

Cabinet

16 October 2024

Review of Customer Access Point Service Offer

Key Decision No. CORP/R/2024/005



Report of Corporate Management Team

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Councillor Susan McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Customer Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

All.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To outline proposals to adjust the face-to-face service offer delivered in Customer Access points (CAPs) which reflects reduced demand whilst preserving channel choice.
- 2 To set out the findings of the consultation activity and equalities impact assessment (EIA) on the proposals, which are linked to the achievement of savings targets included in MTFP (14).
- 3 To highlight options for early realisation of a proportion of associated savings.

Executive summary

- 4 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.
- 5 Demand levels in 2023/24 were 33% of that which they were in 2017/18.
- 6 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.

- 7 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.
- 8 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.
- 9 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 our decline in demand and 41% more than the 2023 service offer consultation.
- 10 The recommended option, following analysis of data, resident, and member feedback, is 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.
- 11 The proposal has been 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.
- 12 A full Equalities Impact Analysis (EIA) has been carried out. It is recognised that older age groups, over the age of 65 years and people with disabilities are more likely to access face to face provision at CAPs and this is reflected in the percentage of consultation respondents from those groups.
- 13 The report has been considered and noted by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management board (COSMB), full comments can be found at appendix 5.
- 14 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 re-modelled 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.

- 15 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.
- 16 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.
- 17 A communication and engagement plan to support changes and promote customer service access channels have been drafted and are included at appendix 4.
- 18 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.
- 19 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.

Recommendation(s)

- 20 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) note the content of the report, the information contained within, and the reduced footfall being seen in CAPs and increased demand across other channels;
 - (b) approve 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) note the proposal to accelerate the majority of the associated savings currently profiled to be achieved in 2026/27 into 2025/26.

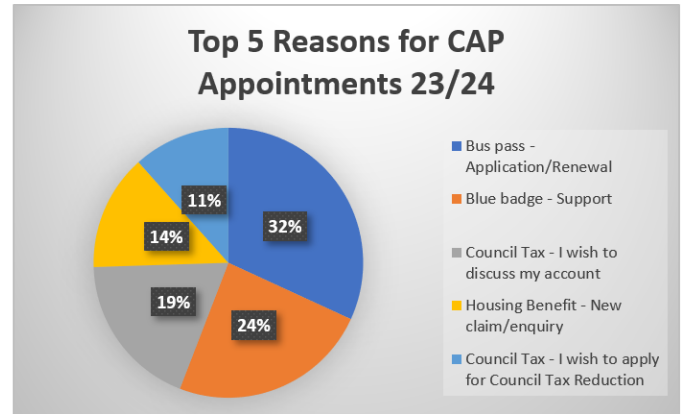
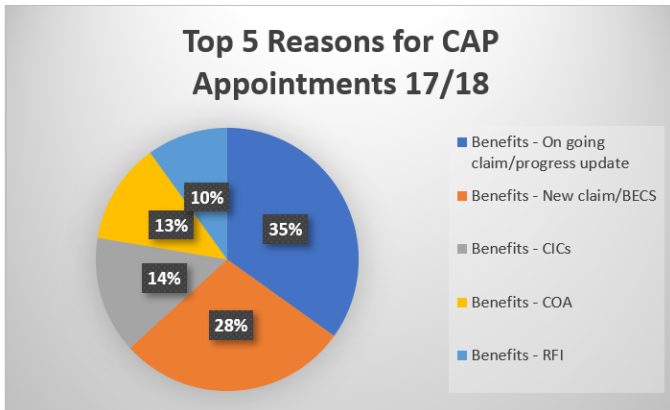
Background

- 21 Residents and customers can contact the council in several ways to get help and information about council services including telephone, online, self-serve, web chat, chatbot, social media and face-to-face through our CAPs.
- 22 All our Customer Service Officers (CSOs) and Assistants (CSAs) are skilled to work across multiple channels to meet service demand.
- 23 There are currently 8 CAPs across the county located in Barnard Castle, Stanley, Seaham, Spennymoor, Durham City (Clayport), Crook, Chester-Le-Street and Consett. Current opening times for all CAPs can be found at appendix 3.
- 24 The council's current CAP offer requires 30.84 FTE to maintain the service, the associated operating model includes the following roles.
 - (a) 2.84 x Team Coaches Grade 9
 - (b) 20.1 CSOs Grade 6
 - (c) 7.9 CSAs Grade 4
- 25 It should be noted that the staff assigned to the CAPs also provide scheduled telephony, email, webchat, and quality assurance support to the wider service.
- 26 Demand for the CAP service offer has decreased year upon year with appointment take up falling significantly since the launch of Universal Credit (UC) and visitor numbers dropping even further post pandemic.
- 27 In response to this change in demand and to support MTFP(13) savings the CAP service offer was adjusted in October 2023 and opening days across 4 of the least used CAPs were reduced.
- 28 Stanley, Consett and Chester Le Street opening days were reduced from 5 to 3 days per week and Barnard Castle adjusted from 4 to 2 opening days per week to better reflect the demand in these areas and realise £137,000 in savings.
- 29 Despite this adjustment demand for CAP services remains significantly less than the capacity available under the current service offer.
- 30 In the 9 months following implementation of the adjusted service offer 60% of appointment capacity across the estate remains unused with some locations seeing just 22% of appointment time utilised.

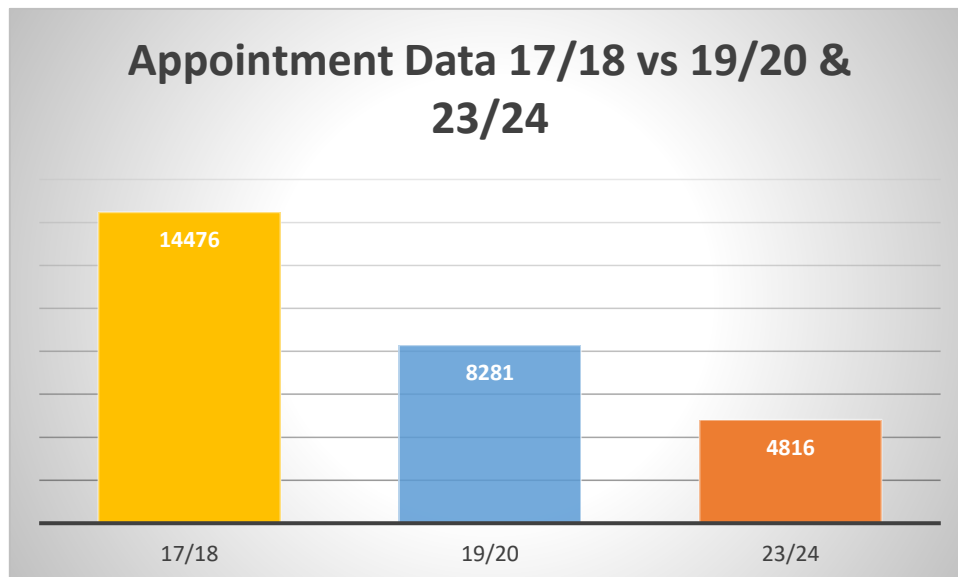
- 31 To ensure the council is making best and responsible use of its resources and assets as well as appropriately supporting existing contact channels, and maintaining services that matter to our residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable, a further review of the face-to-face customer service offer was initiated.
- 32 The review aimed to establish the impact and benefits of moving from a traditional, building led CAP operating model to a more responsive offer 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.
- 33 Savings of £219,000 are aligned to this review which are included in MTFP(14) savings plans approved by Full Council in February 2024 and projected for the financial year 2026/27.
- 34 The aim of such fundamental adjustment to the operating model is that all contact channels remain available for residents, and the delivery of the offer is reflective of where the demand exists.

Data

- 35 CAP demand has decreased year upon year, now over 90% of customer service contacts are received by phone, email or online.
- 36 Central to the Government's welfare reform programme is the migration of means-tested benefits and tax credits ('legacy benefits') to Universal Credit (UC), which is managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 37 This migration commenced in County Durham in June 2018 and has significantly impacted demand for face-to-face customer service support.
- 38 Pre UC migration most CAP demand was linked to benefits queries which equated to over 16k appointments each year.
- 39 The graphs below show the top 5 reasons for CAP appointments in the 12 months pre-UC compared with the financial year 2023/24. Benefit related contact represented 100% of the top 5 reasons for CAP appointments pre-UC migration.



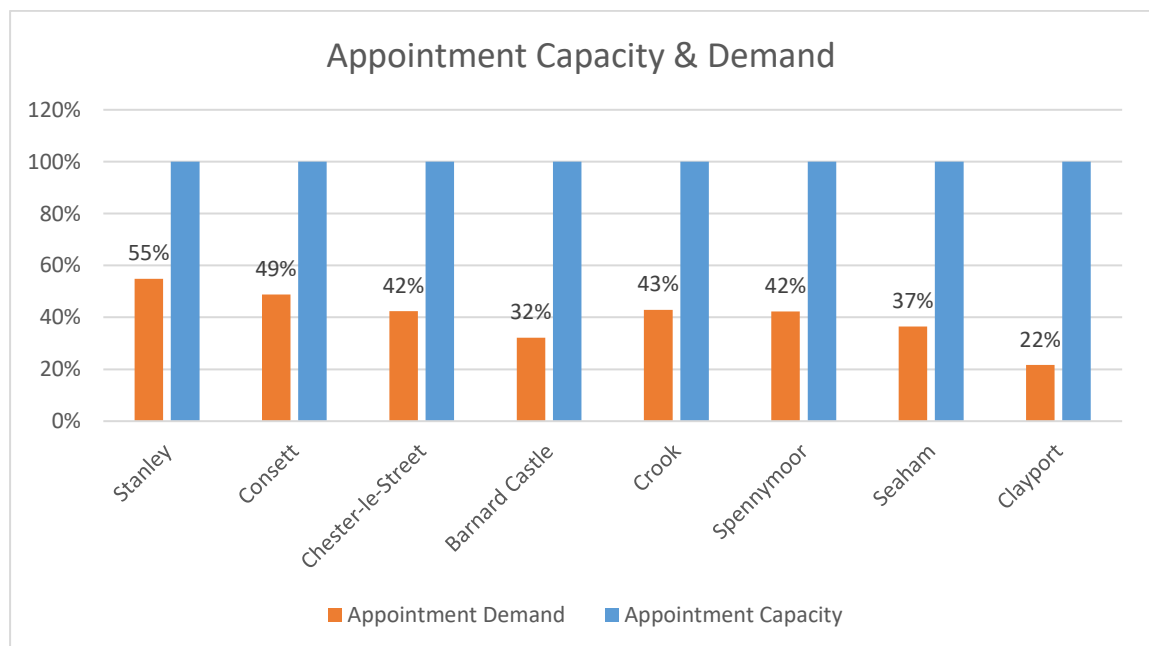
- 40 This demand is now managed by the DWP completely shifting the type of support required from customer services and reducing demand by almost half (42%) by the financial year 2019/20.
- 41 The CAP closure period between 27 March 2020 and 1 April 2022, in line with COVID 19 restrictions, also influenced a shift away from face-to-face demand which dropped by 42% following reinstatement of the offer when compared with the financial year 2019/20.
- 42 The graph below compares demand for the financial years 2017/18 (pre-UC) 2019/20 (pre pandemic) and 2023/24 (post pandemic).



