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**REVIEW OF SERVICE PROVISION – BROMSGROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE**

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Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Mark Bullivant
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Amanda de Warr, Head of Customer Services
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	N/A
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision	Non Key Decision

**1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 Over the last few years we have seen a reduction in demand at the Customer Service Centre on Saturday mornings, resulting in a high ratio of staff compared with the demand.
- 1.2 The vast majority of customer demand is received Monday to Friday.
- 1.3 The majority of customer demand is now dealt with by service experts, in a variety of fields, who are available Monday to Friday to deal with customer enquiries in full. The service it is possible for the generic Customer Service staff to provide has reduced dramatically as a result.
- 1.4 Based on data collected throughout 2012/13 this report proposes that the opening hours of the Customer Service Centre are changed to reflect the reduced demand and changes to service delivery, and that the staffing resources are realigned to when they are most needed.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That Cabinet resolves to :-**

**Change the opening hours of the Customer Service Centre to Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm**

**3. KEY ISSUES**

**Financial Implications**

- 3.1 The recommendation is not being made to cut costs and there would be no savings in staffing costs as a result of the recommendation but it would enable more effective use of resources. Currently staff who work on Saturday mornings take the commensurate time off in the week reducing the resources available at busier times.

- 3.2 Some very small savings would be realised in relation to utilities and other running costs, but these have not been quantified as they would be minimal.

**Legal Implications**

- 3.3 As providing cover for weekend working forms part of the staff contracts, formal staff consultation will be required before any changes could be implemented.

**Service / Operational Implications**

- 3.4 The Customer Service Centre is currently open Monday to Friday from 9am until 5pm, and on Saturday mornings from 9am until 12 noon.
- 3.5 Over recent years we have seen a decline in customer number on Saturdays, especially for payments as customers move to other payment methods.
- 3.6 Data for 2012/13 shown in the following table indicates the low demand on Saturdays compared with on weekdays.

Average customer numbers	Face to face enquiries	Telephone enquiries	Payments – face to face and telephone	Total customers
Saturdays	8	21	33	62
Monday – Friday Average per day	56	305	114	465

- 3.7 Through transformation of service delivery and in order to better meet customer needs we have seen a shift towards experts in the key frontline services dealing with customer demand directly. Council Tax and Benefits specialist staff are now located at the Customer Service Centre and deal with their customers directly whether contact has been made over the 'phone or in person. This has significantly increased the ability to resolve the customer's problem at the point of contact. As a result the enquiries that Customer Service staff are able to deal with has reduced.
- 3.8 The data collected during 2012/13 tells us that of the total enquiries received on Saturdays 53% were for council tax and 12% were for benefits. Benefits customers are already encouraged to do their business with us face to face, and during the week, when a benefits expert is available. Therefore, 65% of all the customer demand received on a Saturday cannot be dealt with by the CSA's. This number is increasing as we see more demand going to experts to deal with.

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- 3.9 The overall number of enquiries received on Saturday mornings is too low to warrant having expert staff available on a Saturdays, but at the same time it is not possible to keep CSA's up-skilled in these areas to ensure customers on a Saturday receive the same level of services as those customers contacting us Monday to Friday. Therefore, customers who access our services on a Saturday morning receive a lower level of service, despite the excellent customer care skills of the staff available.
- 3.10 Around 20% enquiries made either face to face or by telephone on Saturdays are for Worcestershire County Council services and there are County Council phone lines open and available to take those enquiries.
- 3.11 The number of payments received is also very low, although they do make up the majority of the customer demand on Saturday mornings.
- 3.12 15% of payments were made by telephone and we have a 24/7 service available for telephone payments via the automated payments line.
- 3.13 A further 46% of payment were made using a debit or credit card, or by cheque, indicating that the customer could have made the payment using an alternative method such as by telephone, online, or through their bank.
- 3.14 Approximately 11 payments per week, made on Saturdays, are paid in cash. Due to the fact that we take Council Tax by instalments this is likely to equate to in the region of 70 individual customers over the year. These people may be disadvantaged by not being able to make payments on a Saturday but there is no evidence to suggest that they cannot make other arrangements and assistance would be provided to ensure a smooth transition if a change to opening hours were agreed.
- 3.15 Taking into account the data relating to demand and the changing face of service delivery, it would be more practical to focus our resources to those times where demand requires it so that we can best help the majority of customers accessing our services.
- 3.16 Where, through transformation of services, we identify a need to see an individual customer on a Saturday in order to meet their needs, this is more likely to be on site, or as a home visit, rather than in the office.

**Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 3.17 Rationalising the opening hours of the face to face service and therefore not opening on a Saturday would disadvantage a small number of customers. However, it would enable us to focus our resources to the times when we are most needed, and when we can provide the highest level of service.
- 3.18 Not opening the phone lines on a Saturday would have a minimal impact as customers can do their business with us remotely during the week. Over half of

## **CABINET**

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> September 2013

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callers needed to speak to a Council Tax expert and therefore were required to speak to that expert at some point Monday – Friday. We see a significant peak of phone calls on Monday mornings and it would be beneficial to use resources at times of peak calls rather than at the weekend when staff can only take and pass on messages.

- 3.19 An equality impact assessment has been carried out and there is no evidence to suggest that any group of customers would be unfairly disadvantaged. Furthermore, we have a wide range of options available to customers to ensure that they can still do their business with us in a timely fashion.
- 3.20 Appropriate out of hours cover is place in the event of any emergencies.
- 3.21 Frequently Asked Questions (Appendix A) would be provided to customers, via the Customer Service Centre and through press releases, to help explain the changes.

### **4. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 In order to ensure customers have time to make other arrangements, thus reducing the risk of non-payment of Council Tax, an implementation date for the change should be at least 3 months from date of decision. If the recommendation is agreed changes would come into effect from the 4<sup>th</sup> January.
- 4.2 Appropriate publicity of any change would be put in place giving alternative methods of payments and contact arrangements.
- 4.3. During the period between decision and implementation staff would work with those customers who regularly use the service on a Saturday to help them identify alternative arrangements.

### **5. APPENDICES**

Appendix A - Frequently Asked Questions

### **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Held by Head of Customer Services

### **7. KEY**

N/A

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