



Policy and Resources Committee - 5 July 2010

Consultation on future provision of face to face council services in the north of the District

Summary

This report summarises progress on the review of face to face council service provision across the District. Approval is sought for a consultation process with possible partners and other stakeholders on options for delivery of council face to face services across the north of the District and tourist information in Oundle.

Attachment(s)

Appendix A - locations of households with high likely levels of demand for face to face customer services

1.0 Background

1.1 East Northamptonshire Council currently provides the majority of its face to face service provision via three council owned customer service centres at Oundle, Rushden and Thrapston. Each of these locations provides slightly different access to council services as a result of their history or layout, for example Rushden provides on-site revenues and benefits interviews whilst Oundle provides local tourist information and ticket sales.

1.2 In the foreseeable future there will continue to be some council services that require face to face delivery (e.g. pest control) and some services where the nature of the interaction is often more effectively delivered face to face e.g. during benefits interviews not only can supporting documentation be verified on the spot but the opportunities can also be taken to inform people of other services that might be relevant to improving their wellbeing. There are also likely to always be customers who require face to face contact to assist them in requesting services, for example because they have literacy problems.

1.3 A review of face to face service provision by a joint member/officer group started in May. The review was prompted by the following factors:

- The need to match limited resources for face to face service delivery so they maximise their effectiveness for those customers who need this form of service deliver in the current financial climate
- Analysis (Appendix A) which indicated that there are some households likely to require face to face service provision who may have difficulties accessing the current sites if they do not have access to a car.
- Opportunities through the forthcoming break clause in the lease for the premises at Oundle.

There is also a need to maximise the migration of service delivery to other customers who can and will use other cheaper channels such as telephone and web based service delivery.

1.4 The project brief is to *produce a range of costed options for the future delivery of face to face service delivery which optimise the match between customer need and current resources.*

'Need' is defined as a requirement for face to face delivery because either:

- Failure to do so would significantly disadvantage particular customer groups and lead to inequalities in service access
- There is a requirement for face to face contact for the service to be delivered.
- Some face to face contact provides a better quality of information for both customer and service area and therefore is a 'good' investment e.g. benefits initial enquiry and application submission

1.5 The Group includes the Lead Member for Customer and Community Services, Cllr W Brackenbury, and two members of Scrutiny Committee, Cllrs P Stearn and D Bateman, who wished to look at aspects of Customer Focus and Customer and Community Insight as part of this year's Scrutiny Workshop.

1.5 A considerable volume of background information has been collated to inform the review including:

- Costs and volume of current service provision at the three sites
- MOSIAC information on which residents and communities are most likely to continue to need face to face services across the communities and which households are easiest to migrate to other channels.
- Partners, locations and approaches which could assist in the alternative delivery of services
- Recent and future changes to the requirements for face to face service delivery e.g. the responsibility for concessionary travel will pass to the County Council in April 2011

2.0 Implications for Face to Face Service Delivery in the north of the district

2.1 Because of the time limited opportunity to withdraw from the lease of the current Oundle Customer Services premises (December 2010), early work by the group has concentrated on this issue. The Group has identified a clear need for ongoing face to face council service provision within Oundle and at other locations in the north of the district which cannot easily access Thrapston or Rushden together with demand for provision of local tourism related information in Oundle. The group however recognised that these two elements could be separated and that the tourism information could be delivered by a partner organisation and/or in a different way. Separation of the two elements could also enable the council's face to face service delivery to be located away from the historic centre of the town to other centres of local activity where they link with a partner's service delivery e.g. the library.

2.2 The next stage is for the review team to consult with possible partners to explore the options for face to face service delivery in Oundle and in the north of the district plus tourism information services in the heart of Oundle. Possible partners could include Oundle Town Council, NCC (Libraries), other Parish Councils, local Housing Associations, Oundle International Festival, local hotels or any other business with an interest in tourism.

2.3 This information will then be summarised into a report to the next Policy and Resources Committee which will present costed options for future service delivery and their impacts on customers. It is proposed that all options presented, including continuing with the current location will need to deliver at least a 10% saving on the current costs incurred at Oundle (approx £10,000). The timing of this report will enable a decision to be made in time to take advantage of the break clause in the Oundle premises lease if required.

2.4 Another consideration within each option is the future provision for the sale of tickets to local events. Although the Oundle International Festival now has its own ticket sale arrangement and no longer use the Council's Oundle Customer Services Centre,

other organisations such as the Stahl Theatre and Oundle Literature Festival still sell tickets via the Council's Customer Services Centre.

2.5 Oundle Customer Services staff have been involved in the review and are aware of the proposed approach. They have been reassured that the council will still need to deliver face to face services but these may be from different locations, and that redundancies will be considered only as a last resort.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that –

- (1) Members give approval for Officers to begin a process of consultation as outlined in paragraph 2.2
- (2) A report be made to the September meeting of this Committee with the results of that consultation, and
- (3) The report also includes a range of options with a target saving of at least 10% of current costs.

Implications:	
Corporate Outcomes or Other Policy/Priority/Strategy	
Good Quality of Life	<input type="checkbox"/> Good Reputation <input type="checkbox"/>
Good Value for Money	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High Quality Service Delivery <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Effective Partnership Working	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong Community Leadership <input type="checkbox"/>
Effective Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge of our Customers and Communities <input type="checkbox"/>
Employees and Members with the Right Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decision(s) would be outside the budget or policy framework and require full Council approval	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Financial	There are no financial implications at this stage <input type="checkbox"/>
	There will be financial implications – see paragraph 2.3 - proposed saving level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	There is provision within existing budget <input type="checkbox"/>
	Decisions may give rise to additional expenditure at a later date <input type="checkbox"/>
	Decisions may have potential for income generation <input type="checkbox"/>
Risk Management	An assessment has been carried out and there are no material risks <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Material risks exist and these are recorded at Risk Register Reference - inherent risk score - residual risk score - <input type="checkbox"/>
Staff	There are no additional staffing implications <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Additional staff will be required – see paragraph <input type="checkbox"/>
Equalities and Human Rights	There will be no impact on equality (race, age, gender, disability, religion/belief, sexual orientation) or human rights implications <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	There will be an impact on equality (see categories above) or human rights implications – see paragraph <input type="checkbox"/>
Legal	Power: Local Government Act 1972
	Other considerations:
Background Papers: s	
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Date: 24 June 2010	
CFO	MO
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