



## RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** on **WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY 2014**.

The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **MONDAY 27 JANUARY 2014** unless the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

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### **Customer First Strategy Refresh 2014-2017 [Key Decision: NS/22/13]**

#### **Summary**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services which sought approval to carry out a public consultation on a new Customer First Strategy for the Council for 2014-2017.

In line with the 'whole council approach' to Customer Services, the Customer First Strategy seeks to broaden accessibility to information and increase the online capability to transact with the council. This approach will ensure best use of existing resources and buildings to provide a network of service access points which is instantly recognisable through a single branding, provisionally entitled "Information Durham". When implementing this approach, clarity will be provided in relation to where key transactions such as benefits will be offered and customers will have much greater access to services and information.

Delivery of the Strategy will result in changes both internally, in relation to integration of services and enabling "channel shift" so that customers are able to and want to access services through digital means. The report proposed that a consultation exercise be undertaken to obtain the views of the public on a number of issues central to the strategy document and the direction of travel proposed in it.

The proposed consultation routes include:

- On-line survey (Paper copies will be available at locations across the county to ensure those without access to PCs/internet access can participate)
- Focus group meetings and signposting through AAPs
- The Disability Partnership

- Partnership Delivery Improvement Group
- Investors in young people
- People's Parliament

The consultation will take place over a 12 week period, commencing on 20 January 2014 until 14 April 2014.

## **Decision**

The Cabinet approved the commencement of a consultation on the Customer First Strategy with a further report being presented to Cabinet following the consultation exercise in order to confirm the final strategy document.

## **Customer Access Point Review [Key Decision: NS/23/13]**

### **Summary**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services and the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development on the current position and future direction of travel in relation to providing face to face access to services through Customer Access Points (CAPs). The report presented options for consideration and proposed a way forward in the light of customer requirements and savings targets.

The Council's most recent Medium Term Financial Plan has identified that the level of savings required in the period 2011 to 2017 has increased considerably to a figure of £222 million. Total revenue expenditure on Customer Services is approximately £4.06 million.

Cabinet approved the original Office Accommodation Strategy on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010 to enhance the Council's customer service provision and rationalise office accommodation before April 2014. Analysis work on the current use of CAPs was undertaken by the research and consultation team, sponsored by the Customer Focus Board which explored the types of interactions and services requested and also defined areas from which demand originates.

The Customer First Strategy is currently undergoing a refresh, with a direction of travel to deliver more efficient and effective access channels and more responsive customer focussed services. One of the key mechanisms for delivering these objectives is the movement of customer contact away from expensive channels. Face to face remains the most expensive way of dealing with customer enquiries. When compared to near neighbours, Durham County Council provides a generous proportion of Access Points with an above average number of access points per population. Customers' expectations regarding the way they can access our services are changing with 44% of households using the internet to make payments, which is higher than the national average. The Government's approach to 'Digital by Design' which aims to deliver public services online or by other digital means, will

increasingly see public services being required to consider digital access as the first option. However, it is recognised that there are groups of people who do not have access to the internet, or, have a need to access services via traditional methods.

In light of reducing budgets and continuing pressures on revenue and general reductions in services County-wide, the report requested that Cabinet consider whether the planned increase in CAPs and the associated revenue expenditure remains appropriate and sustainable.

The following options were considered:

**Option 1 – Maintain the current strategy, increasing revenue expenditure on face to face customer services.**

By continuing full delivery of the Accommodation Strategy, there will be capital expenditure of £2,147,736 and an increase in the Customer Services revenue budget of £136,665. Developments at Stanley, Newton Aycliffe and Bishop Auckland would result in the closure of Spennymoor CAP as a face to face access point. Staff from Spennymoor would be redeployed to alternative locations to support delivery in these areas. This option would considerably increase access to services available prior to LGR.

However, the analysis carried out has shown Spennymoor is one of the busiest CAPs with one of the largest catchment areas. Should this close, the nearest short term available alternative would be the service at Bishop Auckland, which, due to its facilities, would not be able to deal with the demand and would create significant operational difficulties until the projects at Bishop Auckland and Newton Aycliffe were delivered. This option would also fail to achieve the required MTFP saving resulting in further steps being taken through contingency to address this.

**Option 2 - Revise the Office Accommodation strategy to achieve a reduction in revenue expenditure**

Under this option, Spennymoor, the most popular CAP, would remain open as a staffed face to face CAP. Newton Aycliffe, Bishop Auckland and Peterlee would offer a surgery based service. This would be provided from suitable locations and through working with other service providers. This would result in all the areas identified in the Office Accommodation Strategy receiving a Customer Service offer.

In addition to CAPs identified above, information will be available in a variety of Council owned properties, providing customers with signposting assistance. This new provision will be presented under a common 'Information Durham' branding alongside identified CAPs.

