation paper which outlines the benefits realisation of migrating to digital transactions, shows that the cost of handling a contact face-to-face is £8.21 per transaction compared with £2.59 for a telephone transaction and for a web transaction £0.09.

## **5. PROPOSALS**

- 5.1. In the context of the reducing demand for face to face services it is proposed that the Council focuses on digital service provision, including telephony, for the delivery of Customer Services.
- 5.2. This would mean closing the reception and appointments-based face to face service at Dundee House as well as the drop-in services at the District Housing Offices.
- 5.3. Customers will be able to continue to access all Council Services via telephone or the website. The evidence from the pandemic and the closure of the face to face cashiers' services in April 2022 indicates that this will not present a barrier to the delivery of these services.
- 5.4. Appendix A to this report show the services on offer face to face and alternative methods of contact.
- 5.5. Recognising that it is not possible to envisage all circumstances that may occur, the Customer Services Team will provide a reduced face to face appointment service, in a central location, to ensure that customer needs are met. It is proposed that initially this would be from 9am to 1pm on Tuesdays and 1pm to 5pm on Thursdays and officers are exploring venues including the Central Library and City Square Box Office. The Head of Customer Services and IT will keep this under review and if necessary, amend the times and location to best meet customer needs.
- 5.6. As part of the change Dundee House will cease to become a public facing office and arrangements will be required for any visitors to be met by their hosts.
- 5.7. This service redesign will free up space and the future use of this space will be considered as part of the Council's wider property rationalisation plan led by City Development.

## **6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. This report has been subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment to identify impacts on Equality & Diversity, Fairness & Poverty, Environment and Corporate Risk. An impact, positive or negative, on one or more of these issues was identified. An appropriate senior manager has checked and agreed with this assessment. A copy of the Integrated Impact Assessment showing the impacts and accompanying benefits of / mitigating factors for them is included as an Appendix to this report.

## **7. CONSULTATIONS**

The Council Leadership Team were consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

## REDESIGN OF CUSTOMER SERVICES FACE TO FACE SERVICES

SERVICE	SUMMARY	ACCESS ROUTE	Comments
Council Tax Enquiries		Online forms Online account Direct telephone line	
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Reduction		Online forms Direct telephone line	
Parking Enquiries	Applications for residents parking permits; Parking Fine Appeals	Online facility available via firmstep/My Dundee. General Services Telephone line	
NEC/Bus Pass	New applications/renewals/replacements/photographs	Online application, General services telephone line available for assistance.	
Blue Badges	Applications	Online application General Service telephone assistance.	
Housing	Receipt of paper application forms. Tenancy terminations Replacement key fobs & return of keys from tradespeople	Housing services will still be available at East office from Housing staff who are located there.	
Others	School placing requests, licencing renewals	Online forms available. General services telephone line.	

# Integrated Impact Assessment

Committee Report Number: Not known

Document Title: Redesign of Customer Services Face to Face Provision

Document Type: Other

Description:

Committee approval for redesign of Customer Services face to face provision.

Intended Outcome:

To move towards being a digital by default Council by increasing the scope of customer services and improving the range and accessibility of on-line services and reducing the need for face to face contact

Period Covered: 01/04/2023 to 31/03/2024

Monitoring:

Demand for customer services including any requests for face to face will be monitored on a monthly basis.

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# Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

## Impacts & Implications

Age: Positive

All services currently provided via face to face can be delivered either digitally or via telephone. We recognise that not everyone is able to or wants to use our digital services, we remain committed to offering alternative options where required. One of which is Customer Services Team will provide a reduced face to face appointment service, in a central location

Disability: Positive

Customers who currently use Dundee House and East/West District Housing Offices can continue to use our services either digitally or via telephone. However, we recognise that not everyone is able to or wants to use our digital services, we remain committed to offering alternative options where required, therefore Customer Services Team will provide a reduced face to face appointment service, in a central location. We will continue to enhance website accessibility in accordance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

Gender Reassignment: No Impact

Marriage & Civil Partnership: No Impact

Pregency & Maternity: No Impact

Race / Ethnicity: No Impact

Religion or Belief: No Impact

Sex: No Impact

Sexual Orientation: No Impact

Are any Human Rights not covered by the Equalities questions above impacted by this report?