- 43 Demand levels in 2023/24 are 33% of that which they were in 2017/18.
- 44 This drop has likely been influenced by both a significant e-enabling/digitisation programme that was required whilst access was restricted, along with the long period of closure forcing the use of other

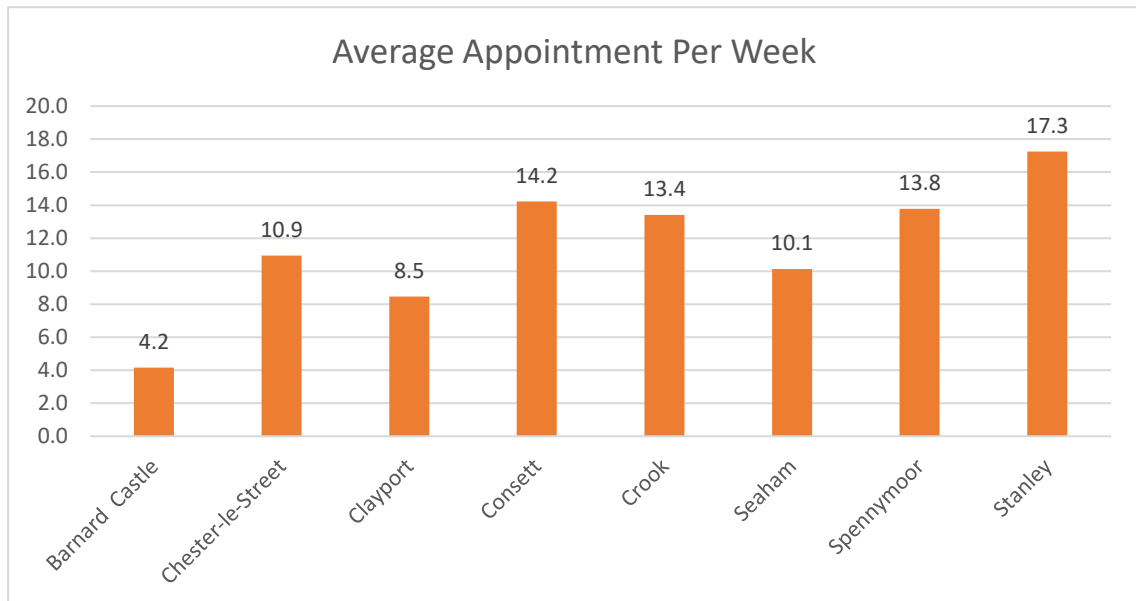
channels which have now been adopted by users as the preferred channel choice.

- 45 Adoption of other channels as preference is evidenced in the increases being seen across the other channels staffed by corporate customer service and self-service channels as customer choice continues to shift away from face-to-face.
- 46 Contact received by customer service via telephony has increased by 29%, email by 33%, social media by 21% and webchat by 100% in 2023/24 compared to 2019/20 equating to 125,913 additional contacts coming in through these channels and further supporting the need for to review the service offer to ensure the movement of resource to match changes in customer channel choice.
- 47 In the 9 months since reducing opening days in some of the CAPs the capacity significantly exceeds demand, with more than half of the available appointment slots going unused across the CAPs.
- 48 Whilst all CAPs are consistent, in that capacity in each outweighs demand, there is variability across the estate as can be seen in the graph below, some areas are seeing as little as 22% demand for CAP support in comparison to the availability.



- 49 Since the launch of UC in 2018 CAP appointments in the main relate to transactional activity, namely, blue badge or bus pass application support and take between 15 and 30 minutes.

- 50 The graph below shows the average appointments carried out per week for each CAP in the 9 months following adjustment to the offer in October 23.



- 51 In the last 6 years the number of hours required each week to fulfil appointment demand across the CAP estate has dropped from 202.8 to 52.8 hours per week.
- 52 It can be concluded from the demand data that CAPs are over capacity and current demand can be managed in 1 or less working days per week per CAP.

Voice of the Customer

- 53 Whilst data is available to demonstrate demand in the existing CAP sites and can be used to establish how much customer service capacity is required to meet that demand, what cannot be established from the data alone is whether there is unmet demand in areas where there is not a CAP and barriers such as transport links or cost and time to travel are stopping residents from accessing services.
- 54 A key aim of a further review of the operating model was to ensure delivery of the offer is reflective of where demand exists, and that the council maintain services that matter and add value to residents.
- 55 The CAP locations are not evenly spread across the county as is shown in the image below (CAPs are identified by the red dot).



56 Therefore, an essential element of this review was to gather the voice of the customer and establish where demand for face-to-face customer service support may exist in areas where there is no current provision.

57 During 7 May and 28 July 2024 public consultation was carried out to gather information on the impact of reducing the days current CAPs are open and gather intelligence on where there is a need for CAP resource to be placed to allow us to put capacity where it is needed and deliver an offer that adds increased value.

58 The survey can be found at appendix 2 and asked residents to tell us:

- (a) How far they travelled to access a CAP;
- (b) Whether it would impact them if opening days of current CAPs reduced to 1 day each week;
- (c) Whether it would benefit them if CAPs were opened in additional locations; and
- (d) Where these locations should be.

59 Promotion of the consultation to maximise the volume of resident feedback included the following.

- (a) Information on the Durham County Council website;
- (b) A link to the survey was added to all email and webchat responses issued by Customer Services during the period (Approx 21k);

- (c) 2,302 email, 1,326 text messages and 1,003 letters were issued to CAP users asking them to get involved in the consultation;
- (d) A press release was added to the May edition of Durham County News;
- (e) Members briefings were issued;
- (f) Partner briefings were issued including libraries, AAPs, VCS, and housing associations;
- (g) Partner boards were attended; and
- (h) Social media communications were issued throughout the period.

60 The customer service management team also presented to the 14 Area Action Partnership (AAP) Boards, Poverty Action Steering group (PASG), Housing Poverty Group and attended meetings of County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) to share the consultation plans and gather wider partner and community feedback.

61 In addition, due to low response rates, a social media campaign was paid for across June and July to make every effort to capture resident input to support decision making.

Participation

62 Participation in the consultation is shown in the table below.

| Method | No of People |
|---|-----------------|
| Survey (Online) | 275 |
| Survey (Paper Based) | 404 |
| AAP Board meetings | 302 |
| Social Media | 804 engagements |
| PASG | 14 |
| Housing Poverty Group | 13 |
| County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) | 48 |
| Total | 1,860 |

- 63 The approach enabled the council to engage with 1,860 people. This included 679 survey respondents, with 90% of these respondents providing equality data. There is no disaggregated equality data for other engagement methods.

Summary of AAP Feedback

- 64 A presentation was delivered to each AAP Board where they could ask questions and provide feedback. Members of the public were invited to attend the meetings, both paper copies and the survey link were made available in each meeting.
- 65 The key themes and considerations which emerged included.
- (a) Public transport links and or costs to travel could be a barrier to accessing current locations;
 - (b) Use of local community centres to deliver CAP services should be considered;
 - (c) Use of mobile solution to support access should be considered.
- 66 Full notes from the AAP sessions can be found at appendix 5.

CDALC feedback

- 67 A presentation was delivered to members of both the large and small Town and Parish council forums, key themes and considerations which emerged included.
- (a) Public transport links, lack of car ownership, and technology could be barriers to accessing the service;
 - (b) Use of Libraries to deliver CAP services should be considered;.
 - (c) Demographic data and analysis of current customer travelling requirements to access this service should also be considered.
- 68 Full notes from the CDALC sessions can be found at appendix 5.

COSMB feedback

- 69 The report has been considered and noted by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management board (COSMB), full comments can be found at appendix 5 considerations which emerged included.
- (a) Members acknowledged the changing demands from council customers in the way they accessed council services and the

reduction in face-to-face appointments across the CAPs with a switch to alternative online methods of customer contact.

- (b) In noting the savings members also highlighted that given the changing behaviour of customers, it was appropriate that the customer services offer was proportionately reviewed and evolves with alternative provision to meet associated demand. A suggestion was also put forward that cabinet include within future considerations for service offer the potential for a mobile customer service provision.
- (c) The management board considered that the cabinet when deliberating on the proposals must ensure that an appropriate communications and engagement programme should be developed. Concern was also raised that those staff affected by the proposals and their respective trade unions appeared not to have been included in the consultation exercise but would rather be engaged potentially after the cabinet had made a decision.
- (d) In respect of the proposed development of more online methods of customer service and transactions, reference was made to the use of web chat and assurances sought from the board that wherever possible customers would have access to “real people” and not merely “Bots”.

Learnings from survey responses

- 70 The % of residents disagreeing with reducing the time available in current locations to introduce additional was split almost in half with 53% in disagreement with proposals.
- 71 Residents told us that over 75% of users already travel less than 5 miles to get to their nearest CAP.
- 72 64% stated it would not benefit them if CAPs were opened in additional locations.
- 73 Consequentially, in response to the question of where it would be of benefit to have an additional CAP location 76% of responses were left blank or no preference was selected, 7% referenced towns where a CAP already exists.
- 74 Of the 17% that suggested new locations, 52% (89) suggested towns in the East, 43% (75) in the South, 5% (8) in the North of the County.
- 75 Of the towns suggested for the South, Newton Aycliffe was the most popular with 15 respondents choosing this town, Bishop Auckland was

the 2nd most popular with 13, Ferryhill received 6, the remaining towns (23) received 5 or less.

- 76 Of the towns suggested for the East, Peterlee was most popular with 30 respondents choosing this town, Horden was the 2nd most popular with 14 responds choosing this town, Blackhall, and Easington both received 7, the remaining towns (15) received 3 or less.
- 77 Of the towns suggested for the North, Pelton and Annfield Plain, were suggested by more than 1 respondent the remainder were all singular suggestions each of which are within 5 miles of current CAP locations.
- 78 It can be concluded from the survey data that the consultation did not identify significant demand for or identify a strong feeling of benefit for additional locations.
- 79 However, of the responses linked to new locations additionality in the East and South of the County were most popular accounting for 95% of suggested locations.

