



RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** held on **Wednesday 16 October 2024**. The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **Monday 28 October 2024** unless the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

Review of Customer Access Point Service Offer **Key Decision: CORP/R/2024/005**

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which outlined proposals to adjust the face-to-face service offer delivered in Customer Access points (CAPs) which reflected reduced demand whilst preserving channel choice. The report detailed the findings of the consultation activity and equalities impact assessment (EIA) on the proposals, linked to the achievement of savings targets included in MTFP (14) and highlighted options for early realisation of a proportion of associated savings.

Demand for the CAP service offer has decreased year upon year with appointment take-up falling by 16,000 appointments per annum since the launch of Universal Credit (UC) in 2018 and visitor numbers dropping even further post pandemic. Demand levels in 2023/24 were 33% of that which they were in 2017/18. An adjusted offer, reducing the opening hours of four of the least used CAPs, was implemented in October 2023 and since implementation of the adjusted offer 60% of appointment capacity across the estate remains unused with some locations seeing just 22% of appointment time utilised. To ensure the Council is making the best and most responsible use of its resources, a further review of the face-to-face customer service offer was initiated.

This review aimed to establish the impact and potential benefits of moving from a traditional, building led CAP operating model to a more responsive offer with a focus on delivering customer service support to the places it is most needed and reducing the time spent in current locations to better reflect the demand for service being seen.

A public consultation was carried out between 7 May 2024 and 28 July 2024 to gather views on options to serve the wider community by providing support across more locations in the county, to offer increased choice, reduce travel requirements and provide a better service overall with a wider resident reach. 679 residents responded, a low level of participation but reflective of decline in demand and 41% more than the 2023 service offer consultation.

The recommended option, following analysis of data, resident, and member feedback, was to evolve the operating model into a CAP surgery model operating 1 day a week from current locations with additional locations in Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe also opening 1 day each week to better reflect current demand and increase accessibility in the east and south of the county.

The proposal was developed in consultation with colleagues in Corporate Property and Land to ensure alignment to the Corporate Asset Management Strategy and wider council services including Culture, Sport and Tourism and Childrens and Young People's Services to ensure future co-location plans reflect a total place approach.

A full Equalities Impact Analysis (EIA) was carried out. It was recognised that older age groups, over the age of 65 years and people with disabilities were more likely to access face to face provision at CAPs and this is reflected in the percentage of consultation respondents from those groups. The report was considered and noted by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management board (COSMB). Whilst the proposal will lead to a reduction in the opening times of current CAPs which will impact some, the service is not being removed, it is being remodelled on a demand led basis to provide a broader reach and better access to more residents via the introduction of more locations which will benefit some. In addition, alternative customer access channels including telephone, email, social media, and webchat will remain available. The proposals will allow for resource to be realigned to telephony, email, social media, and webchat support, all of which have seen a substantial increase in demand since the pandemic, thus benefitting all customers accessing support via these channels.

Reasonable adjustments will continue to be made where necessary for customers with a disability, and language support for customers whose first language is not English. A communication and engagement plan to support changes and promote customer service access channels was included in the report. The recommended option can be implemented in all locations except for Durham City (Clayport) from 1 October 2025 facilitating the potential for early delivery of £160,000 of the agreed savings of £219,000 from April 2026 to 1 October 2025.

Durham City (Clayport) is being considered as part of the wider Corporate Asset strategy with longer lead times, savings associated with this location (£59,000) will remain profiled for April 2026.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) noted the content of the report, the information contained within, and the reduced footfall being seen in CAPs and increased demand across other channels;
- b) approved the proposed demand led adjustment to service offer across the CAP estate with effect from 1 October 2025 in line with option 1; and
- c) noted the proposal to accelerate the majority of the associated savings currently profiled to be achieved in 2026/27 into 2025/26.

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2024

Summary

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services and the Director of Public Health which presented the 2024 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for County Durham. One of the statutory requirements of Directors of Public Health under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 is to produce an annual report about the health of the local population. In addition, the local authority has a duty to publish the report.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) received the Director of Public Health Annual Report 2024;
- b) agreed to publish the annual report.