No

## Fairness & Poverty

### Geographic Impacts & Implications

Strathmartine:	Positive
Lochee:	Positive
Coldside:	Positive
Maryfield:	Positive
North East:	Positive
East End:	Positive
The Ferry:	Positive
West End:	Positive

Positive Implications (Strathmartine):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>
Positive Implications (Lochee):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>
Positive Implications (Coldside):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>
Positive Implications (Maryfield):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>
Positive Implications (North East / Whitfield):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>
Positive Implications (East End / MidCraigie):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>
Positive Implications (The Ferry):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>
Positive Implications (West End):	<p>Customers will not have to travel to either a central location or district office to have their enquiry dealt with, this has a positive financial impact and will also have both a positive implication to fairness as well as poverty by reducing travel costs.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities. It is also not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, therefore a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.</p>

## Household Group Impacts and Implications

Looked After Children & Care Leavers: Positive

Positive outcome is reduced travel costs, as well as enhanced customer services which allows customers the flexibility to access on-line services at a time which suits their individual needs.

Along with on-line access, the household group can access suitable support through the Council's Through Care/After Care Team.

However as It is not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.

Carers: Positive

Positive outcome is reduced travel costs, as well as enhanced customer services which allows customers the flexibility to access on-line services at a time which suits their individual needs.

However as It is not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.

# Household Group Impacts and Implications

## Lone Parent Families: Positive

Positive outcome is reduced travel costs, as well as enhanced customer services which allows customers the flexibility to access on-line services at a time which suits their individual needs.

Parents will be able to make contact with the Council outwith normal working hours reducing the need to bring families into the offices. However as it is not possible to recognise all customer circumstances, a reduced face to face appointment service will be available.

## Single Female Households with Children: Positive

Positive outcome is reduced travel costs, as well as enhanced customer services which allows customers the flexibility to access on-line services at a time which suits their individual needs.

Parents will be able to make contact with the Council outwith normal working hours reducing the need to travel with children. However there will be a reduced face to face appointment service in a central location to meet the needs of our customers.

## Greater number of children and/or young children: Positive

Positive outcome is reduced travel costs, as well as enhanced customer services which allows customers the flexibility to access on-line services at a time which suits their individual needs.

Parents will be able to make contact with the Council outwith normal working hours reducing the need to travel with large families and young children. However there will be a reduced face to face appointment service in a central location to meet the needs of our customers.

## Pensioners - single / couple: Positive

The proposals priority is to create accessibility 24/7 for those who can use on-line facilities, a telephony service also remains available during normal working hours.

Pensioners who may not have access, or are unable to access digital services, will be offered alternative supports along with a reduced face to face appointment service in a central location.

## Unskilled workers or unemployed: No Impact

## Serious & enduring mental health problems: Positive

The proposals priority is to create accessibility 24/7 to those who can use on-line facilities, a telephony service also remains available during normal working hours.

A reduced face to face appointment service in a central location will be available for those who may not have, or are unable to access digital services or telephony services.

The Integrated Joint Board for Dundee has a range of supports available to support Mental Health & Wellbeing.

## Homeless: Positive

The proposals priority is to create accessibility 24/7 to those who can use on-line facilities, a telephony service also remains available during normal working hours. Customer Services will provide a reduced face to face appointment service in a central location for those who may not have, or are unable to access digital services or telephony services.

Those who present as homeless will be supported in line with the Homeless Strategy and the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan

## Drug and/or alcohol problems: Positive

On-line access remains available 24/7 and a telephony service remains available during normal working hours.