Equalities Impact assessment Summary

- 80 Feedback from the survey was received across the protected groups, although rates are not always directly comparable with population data for the County.
- 81 Impact from an equality's perspective recognised that older age groups, over the age of 65 years and people with disabilities are more likely to access face to face provision at CAPs and this is reflected in the percentage of consultation respondents from those groups.
- 82 Whilst the proposal will lead to a reduction in the opening times of current CAPs which will impact some, it is important to note that the service is not being removed. It is being re-modelled on a demand led basis to provide a broader reach and better access to more residents via the introduction of more locations. In addition, alternative customer access channels including telephone, email, social media, and webchat will remain available.
- 83 The largest volume of CAP appointment requests relates to Blue Badge support. A Blue Badge is a benefit awarded to people with a condition that impacts their mobility. Another large proportion of CAP appointment traffic is related to concessionary Bus Pass application support and queries which can be associated with older age and or disability.
- 84 This will potentially mean a disproportionate impact on disabled people and older age groups although a service offer will remain, it will be

adjusted in terms of opening hours and potentially location (which could be beneficial for some).

- 85 It is anticipated that the proposal will provide the following positive impacts:
- (a) more location options for service users;
 - (b) less travel requirements for service users;
 - (c) more flexible and agile service offer;
 - (d) increased resource to support telephony, email, social media, and webchat benefitting all customers accessing via these channels through increased response time.
- 86 It is important that any changes have an appropriate lead in time and clear communications to ensure customers are aware of changes to operational opening hours and locations. The communications plan supporting any implementation will reflect this equalities recommendation.
- 87 A copy of the full EIA assessment can be found at appendix 1.

Proposal adjustments from Feedback

- 88 Our consultation proposed the following opening days for current CAP locations as these were the days which saw the highest levels of demand.

| Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri |
|---------------|-------------|----------------|------------------------|------------|
| Chester-Le-St | Stanley | Consett | Clayport (Durham City) | Seaham |
| | | Barnard Castle | Spennymoor | |
| | | Crook | | |

- 89 Consideration of feedback received during consultation has led to adjustments to these proposed days.
- 90 Feedback from Chester -Le-Street AAP board was that surgeries proposed on Mondays would be disproportionately affected by Bank Holidays across the year in addition to transport links in the area being

more challenging on a Monday. In consideration of this feedback there are no surgeries proposed on Mondays and Chester Le Streets CAP surgery day has been moved to Friday.

- 91 Feedback from Crook AAP was that Tuesday would be the most appropriate day to host a surgery as this was 'generally the busiest day in town' and Tuesday is also Market Day in Crook, the proposed opening day has been adjusted to reflect this local intelligence.
- 92 It was requested by local elected members to consider the opening days of the Empire Theatre in Consett so that where possible the Theatre and CAP were not closed on the same day. This consideration has been shared with colleagues in the culture service to address within future decision making as plans for the Theatre are still in development and going through due process.
- 93 Consett opening day has been adjusted to align with library opening times and to the towns Market Day.
- 94 Stanley has not been adjusted to Thursday to align to their Market Day to support access to service being available across the week.

Benchmarking

- 95 The customer service face-to-face offer of neighbouring Local Authorities was also researched to support development of options.
- 96 Of those reviewed 1/3rd do not advertise a face-to-face offer, 1/3rd offer an appointment only service in the same way DCC do although over a smaller number of locations and 1/3rd offer a drop-in customer service offer over fewer locations than the current DCC offer.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Gateshead | Do not advertise a face-to-face customer service offer. Visitors to Civic Centre would be signposted to relevant service for support. |
| Newcastle | Do not advertise a face-to-face customer service offer. Do have a face-to-face housing offer co located within libraries. |
| North Tyneside | Appointment only service, appointments made in advance by calling the contact centre and are available across 4 locations. |
| South Tyneside | Drop-in service available across 2 locations. |
| Northumberland | Drop-in service available across 6 locations. |

| | |
|------------|--|
| Sunderland | Appointment only service, appointments made in advance by calling the relevant service area. |
|------------|--|

Options

- 97 The review of demand data and feedback gathered throughout consultation has allowed development of several service offer options for consideration each focused on delivery of a more efficient and responsive operating model.
- 98 All options are outlined below for consideration, with option 1 being the recommended option.

Option 1 – Surgery model remaining in current location plus 2 new locations.

- 99 Data identifies current CAP demand can be channelled into 7.04 days each week and that transformation of the current model to a surgery model would better reflect demand which represents responsible use of public funds and council assets.
- 100 Maintaining a presence in our current locations results in minimal change for current CAP users.
- 101 Whilst the volume of interest in additional locations across the county was low from a survey perspective the South and the East of the county were identified within public consultation as areas that would benefit from a face-to-face customer service presence with Newton Aycliffe and Peterlee as the most frequently identified towns.
- 102 Appropriate spaces in Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre and Peterlee leisure centre (One point hub) can be made available for a CAP surgery 1 day each week.
- 103 As both are DCC buildings there is no additional cost to the council for use of the space. Health and Safety and facilities colleagues have confirmed no building alterations would be required for the service to deliver a CAP surgery safely from these locations. The only cost associated with delivery is the staff and cost of amendments to signage.
- 104 Adoption of a CAP surgery in these locations increases location choice and improves the geographical spread of the service which in turn will reduce travel requirements for some users making use of the offer more accessible.

- 105 The operating model associated with this option provides 10 surgery days each week giving enough resource to handle an increase in demand of up to 29% from that which we see now.
- 106 This change can be implemented along with achievement of the agreed savings of £219,000.
- 107 The surgery model associated with this option is shown in the table below. Please note the opening times vary in some locations due to the opening/closing times in the buildings from which services will be delivered.

| Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri |
|------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| | Stanley 0830 - 1700 | Barnard Castle 1000 - 1700 | Clayport (Durham City) 0830 – 1700 | Seaham 0830 – 1630 |
| | Crook 0830 -1700 | Peterlee 830-1700 | Spennymoor 0830 – 1700 | Chester Le Street 0830 – 1630 |
| | | | Consett 0930 – 1700 | Newton Aycliffe 1000 – 1630 |

- 108 The aim of the review was to make savings whilst maintaining all contact channels for residents, and delivering the offer where the demand exists.
- 109 This option best meets this outcome. It is demand led in terms of current locations, brings increased value to the offer for residents in the East and in the South of the county and allows reprofiling of customer service resource to other increasingly popular contact channels.
- 110 As there is no cost other than staffing associated with hosting surgeries in the proposed areas this facilities agility to the offer. Should there be limited value seen from adding services in Peterlee or Newton Aycliffe these surgeries can be wound down or the time invested reduced without any loss of outlay.

Option 2 – Surgery model in current locations only

- 111 Consultation did not identify significant levels of demand for additional locations and 64% of residents stated it would not benefit them if CAPs were opened in additional locations, therefore, it should be a consideration to simply adjust the current offer to reflect current demand.
- 112 Data trends identify current CAP demand can be channelled into 7.04 surgery days each week; a surgery model utilising only current locations covers 8 days each week giving 12% capacity in the model to absorb increased demand before adjustment to the operating model would be required.
- 113 Transformation of the current model to surgery model 1 day each week in each current location requires less staff to deliver than option 1 increasing the saving available by £70,000 bringing the total saving available because of the change in operating model to £289,000.
- 114 The surgery model associated with this option is shown in the table below.

| Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri |
|-----|------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| | Stanley 0830 - 1700 | Barnard Castle 1000 – 1700 | Clayport (Durham City) 0830 - 1700 | Seaham 0830 – 1630 |
| | Crook 0830 -1700 | | Spennymoor 0830 - 1700 | Chester Le Street 0830 – 1630 |
| | | | Consett 0930 - 1700 | |

- 115 However, this is not the recommended option. Whilst response volumes were low to recommend additional areas there was some demand identified, this demand should be explored to determine if there is greater need for support.
- 116 A model with additional surgeries has been identified as deliverable within the agreed savings of £219,000 with no additional rental or set up

costs to the council (option 1). Should this model be underutilised it could be rolled back, and the additional savings realised later.

Option 3 – Mobile Surgery Solution

- 117 In response to AAP board feedback and in consideration of the size and rurality of County Durham a mobile unit for delivery of CAP support has been costed.
- 118 Colleagues from assets and fleet identified the cost to purchase 1 mobile unit was between £49 and £51k, annual maintenance and running costs would be additional.
- 119 However, this is considered a high-risk option in terms of cost to implement versus benefit to residents and as such has not been considered as viable for the following reasons.
- (a) There are no identifiable benefits of transferring from existing established locations to this solution;
 - (b) This is only beneficial to cover additionality of the offer, consultation did not identify significant enough demand for more locations to justify the additional spend;
 - (c) CAP users need CAP support in most cases less than once each year, and figures for this support are falling each year, this is an expensive option for a service with decreasing demand.

Staffing Impact

- 120 Savings associated with this change will be delivered from a reduced operating model therefore staff will be impacted and will require consultation.
- 121 The recommended option requires deletion of the following posts from the operating model.
- 1.9 Grade 9 Team Coach
 - 3.89 Grade 6 CSOs
 - 4.1 Grade 4 CSOs
- 122 Of these posts it is anticipated at least 1 could be met through existing expressions of interest for ER/VR, 8 could be met through vacancies and 1 could require compulsory redundancy. A proposed consultation timeline in readiness for any restructure exercise with employees can be found at appendix 1.

- 123 12 staff will remain aligned to the CAP offer and will cover the face-to-face surgeries along with providing scheduled telephony, email, webchat, and quality assurance support to the wider service in the same way they do now.
- 124 The remaining staff will be realigned from the CAP operating model and into the wider customer service operation to support other contact channels and would be given opportunity to adopt hybrid ways of working. Alternatives would be made available for those who do not wish to work from home.

Conclusion

- 125 The recommended option for future service delivery ensures CAPs are open at the most appropriate times that reflect demand and provide capacity to make appointments available at multiple locations across the county.
- 126 The proposal has been developed in consultation with colleagues in Corporate Property and Land to ensure alignment to the Corporate Asset Strategy as well as 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.
- 127 The adjustment will also support agility in the service to be able to change locations where demand suggests this is appropriate. This approach supports a value for money offer which maintains all the contact channels currently available for customers in addition to allowing an appointment-based system in more locations across the county than the current offer.
- 128 To make savings and maintain a value for money offer that makes best use of council resources it is essential that the customer service offer is kept under review and evolves in response to the channel demand.
- 129 Inability to adjust the face-to-face offer to reflect the decreasing demand will result in inability to meet MTFP14 savings goals aligned to customer services and perpetuate an inefficient service delivery model.
- 130 Adjustment to the recommended option will allow greater resource to move to telephony, email, social media, and webchat support which has seen a substantial increase since the pandemic, benefitting all customers accessing via these channels through increased response time.
- 131 Reasonable adjustments will continue to be made where necessary for customers with a disability, and language support will remain available for customers whose first language is not English.