This option would considerably increase access to services when compared to the circumstances prior to LGR. All of the areas identified in the Office Accommodation Strategy would still receive a service of some type, with a further enhancement upon implementation of the strategic direction of 'Information Durham'.

Customer Services is required to make £196,000 MTFP savings in 2014/2015 which can currently only be achieved by a reduction in service provision. By ceasing the planned CAP developments the identified £136,655 increase in operational costs would be avoided and therefore contribute to this target.

This option proposes that Bishop Auckland CAP, which is likely to be sold in the near future, be vacated and service re-deployed as a surgery in a nearby Council owned property. Services would continue on an appointments basis for Revenues and Benefits. This would achieve the additional £59,345 saving. In total these changes would achieve MTFP target with considerably less impact on the front line than the full closure of Spennymoor CAP.

It would also be a feasible option to reconfigure the current plans to move the Stanley CAP into the Louisa centre as part of this option, without increasing revenue costs, to incorporate improved accommodation as part of this option.

In summary, this option will result in:

- Relocation of the CAP at Stanley
- a surgery based service at Bishop Auckland and Peterlee
- Newton Aycliffe will continue to offer surgery provision in line with the leisure centre / library project.
- Spennymoor will retain the existing CAP
- No further increases in revenue expenditure
- Savings incurred on Capital financing
- Planned MTFP savings achieved
- 'Information Durham' provision and branding developed

### **Option 3 – Closure of further CAPs**

Option 3 considered the further closure of CAPs to continue the direction of travel towards expenditure reductions.

The analysis of work undertaken to inform this review has shown that if CAPs other than Spennymoor were to be considered for closure to generate revenue savings then others should be considered based on popularity, proximity and current operating models. When taking a strategic view, considering the popularity, proximity and current operating model, the two CAPs which could be closed, where the impact could be mitigated by nearby CAPs, would be Bishop Auckland and Stanley. As with option 2, in addition to CAPs identified above, information will be available in a variety of Council owned properties, providing customers with signposting assistance. It should be noted that Stanley CAP returned one of the highest usage rates per head within its catchment, implying that although demand would be displaced to nearby CAPs, this would impact upon the capacity to deliver services within this area.

From the closure of the two CAPs a total saving of £234k would be achieved, resulting in an overall saving for this option of £371k. A restructure of customer services would be required to achieve this saving with a required reduction of approximately 9 FTE.

## **Option 4 – Adopt an alternative service delivery model**

The final option considered was to move to an alternative delivery model for face to face contact, with a small number of centres offering full face to face interview services, potentially by appointment only, with staff in other centres such as leisure centres and libraries providing frontline signposting services.

This option has not been fully costed and would represent a significant change to the way customers receive face to face services. Interview space would be restricted to potentially four centres at Consett, Durham, Seaham and Spennymoor on an appointment only basis, potentially supplemented by surgeries in other locations.

In addition to the CAPs identified above, information will be available in a variety of Council owned properties, providing customers with signposting assistance. The availability of the core services would however be reduced.

Major impacts of this alternative delivery model would be upon customers accessing the benefits service who currently prefer or require face to face interactions. There would also be impacts on hosted services that rely on Customer Services to provide accommodation, signposting or reception function, in particular (Housing Solutions and Welfare rights). Based on 2012/13 data 130,000 interactions at access points would need to be accommodated by an alternative resource.

### **Decision**

The Cabinet approved Option 2 for implementation.

## **Local Education Partnership Director**

### **Summary**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Resources requesting approval to appoint a new Director to represent Durham County Council on the Board in Inspiredspaces Durham Limited who are the Council's Building Schools for the Future contractor under a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) which gives the company exclusivity over secondary education projects above £100,000 in value over the 10 year contract period to 13 August 2019.

Since signing the SPA the Council has been represented on the Board of Directors by a Finance Manager in the Resources Service Grouping. This directorship has come to an end and, following agreement of the Corporate Directors for Resources and Regeneration and Economic Development, Adrian White, the Head of Transport & Contract Services in the Regeneration and Economic Development Service Grouping has been identified as an appropriate officer to represent the Council on the Board of Directors.

### **Decision**

The Cabinet approved the appointment of Mr Adrian White as Durham County Council's Director on the Board of Inspiredspaces Durham Limited.

**Decisions made in Part B of the meeting – reports contain exempt or confidential information**

**North East Industrial Estate – Future Options and Acquisition Strategy [Key Decision: R&ED/13/13]**

**Summary**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development relating to the North East Industrial Estate – Future Options and Acquisition Strategy.

**Decision**

The Cabinet approved the recommendations contained in the report.

**Acquisitions at Queen Street, Crook to Facilitate Sale of Former DCC Depot**

**Summary**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development relating to Acquisitions at Queen Street, Crook to Facilitate Sale of Former DCC Depot.

**Decision**

The Cabinet approved the recommendations contained in the report.

Colette Longbottom  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services  
17 January 2014