Customer Services will provide a reduced face to face appointment service in a central location for those who may not have, or are unable to access digital services or telephony services.

## Offenders & Ex-offenders: Positive

In addition to the support already in place for this group, on-line access remains available as well as a telephony service during normal working hours.

Customer Services will provide a reduced face to face appointment service in a central location for those who may not have, or are unable to access digital services or telephony services.

# Socio Economic Disadvantage Impacts & Implications

## Employment Status: No Impact



# Socio Economic Disadvantage Impacts & Implications

Education & Skills: No Impact

Income: No Impact

Caring Responsibilities (including Childcare): No Impact

Affordability and accessibility of services: Positive

Positive outcome is reduced travel costs, as well as enhanced customer services which allows customers the flexibility to access on-line services at a time which suits their individual needs. A telephony service will continue to be available during normal working hours.

Customer Services will provide a reduced face to face appointment service in a central location for those who may not have, or are unable to access digital services or telephony services.

The Council continues to provide financial support and works in partnership with Brooksbank and CAB to support the most disadvantaged within communities.

Fuel Poverty: No Impact

Cost of Living / Poverty Premium: No Impact

Connectivity / Internet Access: No Impact

Income / Benefit Advice / Income Maximisation: No Impact

Employment Opportunities: No Impact

Education: No Impact

Health: No Impact

Life Expectancy: No Impact

Mental Health: No Impact

Overweight / Obesity: No Impact

Child Health: No Impact

Neighbourhood Satisfaction: No Impact

Transport: Positive

Positive outcome is reduced travel costs, as well as enhanced customer services which allows customers the flexibility to access on-line services at a time which suits their individual needs. A telephony service will continue to be available during normal working hours.

## **Environment**

### **Climate Change Impacts**

Mitigating Greenhouse Gases: Positive

Redesigning Customer Services will reduce the need for customers to travel, in turn lowering emissions. This supports one of the Council's key priorities of Tackling Climate Change and reaching Net Zero carbon emissions by 2045.

Adapting to the effects of climate change: No Impact

## Resource Use Impacts

Energy efficiency & consumption: No Impact

Prevention, reduction, re-use, recovery or recycling of waste: No Impact

Sustainable Procurement: No Impact

## Transport Impacts

Accessible transport provision: No Impact

Sustainable modes of transport: No Impact

## Natural Environment Impacts

Air, land & water quality: No Impact

Biodiversity: No Impact

Open & green spaces: No Impact

## Built Environment Impacts

Built Heritage: No Impact

Housing: No Impact

Is the proposal subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)?

No further action is required as it does not qualify as a Plan, Programme or Strategy as defined by the Environment Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

## Corporate Risk

## Corporate Risk Impacts

Political Reputational Risk: Positive

Redesigning the delivery of customer services is integral in moving towards a Modern Digital Council. All services will continue to be delivered to meet the needs of the customers and whilst this may be a significant change to some, a reduced face to face appointment service will be provided. This will encompass those who are unable or have no access, or prefer not to use online and/or telephony services.

Economic/Financial Sustainability / Security & Equipment: Positive

Introducing the new service delivery model allows customers the full range of services - which is part of the transformation plan to design a Modern Council consistent with the financial sustainability of the Council.

Social Impact / Safety of Staff & Clients: No Impact

Technological / Business or Service Interruption: No Impact

Environmental: Positive

Closing the offices reduces the need for customers to travel which tackles Climate Change, one of the priorities of the Council.

Legal / Statutory Obligations: No Impact

Organisational / Staffing & Competence: No Impact

Corporate Risk Implications & Mitigation:

The risk implications associated with the subject matter of this report are "business as normal" risks and any increase to the level of risk to the Council is minimal. This is due either to the risk being inherently low or as a result of the risk being transferred in full or in part to another party on a fair and equitable basis. The subject matter is routine and has happened many times before without significant impact.