Next Steps

- 132 Delivery of savings associated with this change were agreed at Full Council in February 2024 to be realised in full from April 2026.
- 133 Support from colleagues in Communications, Assets, Business Services, and the Consultation Officer Group (COG) has resulted in earlier than planned completion of the review facilitating opportunity for earlier implementation in most sites and earlier realisation of 70% of associated savings.
- 134 Implementation and communications plans associated with Options 1 and 2 have been drafted and can be delivered within 12 months allowing implementation of change in Barnard Castle, Stanley, Seaham, Spennymoor, Durham City, Crook, Chester-Le-Street, Consett, Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe to be in effect from 1 October 2025.
- 135 Early implementation across these sites releases £160,000 of the agreed savings from 1 October 2025.
- 136 A copy of the draft communications plan can be found at appendix 4.
- 137 Durham City (Clayport) is the exception. We are working with our colleagues in assets who have a developing strategy for this location, Durham City property area review, spanning over a longer period, as such savings associated with this location (£59,000) will remain profiled for 2026/27.

Background papers

- List any papers required by law / None.

Other useful documents

- Review of Customer Access Point Service Offer - Report of Corporate Director of Resources (Key Decision: CORP/R/23/06) – County Council 12 July 2023

Author(s)

Sarah Welsh

Tel: 07768994343

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not Applicable.

Finance

MTEP 14 savings aligned to this change are £219,000 and are currently profiled to be achieved in financial year 2026/27 as agreed by Full Council in February 2024.

However, it has been determined that £160,000 can be brought forward, subject to proposal agreement could be realised in October 2025.

Redundancy from staffing reductions associated with this change in offer need to be considered. The service anticipate redundancy to be limited to 1.9 Grade 9 posts as current vacancies will be used for the remainder.

There are already expressions of interest for ER/VR from Officers at this grade although the risk of compulsory redundancy remains at this stage.

Redundancy costs associated will be financed from the Corporate ER/VR Earmarked Reserve.

There will be costs associated with communicating any change in offer and to update/add relevant signage to CAP locations. This will be financed from service staffing underspend accrued as a result of holding vacancies during this review.

Consultation and Engagement

A communications plan incorporating member, staff and key stakeholder engagement is in place in addition to broader communication and engagement planning for service users.

Full consultation with the team and trade union will be conducted as identified in the report and in line with the DCC Restructure Policy.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

A full Equalities Impact Assessment is below detailing potential impacts (both positive and negative) in relation to the protected characteristics. The assessment has been updated throughout and following the consultation to assess the impact of the proposed changes on the protected characteristic groups and to identify and evaluate any mitigations.

Durham County Council Equality Impact Assessment

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires Durham County Council to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people from different groups. Completion of this template allows us to provide a written record of our equality analysis and demonstrate due regard. It must be used as part of decision-making processes with relevance to equality.

Please contact equalities@durham.gov.uk for any necessary support.

Section One: Description and Screening

| | |
|---|--|
| Service/Team or Section | Resources |
| Lead Officer name and job title | Sarah Welsh. Strategic Manager Customer relations |
| Subject of the impact assessment | Customer Access Points service offer |
| Report date (Cabinet/CMT/Mgt team etc) | TSCS Team Meeting – 21.8.24 RMT -27.8.24 CMT – 4.9.24 COSMB – 3.10.24 CABINET – 15.10.24 |
| MTFP Reference (if relevant) | MTFP 14 Res 32 |
| EIA Start Date | June 2024 |
| EIA Review Date | September 2025 |

Subject of the Impact Assessment

Please give a brief description of the policy, proposal or practice which is the subject of this impact assessment.

At present, 90% of the enquiries we receive are made by phone, email or online. And despite opening hours being reduced at the four least used CAPs last October, demand for face-to-face customer services remains low, with only 38% of available appointment slots being used since these changes were introduced. We

want to ensure that the remaining 10% of our residents, who cannot access our services in any way, other than face to face, are best served by what we provide.

We have consulted on proposals to provide a more responsive offer which delivers customer service support to the places it is most needed. The consultation gathered views on opportunities 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. This proposal involves a proposed reduction in the opening times of CAPs to remove unused appointment time in our current CAP locations.

The following revised opening days were proposed at current CAP locations as part of the consultation phase:

- Barnard Castle: Wednesday 10am to 5pm
- Chester-le-Street: Friday 8:30am to 5pm
- Consett: Thursday 9:30am to 5:30pm
- Crook: Tuesday 8:30am to 5pm
- Durham City (Clayport): Thursday 8:30am to 5pm
- Spennymoor: Thursday 8:30am to 5pm
- Seaham: Friday 8:30am to 5pm
- Stanley: Tuesday 8:30am to 5pm

We based the suggested opening days for the existing CAPs following a review of appointment data, along with knowledge of what is happening in the CAPs' local areas. This has helped us recommend the best opening times to match resident demand. We have also considered feedback from some residents during appointments and our consultation last year, who said their nearest CAP was further away than they would like.

Insert summary of preferred option

The preferred option for implementation is to increase coverage in the East and South of the County by offering a surgery location in Peterlee and in Newton Aycliffe in addition to remaining in current location for 1 day each week.

| Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri |
|-----|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Stanley 0830 - 1700 | Barnard Castle 1000 - 1700 | Clayport (Durham City) 0830 – 1700 | Seaham 0830 – 1630 |
| | Crook 0830 - 1700 | Peterlee 830-1700 | Spennymoor 0830 – 1700 | Chester Le Street 0830 – 1630 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|------------------------|--|--|
| | | | | Consett 0930 – 1700 | Newton Aycliffe 1000 – 1630 | |
|--|--|--|--|------------------------|--|--|

Who are the main people impacted and/or stakeholders? (e.g. general public, staff, members, specific clients/service users, community representatives):

General public, elected members, customer service staff

Screening

Is there any actual or potential negative or positive impact on the following protected characteristics¹?

| Protected Characteristic | Negative Impact Indicate: Yes, No or Unsure | Positive Impact Indicate: Yes, No or Unsure |
|---|---|---|
| Age | ? | Y |
| Disability | ? | Y |
| Gender reassignment | N | Y |
| Marriage and civil partnership (only in relation to 'eliminate discrimination') | N | N |
| Pregnancy and maternity | ? | Y |
| Race | ? | Y |
| Religion or Belief | N | Y |
| Sex | ? | Y |
| Sexual orientation | N | Y |

¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

Please provide **brief** details of any potential to cause discrimination or negative impact. Record full details and any mitigating actions in section 2 of this assessment.

The proposal will lead to a reduction in the opening times of current CAPs which will impact some, however the service is not being removed, it is being re-modelled on a demand led basis to provide a broader reach and better access to more residents via the introduction of more locations.

The largest volume of CAP appointment requests relate to Blue Badge support. A Blue Badge is a benefit awarded to people with a condition that impacts their mobility. Another large proportion of CAP appointment traffic is related to concessionary Bus Pass application support and queries which can be associated with older age and or disability. This will potentially mean a disproportionate impact on disabled people and older age groups although a service offer will remain, it will be adjusted in terms of opening hours and potentially location (which could be beneficial for some).

It is important that any changes have an appropriate lead in time and clear communications to ensure customers are aware of changes to operational opening hours and locations.

Please provide **brief** details of positive impact. How will this policy/proposal promote our commitment to our legal responsibilities under the public sector equality duty to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
- advance equality of opportunity, and
- foster good relations between people from different groups.

The review of Customer Access Points will ensure they are open at the most appropriate times that reflect demand and provide capacity to make appointments available at multiple locations across the county. The adjustment will also support agility in the service to be able to change locations where demand suggests this is appropriate. This approach supports a value for money offer which maintains all of the contact channels currently available for customers in addition to allowing an appointment-based system in more locations across the county.

It is anticipated that the proposal will provide the following positive impacts:

- more location options for service users
- less travel requirements for service users
- more flexible and agile service offer

Reasonable adjustments in service delivery for people with disabilities (e.g. requirement for a face-to-face appointment) will continue to be made. Also, for people whose first language is not English and require language support.

Staff will be impacted as a result of the changes proposed and HR processes will be followed to ensure fair treatment. ER/VR requests will be progressed where possible.

Evidence

What evidence do you have to support your data analysis and any findings?

Please **outline** any data you have and/or proposed sources (e.g. service user or census data, research findings). Highlight any data gaps and say whether or not you propose to carry out consultation. Record your detailed analysis, in relation to the impacted protected characteristics, in section 2 of this assessment.

Public consultation up to 28 July 2024

The consultation was designed to be as inclusive as possible, methods used to engage residents included:

- Information on the Durham County Council website.
- A link to the survey was added to all email and webchat responses issued by Customer Services during the period (Approx 21k).
- 2302 email, 1326 text messages and 1003 letters were issued to CAP users asking them to get involved in the consultation.
- A press release was added to the May edition of Durham County News.
- Members briefings were issued.
- Partner briefings were issued including libraries, AAPs, VCS, and housing associations.
- Partner boards were attended.
- Social media communications were issued throughout the period.
- To raise awareness and provide information regarding the consultation activity the customer service management team presented to the 14 Area Action Partnership (AAP) Boards, Poverty Action Steering group (PASG), Housing Poverty Group and attended meetings of County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) to share the consultation plans and gather wider partner and community feedback.
- In addition, due to low response rates a social media campaign was paid for across June and July to make every effort to capture resident input to support decision making.

Post consultation update.

The consultation feedback confirmed that disabled and older people make more frequent contact with CAPs and would thus be the most affected by the proposals.

Overall, 76.7% of respondents prefer face to face, when disaggregated by Disability its 83.2%, however, this is to be expected given the usage data we have.

We were only able to collect equality data for those who completed the surveys. However, 90% of survey respondents provided equality data, this is included in section 2 of this assessment.

Screening Summary

On the basis of the information provided in this equality impact screening (section 1), are you proceeding to a full impact assessment (sections 2&3 of this template)?

Please confirm
Yes.

Sign Off

Lead officer sign off:

Date:

Equality representative sign off (where required):

Date:

M C Gallagher, EDI Team leader

Reviewed 14.08.24

If carrying out a full assessment, please proceed to sections two and three.