Adult Social Care Update on the Outcome of the Local Authority Assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) under the Health and Care Act (2022)

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services which provided an update on the outcome of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment of the way in which the Council discharges its adult social care duties under part 1 of the Care Act 2022 undertaken earlier this year.

The report sought Cabinet approval for the Service Improvement Plan to address areas for development set out in the CQC report and wider service improvement aspirations, progress against which will be subject to annual reporting in the future.

On 1 April 2023, CQC regulatory powers came into effect under the Health and Care Act 2022 to assess how well local authorities are performing against their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act. When assessed, local authorities are given a rating of outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate. Significant work was undertaken to prepare for the CQC assessment, specifically including the development of a self-assessment which was informed by a variety of engagement work.

On 30 January 2024, CQC notified the council of the commencement of the assessment process consisting of various stages and taking place over a period of up to six months. The stages included the submission of a comprehensive information return consisting of key evidence, information and data; a pre-meeting with senior leaders and representatives from CQC; case tracking activity to assess the lived experience of people drawing support from social care; remote activity with partners and providers including the voluntary and community sector, and the on-site assessment which took place during May 2024 involving leaders, staff, partners and representative groups.

In August 2024 CQC published the final assessment outcome, rating adult social care provision within the Council as 'Good'. The majority of areas within the assessment were found to be of a good standard and the report highlighted that the Service was performing well and meeting the expectations of CQC. The outcome and key messages have been communicated to a wide range of key stakeholders. At the time of publication the Council's rating placed it joint third nationally out of 11 published reports.

A number of areas within the report were also highlighted as needing improvement and a Service Improvement Plan was developed to address these, building upon the work that was already in progress and following the development of the self-assessment. The service has a strong focus on ensuring continuous improvement and strives to foster a culture of continuous learning and development. A review of the governance arrangements in relation to the work associated with CQC assessment had taken place to ensure that the robust oversight and leadership of improvement activity continues, as well as learning and preparation for future assessments.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) noted the outcome of the CQC assessment;
- b) approved the Adult Social Care Service Improvement Plan 2024-2025 at Appendix 2 of the report;
- c) agreed to annual update reports on progress with the Service Improvement Plan.

Public Sector Equality Duty annual review 2023-2024 and Equality Policy

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive which sought agreement of the updated Equality Policy (2024-2028) and reviewed the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) annual update 2023-24, prior to publication. The report also included an update on staff networks and the Changing Places toilets funding programme.

The corporate equality, diversity and inclusion programme is broad and cross cutting, necessary to ensure that the council continually addresses its legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, in particular, discharge of the public sector equality duty (PSED).

All services, staff and members must take responsibility for equality and inclusion in the delivery of excellent council services and in their working relationships with colleagues and the public. The corporate equality and diversity (E&D) team focusses on the key drivers of equality, legal compliance, supporting services to deliver projects and/or embed measures which advance equality, especially widening inclusion for disproportionately marginalised groups. They also lead on specific initiatives which require a more coordinated or corporate approach.

The Equalities and Disabilities team works closely with and are supported by HR and Employee Services on many projects. They also work closely with Partnerships and Community Engagement. As part of the specific equality duties under the Act, there is a requirement to set equality objectives at least every four years.

During consultation on the Council Plan 2024-28 feedback was sought on refreshing and extending the current equality objectives for a further four years (2024-28). This will allow the Council to build on and broaden the work already achieved under each objective. The refreshed equality objectives form part of the updated Equality Policy 2024-28. There is a requirement to publish information on the public sector equality duty on an annual basis and the annual review 2023-24 was attached to the report at Appendix 3. As regulator of the Equality Act 2010, compliance in meeting the requirements of the specific duties, including publication of the annual review, is monitored by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) adopted the refreshed Equality Policy 2024-28 as at Appendix 2 of the report;
- b) reviewed and approved the Public Sector Equality Duty annual update 2023-24 as at Appendix 3 of the report;
- c) noted the content of the report including updates in two key areas:
 - Staff Networks as at Appendix 4;
 - MHCLG funded Changing Places Toilets programme as at paragraphs 28-32 of the report and Appendix 5.

Helen Bradley
Director of Legal & Democratic Services
18 October 2024