If not proceeding to full assessment, please ensure your screening record is **attached to any relevant decision-making records or reports**, retain a copy for update where necessary, and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

If you are unsure of assessing impact, please contact the corporate equalities team for further advice: equalities@durham.gov.uk

Section Two: Data analysis and assessment of impact

Please provide details of impacts for people with different protected characteristics relevant to your screening findings. You need to decide if there is or likely to be a differential impact for some. Highlight the positives e.g. benefits for certain groups and advancement of equality, as well as the negatives e.g. barriers or exclusion of particular groups. Record the evidence you have used to support or explain your conclusions, including any necessary mitigating actions to ensure fair treatment.

Protected Characteristic: Age

| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to age? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|-----------|---------|----------|---|------|-------|---|------|-------|----|------|-------|----|------|-------|----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-------|--------------|------------|---------------|--|
| <p>It is recognised that more older people use face to face so there is a disproportionate impact for this group although maintaining a presence in our current CAP locations results in minimal change.</p> <p>Adjusted opening hours of CAPs may be beneficial for some.</p> <p>An appointment-based offer at 10 locations is positive and expands access for customers of all ages.</p> | <p>A large proportion of CAP appointment traffic is related to concessionary Bus Pass application support, Blue Badge applications and queries which can be associated with older age and or disability.</p> <p>Overall survey respondents by age:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="635 801 1078 1574"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Frequency</th> <th>Percent</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Under 18</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>18-24</td> <td>6</td> <td>1.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>25-34</td> <td>21</td> <td>3.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>35-44</td> <td>58</td> <td>9.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>45-54</td> <td>68</td> <td>11.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>55-64</td> <td>136</td> <td>22.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>65-74</td> <td>224</td> <td>36.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>75+</td> <td>100</td> <td>16.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>614</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>75% of survey respondents were over the age of 55.</p> | | Frequency | Percent | Under 18 | 1 | 0.2% | 18-24 | 6 | 1.0% | 25-34 | 21 | 3.4% | 35-44 | 58 | 9.4% | 45-54 | 68 | 11.1% | 55-64 | 136 | 22.1% | 65-74 | 224 | 36.5% | 75+ | 100 | 16.3% | Total | 614 | 100.0% | <p>It is important that any changes have an appropriate lead in time and clear communications to ensure customers are aware of changes to operational opening hours and locations.</p> |
| | Frequency | Percent | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Under 18 | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18-24 | 6 | 1.0% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25-34 | 21 | 3.4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 35-44 | 58 | 9.4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 45-54 | 68 | 11.1% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 55-64 | 136 | 22.1% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 65-74 | 224 | 36.5% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+ | 100 | 16.3% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 614 | 100.0% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Protected Characteristic: Disability

| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to disability? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? |
|---|---|--|
| | | |

| <p>It is recognised that more people with disabilities use face to face so there is a disproportionate impact for this group although maintaining a presence in our current CAP locations results in minimal change.</p> <p>An appointment-based offer at 10 locations is positive and expands access for all customers including a wider reach for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments in service delivery for people with disabilities (e.g. requirement for a face-to-face appointment) will continue to be made.</p> | <p>Overall survey respondents by disability:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="639 264 1069 405"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Frequency</th> <th>Percent</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>220</td> <td>37.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>365</td> <td>62.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>585</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Those survey respondents who preferred face to face where more likely to be disabled.</p> <p>A large proportion of CAP appointment traffic is related to concessionary Bus Pass application support, Blue Badge applications and queries which can be associated with older age and or disability.</p> | | Frequency | Percent | Yes | 220 | 37.6% | No | 365 | 62.4% | Total | 585 | 100.0% | <p>As above for age.</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments will continue to be made where necessary for customers with a disability.</p> |
|--|---|---------------|-----------|---------|-----|-----|-------|----|-----|-------|--------------|------------|---------------|--|
| | Frequency | Percent | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 220 | 37.6% | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| No | 365 | 62.4% | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 585 | 100.0% | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Protected Characteristic: Gender reassignment | | |
|--|---|--|
| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to gender reassignment? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? |
| | No relevant data. | |

| Protected Characteristic: Marriage and civil partnership (only in relation to 'eliminate discrimination') | | |
|--|---|--|
| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to marriage and civil partnership? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? |
| N/A | | |

Protected Characteristic: **Pregnancy and maternity**

| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to pregnancy and maternity? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Maintaining a presence in our current CAP locations results in minimal change for all customers.</p> <p>An appointment-based offer at 10 locations is positive and expands access for all customers which may be particularly beneficial in terms of pregnancy and maternity.</p> | <p>No relevant data.</p> | <p>As above for age.</p> |

Protected Characteristic: **Race**

| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to race? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Maintaining a presence in our current CAP locations results in minimal change for all customers.</p> <p>An appointment-based offer at 10 locations is positive and expands access for all customers which may be particularly beneficial for those whose first language is not English and who require language interpretation for a pre-arranged face to face appointment.</p> | <p>3.4% of overall survey respondents were non white British.</p> | <p>As above for age.</p> <p>Translation and interpretation services are available where required.</p> |

Protected Characteristic: **Religion or belief**

| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to religion or belief? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|-----------|---------|-----------|-----|-------|------|-----|-------|--------|---|------|--------|---|------|-------|---|------|----------|---|------|----------|---|------|---------|---|------|----------|---|------|-------|---|------|----------|---|------|------|---|------|--------|---|------|------|---|------|--------------|---|------|--------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <p>Maintaining a presence in our current CAP locations results in minimal change for all customers.</p> <p>An appointment-based offer at 10 locations is positive and expands access for all customers.</p> | <p>Overall survey respondents by religion or belief:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="600 479 1110 1715"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Frequency</th> <th>Percent</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Christian</td> <td>394</td> <td>71.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>None</td> <td>136</td> <td>24.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Muslim</td> <td>3</td> <td>0.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jewish</td> <td>2</td> <td>0.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pagan</td> <td>2</td> <td>0.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Shamanic</td> <td>2</td> <td>0.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agnostic</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Atheist</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Buddhist</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hindu</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Humanist</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jedi</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Omnist</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sikh</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spiritualist</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>548</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | | Frequency | Percent | Christian | 394 | 71.9% | None | 136 | 24.8% | Muslim | 3 | 0.5% | Jewish | 2 | 0.4% | Pagan | 2 | 0.4% | Shamanic | 2 | 0.4% | Agnostic | 1 | 0.2% | Atheist | 1 | 0.2% | Buddhist | 1 | 0.2% | Hindu | 1 | 0.2% | Humanist | 1 | 0.2% | Jedi | 1 | 0.2% | Omnist | 1 | 0.2% | Sikh | 1 | 0.2% | Spiritualist | 1 | 0.2% | Total | 548 | 100.0% | As above for age. |
| | Frequency | Percent | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Christian | 394 | 71.9% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| None | 136 | 24.8% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Muslim | 3 | 0.5% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jewish | 2 | 0.4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pagan | 2 | 0.4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Shamanic | 2 | 0.4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Agnostic | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Atheist | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Buddhist | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hindu | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Humanist | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jedi | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Omnist | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sikh | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spiritualist | 1 | 0.2% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 548 | 100.0% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Protected Characteristic: Sex | | |
| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to sex? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? |

| | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| <p>Maintaining a presence in our current CAP locations results in minimal change for all customers.</p> <p>An appointment-based offer at 10 locations is positive and expands access for all customers.</p> | <p>56.4% of overall survey respondents were women.</p> | <p>As above for age.</p> |
|---|--|--------------------------|

| Protected Characteristic: Sexual orientation | | |
|---|---|--|
| What is the actual or potential impact in relation to sexual orientation? | Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact. | What further action or mitigation is required? |
| <p>Maintaining a presence in our current CAP locations results in minimal change for all customers.</p> <p>An appointment-based offer at 10 locations is positive and expands access for all customers.</p> | <p>6.2% of overall survey respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual.</p> | <p>As above for age.</p> |

Section Three: Conclusion and Review

Summary

| |
|---|
| <p>Please provide a brief summary of your findings; a summary of any positive and/or negative impacts across the protected characteristics, links to the involvement of different groups and/or public consultation, mitigations and conclusions made.</p> |
| <p>The largest volume of CAP appointment requests relate to Blue Badge support for people with disabilities. Another large proportion of CAP appointment traffic is related to concessionary Bus Pass application support and other queries which can be associated with older age and or disability. This will potentially mean a disproportionate impact on disabled people and older age groups although a service offer will remain, it will be adjusted in terms of opening hours and location which could be beneficial for some. Reasonable adjustments will continue to be made where necessary for customers with a disability.</p> <p>Widening the appointment-based offer from 8 to 10 locations is positive and expands access for all customers. This may be particularly beneficial in terms of</p> |

older people, pregnancy and maternity and for those whose first language is not English and who require language interpretation for a pre-arranged face to face appointment.

It is anticipated that the proposal will provide the following positive impacts for all customers:

- more location options for service users
- less travel requirements for service users
- more flexible and agile service offer

It is important that any changes have an appropriate lead in time and clear communications to ensure customers are aware of changes to operational opening hours and locations.

Will this promote positive relationships between different communities? If so, how?

Expanding the appointment-based offer is positive for those communities, reducing travel time and widening access.

Action Plan

| Action | Responsibility | Timescales for implementation | In which plan will the action appear? |
|--|----------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Appropriate lead in time and clear communications to ensure customers are aware of changes to operational opening hours and locations. | Sarah Welsh | Subject to approval in October 2024 implementation will be from 1 October 2025 giving 12-month period to communicate the change | Communications Plan |
| | | | |

Review and connected assessments.

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| Are there any additional or connected equality impact assessments that need to be undertaken? (If yes, provide details) | Yes, the CAP review EIA 2023 |
| When will this assessment be reviewed? Please also insert this date at the front of the template | September 2025 |

Sign Off

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Lead officer sign off: | Date: |
| Equality representative sign off (where required): M C Gallagher, EDI Team Leader | Date: 14.08.24 |

Please ensure:

- **The findings of this EIA are carefully considered and used to inform any related decisions and policy development**
- **A summary of findings is included within the body of any relevant reports or decision-making records**
- **The EIA is attached to reports or relevant decision-making records and the report Implications Appendix 1 is noted that an EIA has been undertaken.**

Please retain a copy for review and update where necessary, and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

Climate Change

The shifting of channels from face to face to telephony and digital reduces the need for both customers and staff to travel supporting the climate change agenda through reduced emissions.

Human Rights

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable.

Staffing

Approval of changes in the service offer will release capacity to remove posts and realign others within the service.

A draft timeline is below which would be applicable to any restructure exercise only. The proposals are for reductions in staffing numbers, and although it is hoped that there would be sufficient volunteers for VR or ER/VR in the relevant areas to avoid the need to follow the restructure exercise with a further compulsory redundancy consultation, that cannot be guaranteed.

Depending on the outcome of the restructure exercise, it could be necessary to undertake a further separate consultation period of 30 days for compulsory redundancy from the end of May 2025. The timeline accounts for a maximum notice period (12 weeks) to be issued to anyone who will be redundant as a result of the exercise(s) either through voluntary or compulsory reasons, to coincide with an implementation date of 1 October 2025.

| Step | Milestone | Start date | End date |
|------|---|------------|----------|
| 1 | Approval from Cabinet received | 1.10.24 | 15.10.24 |
| 2 | Notification of Restructure Letter to Trade Unions and affected staff | 31/3/25 | 1/4/25 |
| 3 | Trade Union meeting to discuss the proposals (TU/HR/manager to attend) | NA | 7/4/25 |
| 4 | Formal written response provided to TU's and copy provided to employees | NA | 10/4/25 |
| 5 | Group employee consultation meeting to share information and discuss the proposals. | 14/4/25 | 16/4/25 |
| 6 | Formal written response provided to employees and copy provided to Trade Unions | NA | 21/4/25 |
| 7 | End of 30-day consultation period | NA | 29/4/25 |
| 8 | Review proposals in light of trade union comments and employee issues raised | 29/4/25 | 2/5/25 |
| 9 | Issue of final determination - Provide TUs and employees with relevant final structure charts, job descriptions and arrangements for recruitment. | NA | 7/5/25 |
| 10 | Employees issued with recruitment proposals and information, along with deadline for return of application paperwork. | 8/5/25 | 16/5/25 |

| | | | |
|----|---|---------|---------|
| 11 | Ring-fenced interviews (if appropriate) | 19/5/25 | 23/5/25 |
| 12 | Implementation date | NA | 1/10/25 |

Accommodation

It is our aim to utilise only DCC assets for delivery of service to maximise use of our estate and to support delivery of the wider asset strategy.

The location for the additional CAP surgery in the South will be in Newton Aycliffe leisure centre and for the East Peterlee Leisure Centre (One point Hub).

Changes to the location for Consett CAP were agreed in 2023, relocation from the current non DCC owned building into Consett library remain in place for 2025/26 with plans having been drafted to reflect the potentially reduced CAP opening times proposed within this report.

The current CAP location in Stanley will need to be adjusted should options 1 or 2 be approved to ensure the safety of officers working in the CAP and to remove risks associated with lone working whilst liaising with members of the public. Stanley One Point Hub which is adjacent to the current location in the Louisa Centre will be where appointments would be held subject to approval of a new operating model. This adjustment is not expected to cause any impact on CAP users given proximity of the 2 locations, the below image shows the 2 entrance doors to the CAP and the One-point Hub.



Wider assets considerations including Durham City property area review remain ongoing and could influence CAP locations in the future.

Customer Service will continue to be flexible and support assets colleagues with any changes required to support the wider asset strategy.

Risk

Health and Safety risk assessments to ensure the CAP surgeries can safely operate with 1 Officer have been carried out and all proposed locations are suitable.

There is risk of redundancy although this will be limited to the 1.9 posts with remaining posts to be released from vacancies.

The face-to-face offer provides support, advice and assistance to those customers needing more intensive support due to their circumstances and challenges in relation to accessing alternative channels.

Although demand has reduced because of digital shift/changes in behavior, this channel is seen as a strong local presence, offering council services in a very accessible way.

CAPs have been part of the service offer since LGR – providing a reduced offer may cause confusion and reputational damage as more vulnerable customers attempt to attend for support to find the service unavailable.

This adjustment may drive additional footfall into other council buildings in the absence of the CAP presence.

The frequent presentation of homeless and newly released prisoners in Durham City (Clayport) has led to a higher proportion of anti-social behaviour reports than seen in other sites, a security guard is currently in situ 6 days per week making this site an outlier from the rest of the operating model.

Removal of posts from the customer service operating model impacts the resilience of the customer service team. The CAP team are used to provide additional support when needed for the other contact channels particularly when there is increased demand, flexibility to use this resource will be reduced with the removal of the posts associated with this change.

Should neither option 1 or 2 of those outlined in the report be approved the MTFP13 savings associated will not be achieved.

Procurement

Not applicable.

Appendix 2: Public Consultation Survey Questions



Proposed changes to face-to-face customer services

About contacting us

Q1 How do you prefer to contact us?

- By telephone
- Email
- On social media
- By webchat
- Face-to-face

If you selected face-to-face, please tell us why you prefer this method of contact?

About your use of customer access points

Q2 Which of our customer access points (CAPs) have you visited?
Please tick all that apply.

- Barnard Castle
- Chester-le-Street
- Consett
- Crook
- Durham City (Clayport)
- Seaham
- Spennymoor
- Stanley

Q3 How often do you visit a customer access point for support?

- Weekly or more regularly
- Monthly
- Six monthly
- Annually
- Less often

Q4 How far do you travel to get to your nearest customer access point?

—

- Under a mile
- 1-2 miles
- 2-5 miles
- 5-10 miles
- 10+ miles

About the proposed changes

We want to ensure that the 10% of our residents, who cannot access our services in any way, other than face-to-face, are best served by what we provide. Our aim, therefore, is to develop a more responsive offer which delivers customer service support to the places it is most needed. So, rather than continuing to spend unused appointment time in our current CAP locations, we are exploring opportunities to serve wider community needs by providing support across more locations in the county, benefiting you with increased choice, reduced travel requirements and a better service overall.

This does, however, require a reduction in the opening hours of our current customer access points to avoid increasing our costs to deliver the service. The following new opening days are therefore proposed for our current locations:

- Barnard Castle: Wednesday
- Chester-le-Street: Monday
- Consett: Wednesday
- Crook: Wednesday
- Durham City (Clayport): Thursday
- Spennymoor: Thursday
- Seaham: Friday
- Stanley: Tuesday

Q5 Would it benefit you if face-to-face customer services were available one day a week in more locations?

- Yes No

If yes, where else in the county would you like them to be located?

Q6 Would you agree or disagree with your customer access point being located with another council service, such as a library or a family hub?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly
disagree

Q7 Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to alter the opening times of the existing customer access points and introduce additional locations?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly
disagree

If you disagree with the proposal, please state why.

Q8 If the opening times of the customer access points were altered and additional locations introduced, do you feel there would be a positive or negative effect upon you, your business or your organisation?

Extremely
positive

Positive

Neither positive
nor negative

Negative

Extremely
negative

Please state why you feel this to be the case.

Q9 Do you have any further comments or considerations to make about the proposals?

About you

Our aim is to involve as many people as possible in local decision making and, as such, we would like to make sure everyone has the opportunity to become involved. If you could answer a few questions about yourself it will help us to monitor our performance.

These questions are entirely optional.

Q10 What is your postcode?

This information will only be used to better understand the locations of respondents.

Q11 Are you:

Male

Female

Prefer to self-describe

If prefer to self-describe, please specify.

Q12 What is your age?

Under 18

25-34

45-54

65-74

18-24

35-44

55-64

75+

Q13 Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

(This may include any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity which has a substantial effect on your day-to-day life. Long standing means it has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least a year).

Q14 What is your religion or belief?

Christian
 Sikh

Buddhist
 Muslim

Jewish
 Hindu

None
 Other

If other, please specify.

Q15 What is your ethnicity?

White British
 White Non-British
 Asian or Asian British

Black or Black British
 Arab or Middle Eastern
 Mixed Race

Travelling Community
 Other

If other, please specify.

Q16 How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual/straight
 Gay or lesbian

Bisexual
 Other

If other, please specify.

Thank you for completing the survey.

Appendix 3: Current CAP Locations and opening days

| | Current Opening Hours |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Barnard Castle | Monday 10am - 5pm, Friday 10am – 4.30pm |
| Chester-le-Street | Tuesday to Thursday 8.30am - 5pm |
| Consett | Monday and Wednesday 8.30am - 5pm, Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm |
| Stanley | Monday to Wednesday 8.30am - 5pm, |
| Spennymoor | Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5pm, Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm |
| Crook | Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5pm, Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm |
| Seaham | Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5pm, Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm |
| Durham City (Clayport) | Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5pm, Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm |

Appendix 4: Draft Communications plan

Customer Access Point Change to service offer Communications Plan 2024 DRAFT

Updated:29.07.24

Version: 1.0

Author: Richard Proud

| Date | Action | Description | Target audience | Lead Officer | Cost | Status |
|------------|---|---|-----------------|--------------|------|--------|
| 27.8.24 | Report to RMT | Report outlining the results of consultation and recommended option | RMT | Sarah Welsh | | |
| 4.9.24 | Report to CMT | Report outlining the results of consultation and recommended option | CMT | Sarah Welsh | | |
| 3.10.24 | Report to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny | Report outlining the results of consultation and recommended option | | Vicki Murray | | |
| October 24 | Report to Cabinet | Report outlining the results of consultation | Cabinet | Sarah Welsh | | |

| Date | Action | Description | Target audience | Lead Officer | Cost | Status |
|-------------------|--|---|----------------------|------------------|------|--------|
| | | and recommended option | | | | |
| 31/3/25 – 1/4/25 | Notification of Restructure letter to Trade Unions and affected staff | Restructure letter to Trade Unions and affected staff | Trade Unions / Staff | Paul Davies / HR | | |
| 7/4/25 | Trade Union meeting to discuss the proposals takes place with management team | | Trade Union | Paul Davies / HR | | |
| 10/4/25 | Formal written response provided to TU's and copy provided to employees | | Trade Unions / Staff | Paul Davies / HR | | |
| 14/4/25 – 16/4/25 | Group employee consultation meeting to share information and discuss the proposals. Individual consultation meeting appointments available on request of the employee between 16 to 22/4/25 | | Staff | Paul Davies / HR | | |
| 21/4/25 | Formal written response provided to employees | | Staff | Paul Davies / HR | | |

| Date | Action | Description | Target audience | Lead Officer | Cost | Status |
|-----------|---|---|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------|--------|
| | and copy provided to Trade Unions | | | | | |
| | Provide TU's and employees with relevant final structure charts and recruitment arrangements. | | Trade Unions / Staff | Paul Davies / HR | | |
| June 2025 | Opening hours are changing Poster | Develop posters for CAPs detailing opening hours will change | CAP users/Public | Richard Proud/Customer Services | | |
| July 2025 | Opening hours are changing Poster | Display posters in the CAP's - opening hours will change | CAP Users/Public | Ricard Proud/ Customer Services | | |
| July 2025 | Member briefing | Briefing to remind members that the opening hours of CAPs will change on the 1 October and confirm new surgery locations. | Members | Customer Services | | |
| July 2025 | Update CAP website pages | Update CAP webpages to add a call to action – Our hours are changing | Public | Richard Proud/Customer Services | | |
| July 2025 | LCD screen | Run slide highlighting opening hours are changing | Building visitors | Richard Proud / Customer Services | | |

| Date | Action | Description | Target audience | Lead Officer | Cost | Status |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------|---|-------------|---------------|
| September 2025 | Create new surgery internet page(s) | New page to promote new surgery locations, how to book appointment and opening hours | Public | Richard Proud/Customer Services | | |
| September 2025 | Social media campaign | Develop and run messages highlighting change to opening hours and new surgery locations. Run on DCC corporate and relevant AAP channels | Public | Customer Services/ Richard Proud | | |
| September 2025 | Building signage | Ensure any opening hour signage is updated | CAP users/Public | Customer Services/Facilities Management | | |
| October 2025 | LCD screen | Run slide highlighting opening hours have changed | Building visitors | Richard Proud / Customer Services | | |
| 1 October 2025 | Update CAP website pages | Update relevant pages for changing opening hours – new hours | Public | Customer Service/Richard Proud | | |
| October 2025 | Social media campaign | Develop and run messages highlighting we are changing | Public | Customer Services/ Richard Proud | | |

Appendix 5: AAP and Forum Feedback

| Date attended | | Feedback | Number of Attendees |
|---------------|------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 14/04/2024 | East Durham Rural AAP | Transport links are an issue and a mobile CAP solution like a mobile library would be best solution. Use of local community centres to deliver CAP could be explored. Appointing the right people is important ensuring that they have empathy. CACD are busy with PIP and DLE form support is this why CAP not being used, explained difference in offer and PIP/DLE forms dealt with by WR teams. | 16 |
| 16/05/2024 | 3 Towns AAP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You stated that the offer would be spread over more areas? Are there any locations identified for this? We are asking for recommendations for locations as part of the consultation. • Would suggest that the other towns of 3 Towns are considered – Willington and Tow Law • Why was Wednesday chosen as the day for Crook CAP to be open. Tuesday is generally the busiest day in the town. Please feed that information into the consultation. Wednesday was chosen as the busiest day using the current appointment data. • Need to consider issues of outlying areas where public transport is an issue. How would DCC look at other areas in terms of premises? Access to services online needs to be considered if there is to be a reduction in face-to-face services. DCC wants to pop up in more locations – suggestions for locations are asked in the consultation. A mobile CAP (like the mobile library) for example could be an option. | 32 |
| 16/05/2024 | Spennymoor AAP | It was asked if this was driven by demand or finance | 16 |

| | | | |
|------------|-----|---|----|
| 20/05/2024 | CLS | <p>Q CAPS currently not in the right place. Community Centres would be better location.</p> <p>Q Homelessness and Crisis Support are areas of high demand. There would be concerns about reducing to one day for this reason.</p> <p>Q For those living in Sacriston and other out lying areas it is a challenge to get a bus on a Monday.</p> <p>A This is exactly why we are consulting to better understand why people need to access service and where the best localities to support this would be.</p> <p>Q Are the CAPS appointment only If someone walks into the CAP what happens now?</p> <p>A The appointment approach has been in place since 2019 and if someone walks in, they are fully supported and signposted appropriately.</p> <p>Q Can there be more promotion i.e., social media? Many people not aware of the service.</p> <p>A thanks for the feedback and this is an area that we can look into further.</p> <p>Q I work for CAB and mainly deal with claims for HB and CTR/other discretionary awards. I am surprised by the main reasons for contact in the CAP.</p> <p>A These areas are not part of the current CAP offer but exactly why we are seeking feedback for consideration of additional elements for inclusion.</p> <p>Q I was recently talking to a client who through the CAP had already gone?</p> <p>A We delivered extensive communication and engagement activity when the CAP was relocated including mail shots, direct contact with current users by phone, text, and letter as well as other channels.</p> <p>There may be some confusion with the closure of the Karbon hub who offered housing support. Again, this is not a CAP offer. This is helpful feedback, and I can confirm we worked very closely with Karbon at the time.</p> <p>Q Monday may be an issue due to the volume of BH's</p> <p>A Proposals are currently solely based on current demand.</p> <p>Q could you offer a Tues?</p> <p>A Absolutely</p> <p>Q The decline is a sign of the times but the f2f offer still needs to be out there. Where will the other 2 days of resource go to. This needs to be out in the community.</p> <p>A Exactly, this is the whole point of the consultation. Our aim is to need, and demand is. Whilst we cannot increase operating costs so need to consider other localities.</p> <p>Q Ref to recent local member discussions re multi-disciplinary hubs</p> <p>A This was a previous question in the last consultation and less than 20% of respondents answered and none of the responses indicated this was something they had strong feelings on.</p> <p>Q There is a need for extensive consultation. Problem is that we don't know what we need. Example of a resident who was relocating from outside of the area due to domestic violence and</p> | 23 |
|------------|-----|---|----|

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|---|----|
| | | <p>Member being unsure where to send the resident for support.</p> <p>Q CoL crises means that many less people have internet access and limited capability to use the internet.</p> <p>Q CAB has left a gap and how will this be filled?</p> <p>A Yes there has been evolution, and we need to change the offer to what is needed in our communities.</p> <p>Q We are in a different time since the last survey. Responses will be different and service offer needs to be fit for purpose.</p> <p>A That is right. That is why we are not proposing to end the service but make it fit for purpose.</p> <p>Q Times have changed not everyone can access online through forms. This is too narrow a service.</p> <p>A We are not proposing that. Our aim is to maximise council resources and that is why we are asking where this resource should be placed. Also, people are not aware of the service despite extensive promotion, so this is why we are taking the consultation to all AAPs, promoting in DCN, and making direct contact with service users to make this consultation value add and define the future offer.</p> <p>Q I have never set foot in the CAP. What is the offer? What do they do? What if there are no other locations?</p> <p>A Our CAPs support with an DCC related enquiry and signpost internally and externally whether that be discretionary benefits or bin collection days. Their role is to help people through their journey. Demand is not going down in fact it is increasing across all other channels and our agents are multiskilled and work in their down time however this is a challenge when scheduling resource in peak times such as Annual Billing.</p> | |
| 21/05/2024 | Durham | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you reach those that are not online (100 paper copies were printed for Cllr Hovvels). • Is there an out of hours Advice Service (Homelessness for example) • The Fire and Rescue Service offered to circulate information when they are doing home safety checks. • Can we have feedback once the consultation is complete, especially information on areas where people feel there is a gap in services. | 32 |

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|------------|---------------------------|---|----|
| 22/05/2024 | Derwent Valley AAP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staff in Consett have been there a while, know the area and some of their customers. Where will those staff go, will they be made redundant, would staff from elsewhere come to work in Consett who may not know the area and not able to answer customer's questions, or will there be certain staff just visiting the different areas? • A decision has already been made to close Consett CAP and move it into the library. Currently DCC pay £112k/year to rent the building and impossible to justify having a one day a week in the current situation. For the people of Consett the decision has already been made. Therefore, anything in the consultation is not going to help Consett. • Are there any plans to go out to the outlying villages/have a mobile CAP? • How often would they go out to the villages? • How will people find out about the consultation if they are not online? Is there information to go on notice boards? • Where do people go who are not online, find it difficult to use a telephone and/or turn up on foot, when they need help/have an emergency/signposted to when Consett CAP is closed? • Have the limited bus services in this area impacted on the number of people going into the CAP? Therefore, being unfairly judged from the lower numbers because they cannot get there. • Will the service provision be at a better level, particularly for those who do struggle, when they ring the CAPs, i.e. hard of hearing? • Are home visits being considered? • Will there be additional support for vulnerable groups? • Have you considered using Teams for people to access the service, e.g. at the library or Glenroyd House? • Following the consultation, each area should be looked at individually rather than a countywide response. • Are the people who just call into the CAP for information, directions or signposting recorded and were their numbers considered when compiling statistics? | 26 |
|------------|---------------------------|---|----|

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|------------|------------------------|--|----|
| 22/05/2024 | Mid Durham AAP | <p>Will Cabinet go ahead anyway even if the public do not agree with the changes. He was informed Sarah was unable to comment on that point, as her role was to undertake the consultation and then present the results.</p> <p>Had 'abuse of staff' been reduced as the face-to-face service has been reduced. It was stated potentially this may be the case but was not quantified, given many enquires were not necessarily contentious issues not a lot of abuse from the public occurs.</p> <p>A lot of the public living in Durham City would not necessarily use this venue as an access point (backing up the point about reduced service).</p> <p>About the needs of rural communities and their ability to ask customer relations (face to face) and whether mobile libraries etc. would have the ability to process bus pass applications and act as customer relations as an option for those people.</p> <p>Will face-to-face access be the same service as doing it on line as currently she is finding it takes a long time for requests to be actioned as often needs to be passed from customer services to a particular department. There is often a mixed response from departments in terms of responding to the enquiries.</p> | 27 |
| 04/06/2024 | Stanley AAP | No comments or questions | 15 |
| 12/06/2024 | East Durham AAP | <p>AP noted that there are high number of appointments taking place in community centres per week. Services could be located in the community.</p> <p>ACTION: GE requested that the information on what the CAPs offer is sent to LT for circulation.</p> | 16 |

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|------------|--------------------------|---|----|
| 03/07/2024 | Four Together AAP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OP noted from the presentation slides that roughly half of the Spennymoor appointments weren't being used but that the proposal is a reduction of around 4/5, which doesn't directly correlate. SW commented that any proposed reductions have been based on capacity and demand and would help the service to maximise resources. • Cllr JM noted that people could be fearful of what appears to be such a drastic reduction in the number of available days for appointments. SW noted that a review had been carried out last year, looking at four of the least used Customer Access Points. After the consultation, provision had been reduced, and these areas are still only using half of their available appointments. The current traffic figures have been looked at as part of this latest consultation, and the proposed number of appointments would easily fit into one day, whilst also giving the service the flexibility to open up in more locations. • Cllr JM asked whether there will be another review or updated feedback after the change in provision, say in another year's time. SW clarified that the service is reviewed continually. Cllr JM would welcome feedback after any proposed changes have been implemented to see the impacts. • Cllr PA is concerned at the proposed reduction to opening times. Cllr PA believes that deprivation levels should be an important consideration, for example in Ferryhill people often don't have the money available to travel by bus to Spennymoor, and this is a big issue for people who need to access support. Cllr PA would be receptive to the offer of provision in more locations and is hopeful that these locations will be based on need/demand, to help give people better access to support services. • OP asked if there is any anecdotal data available around why people choose face-to-face contact, rather than other methods that are available, e.g. online. SW noted that the service has always provided a multichannel choice offer, and the way people choose to make contact comes down to customer preference. SW further added that a big chunk of the service's work prior to the implementation of Welfare Reforms was linked to benefit support, which is now provided by the DWP. The pandemic also impacted on the number of people choosing face-to-face contact as a method of support. The service is keen to protect face-to-face as a channel choice for those who want to use it, just with a different configuration. • DR commented that public transport links for people from outlying villages trying to get Spennymoor are really poor, and this can deter people. DR suggested that transport links are taken into consideration as part of the consultation. | 16 |
|------------|--------------------------|---|----|

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|------------|-----------------------------|--|----|
| 11/07/2024 | BA & Shildon AAP | <p>SQ asked how the face-to-face appointments are promoted. SW stated the offer has been available since the unitary authority was established. The appointments are promoted on the Durham County Council website. Further promotion took place, after the pandemic once council buildings were reopened.</p> <p>SQ suggested promoting the appointments available to the town and parish councils. SW confirmed that she will be attending upcoming town and parish council meetings.</p> <p>JH suggested providing the services in more accessible areas for example Bishop Auckland Town Hall and any appropriate community buildings in the BASH AAP area. SW welcomed this comment and urged Board and Forum members to feed this and any points into the consultation process.</p> <p>MH asked will there be a review of the transport services? SW stated the current customer access points are located historically. The process of the consultation exercise is to consider the demand for services in the current areas and any gaps in provision.</p> <p>PQ highlighted the issue of accessibility of public transport when travelling to Crook and Spennymoor customer access points. A discussion took place highlighting transport issues across the BASH area in accessing the appointments in Crook and Spennymoor especially for elderly residents.</p> <p>SQ suggested linking with Durham Key options to enhance the service that customer access points can offer.</p> | 18 |
| 17/07/2024 | Teesdale AAP | <p>Where is the current CAP in Teesdale? Due to the reduction in appointments. Would individuals lose their jobs? Can those attending the sessions be asked why they didn't do it online? At the appointments can information be provided on the support available through CAB? Is CAB advice available in Teesdale? How many people across the Teesdale AAP area have access to the internet? It was asked that the rurality of Teesdale be considered when exploring future access to delivery.</p> | 31 |

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|------------|-----------------|--|----|
| 23/07/2024 | GAMP AAP | <p>Proposed Changes to Face-to-Face Customer Services (Sarah Welsh) Board members received a presentation in relation to the review of Durham County Council's face-to-face customer services offer. SW broadly outlined the current service model, and the proposal to develop a more responsive offer to deliver customer service support to the places where it's most needed, reducing the time spent in current locations to better reflect demand.</p> <p>SW advised that over the last 6 months (data to 31 March 2024) around 52% of available appointment slots have gone unused across the whole Customer Access Point (CAP) estate. In Spennymoor CAP, unused appointment slots are around 64%.</p> <p>The proposals would see an adjustment to the days where appointments are available, from Monday to Friday, to Thursdays. The aim is to benefit residents with increased choice, and reduced travel requirements.</p> <p>SW noted that the consultation is keen to gather as much feedback as possible from local community members in relation to where services are needed, and the issues that currently prevent people from attending appointments.</p> <p>The following discussion points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Jim Atkinson commented that the skillset of those staff offering face-to-face services is really important. SW clarified that all staff are trained using a multichannel approach, adding that there is currently not enough demand to fill the current available capacity with face-to-face provision alone, and hence DCC look to maximise resources by redirecting those staff to other areas, e.g. telephone support etc. • Cllr Eddy Adam asked whether the proposed changes are linked to a savings exercise. Cllr EA also commented that the closing date for responses is quite tight (28 July) and asked how long the consultation has been open for and what methods of engagement have been used. SW responded that the consultation was launched in May but the timing of some Board meetings and then the pause resulting from the pre-election publicity period had caused some delays in getting to all the AAPs. The consultation has been live on the DCC website since May and various methods of promotion have been used, including via local partners such as the Poverty Action Steering Group and the Advice in County Durham network. Elected Members were also given information and asked to support the consultation through member briefings. Service users have also been contacted directly to seek their views. SW added that the response rate for this round of consultation has been higher than the last one in January. SW further | 19 |
|------------|-----------------|--|----|

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| | | <p>added that the proposals are linked to a savings target (£219k).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting observer Cllr Tony Armstrong commented that a lot of people, particularly the elderly or vulnerable, can't always access online information and services and welcomed the use of paper surveys as an option to respond to the consultation. Cllr TA questioned how people know the service exists and how they can physically access it, Green Lane is a reasonable distance from Newton Aycliffe. SW noted the current Customer Access Points are located where they have always been historically, and a key aspect of the consultation is to share this message and ask people to give their feedback on the locations and where they believe that services are needed. Current data shows how well the current locations are used, but what we don't know is where people need us to be.• Meeting observer Cllr Tony Armstrong asked whether care homes been targeted to seek their views as part of the consultation. SW commented that care homes haven't specifically been targeted but DCC have linked with Age UK and other partners.• Cllr David Sutton-Lloyd commented that there will be a core of people who need that face-to-face support, and there will be a lot of local community-based organisations who are supporting people who could have that valuable data on where support is needed most.• Cllr Ken Robson asked if any data is available in relation to the fall in the number of enquiries being received. SW clarified that the migration to Universal Credit from 2018 had a huge impact, with Dept for Work & Pensions now providing that support; this equated to around 16,000 appointments a year. The pandemic also had an impact.• Cllr Tony Towers noted that a lot of people who will need support often give up as it can be too difficult to access. Cllr TT suggested that if the CAPs are currently under-utilised, would it not be an option to bring services out to local communities. Having a mobile service would allow DCC to make better use of resources rather than waiting for people to come to you, and Green Lane is quite far from Newton Aycliffe, especially for those who may have mobility or transport difficulties. SW noted the point. | |
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| 11/07/2024 | Weardale AAP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q: What do staff do when appointments are unattended? A: Some can take on duties from the online / digital side of the team, sometimes they will see customers on an ad hoc basis (assuming it is a simple query and not one that requires a specific appointment) and sometimes they unfortunately have nothing to do. • Q: If someone attends a CAP without an appointment what happens? A: An appointment is made for another time (assuming it is not straightforward). Acknowledged it is important to be accessible at short notice but also acknowledged that the right level of support should be provided, and this would inevitably require a return appointment. • Q: Could there be a pop-up service to help those in rural isolated communities such as Upper Weardale – some of whom also struggle with IT ability and access to reliable internet service? A: Most issues seen at CAPs concern issues pertinent to older residents. The council has a responsibility to ensure that their services are accessible to all. This consultation aims to find out where residents think the services should be located and asks for clarity as to where people feel pockets of inaccessibility are. • Q: Will and Equality Impact Assessment be carried out as part of the consultation? A: Yes. | 15 |
| 16/7/24 | CDALC | <p>Smaller Councils Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective view - that the in person face to face customer services should be better publicised so that there are better prospects of them being used. • Collective view - there was disappointment that face-to-face customer services could be whittled away when they are of importance to many vulnerable groups such as the non IT using elderly. • The removal of face to face services is against what Durham CC said when they become a unitary authority. <p>Larger Councils Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested to know what the demographic usage of face to face customer service points. • and the data of where people are travelling from to access face to face customer service points. • Need to look at libraries as an access point for face to face services. • In some areas (such as Horden) access is way below the county average due to lack of car ownership and technology • Comment from a Member that whilst consultation was good on one level it wasn't on another as it can be a minority view. Consultation needs to be far reaching. | 48 |

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| 16/7/24 | Town Council Feedback | <p>The CAP consultation was discussed at the Bishop Auckland Town Council meeting which took place on the 16th July 2024.</p> <p>Members agreed that it is important to ensure there is somewhere for local people to go for the help and advice, especially the aging population. At the Town Council we regularly have the public come into the office looking for how to get a bus pass application or for signposting to one of DCC services. (I know the Town Hall regularly send people to us, so between the town council and county council we would benefit from more internal knowledge and understanding so we can ensure we are supporting the customers to the best of our ability, even if we are not in a position to deal with their query.)</p> <p>Many of the surrounding villages to Bishop Auckland and Shildon would require two or even three busses to get to either Spennymoor or Crook. The population in Bishop Auckland alone is four times that of Crook and would be a suitable town to host one in the area.</p> <p>There are a number of locations that could be considered as a possible venue - Town Hall, Town Council, Woodhouse Close Community Centre, The Four Clocks Centre.</p> | |
| 3/10.24 | COSMB | <p>At a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 3 October 2024, members considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources which:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outlined proposals to adjust the face-to-face service offer delivered in Customer Access points (CAPs) which reflects reduced demand whilst preserving channel choice. • set out the findings of the consultation activity and equalities impact assessment (EIA) on the proposals, which are linked to the achievement of savings targets included in MTFP (14) and, • highlighted options for early realisation of a proportion of associated savings. <p>In considering the report members acknowledged the changing demands from council customers in the way they accessed council services since the launch of Universal Credit in 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Members noted the reduction in face to face appointments across the Council's Customer Access Points with a switch to alternative online methods of customer contact.</p> | 17 |

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| | | <p>Members considered the responses made to the public consultation exercise noting that whilst there was a low level of participation, there were an associated percentage of those who had responded from the over 65s and people with disabilities who were recognised as more likely to access face to face provision at customer access points.</p> <p>In noting the savings which could be realised from the proposals as part of MTFP 14 members also highlighted that given the changing behaviour of customers, it was appropriate that the customer services offer was proportionately reviewed and evolves with alternative provision to meet associated demand. A suggestion was also put forward that cabinet include within future considerations for service offer the potential for a mobile customer service provision be examined to ensure that those customers in the more rural and or deprived areas of the County would still be able to access services. This was particularly important in those areas experiencing poor or low levels of public transport accessibility and car ownership.</p> <p>The management board considered that the cabinet when deliberating on the proposals must ensure that an appropriate communications and engagement programme should be developed which clearly sets out the rationale for the proposed changes.</p> <p>Concern was also raised that those staff affected by the proposals and their respective trade unions appeared not to be have been included in the consultation exercise but would rather be engaged potentially after the cabinet had made a decision. Members considered that this should have been undertaken before the report to cabinet and the results of such consultation included within the report.</p> <p>In respect of the proposed development of more online methods of customer service and transactions, reference was made to the use of web chat and assurances sought from the board that wherever possible customers would have access to "real people" and not merely "Bots".</p> | |
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