

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Policy and Resources Cabinet Board

7 January 2016

Report of the Head of Financial Services – David Rees

Matter for information

Wards Affected:

All

Review of Impact of Reduced Cash Office Opening Hours

Purpose of the Report

1. As part of the budget savings proposals for 2015/16, members approved a proposal to reduce the opening hours of the cash offices at the Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres, which would generate an estimated saving of £50k.
2. This report will provide members with details of the actual reduction in opening hours compared to the proposal, the impact that the proposal has had in terms of usage of the cash office and reaction of users of the service.

Executive Summary

3. As a result of the work of the cashiering team in putting this proposal into operation, the targeted reduction in budget of £50k was achieved. The move has caused minimal disruption to the public and to other services within the Council, has encouraged more people to take up the direct debit option to pay their Council Tax, and the Council Tax collection rate has remained unaffected.

Background

Proposed reduction in opening hours

4. A savings target of £50k was set against the cashiering service for 2015/16. As the majority of the costs in the service were staff related these savings were going to have to come from reduced staff costs which could only be achieved by reducing the opening hours of the cash offices at both the Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres.
5. At the time the opening hours were 8.45am to 4.30pm (Monday to Thursday) and 8.45am to 4.00pm (Friday). A data analysis exercise was carried out on the usage of the cash office in terms of when people attended the cash offices and for what purpose.
6. Following this initial exercise members approved that a four week public consultation be carried out that included a variety of options in terms of reduced opening hours. The consultation was with people who attended the cash office during that period along with the public in general via an on-line questionnaire.
7. The results of the consultation along with those of the data collection exercise were presented to members in a report on the 15th January 2015. Following receipt of the report members approved the recommendation to reduce the cash office opening hours to 10.00am to 3.00pm (Monday to Friday).

Actual reduction in opening hours

8. At the time that the report's recommendation was approved officers still had to carry out an exercise of reviewing working patterns and rotas through the management of change process and it was agreed that if as a result of this the approved opening hours could be lengthened then officers should do this.

9. Following this exercise, and thanks to the hard work of all the staff involved, the actual opening times for the cash offices have been fixed as 9.00am to 3.15 pm Monday to Friday.

Savings Achieved

10. As stated above, the savings target of £50k was achieved and as at the end of November the service was projecting an underspend for the year of £13k.

Impacts – Other Services

11. The reduction in staffing levels and opening hours meant that some transactions could no longer be completed within the cash office and are now being dealt with by the department that provides the service for which payment is required, for example the Miscellaneous Income Team can now take payments directly, which they have found of benefit when chasing up outstanding invoices.
12. This change was supported by the roll out of the paye.net service which allows the department to take payment by debit card over the telephone and by increasing opportunities for on-line payments via the 'Digital by Choice' project.
13. Initially, the One Stop Shop staff were experiencing a number of queries from members of the public who weren't aware of the change, with typical queries being about when and why the change had occurred and how they could now pay their bills. As expected there has however, been a significant drop in these types of queries from a total of 59 during April to a total of 18 (less than one per day) throughout November.

Impact – The public

14. The comments made to Cashiers and the One Stop Shop generally reflect the comments of the public made during the consultation exercise which was that they would rather have retained the service as it was as they felt this represented another service reduction.
15. There has however only been one formal complaint made which was received in November and that was regarding a combination of the fact that the cash office was closed and that the person felt they did not receive a satisfactory service from the One Stop Shop. A formal response has been made to the complainant.
16. There are peak times each month when small queues can be seen at the cash offices but the team is aware of when these are likely to arise and they are dealt with efficiently to the extent that there have been no complaints received regarding having to queue to use the cash office.
17. With regard to usage of the cash office by the public the vast majority of this is in relation to Council Tax transactions. A comparison of the number of transactions between April and June 2015 with the same period in 2014 shows a fall of 3,517 transactions and a corresponding increase in direct debit transactions of 3,539. There has been no adverse impact on the Council Tax collection rate which is retained at the level of the previous year.

18. The table below provides summarised detail of the changes in transactions over the two years:

	April – June 2014. Number of transactions	April – June 2015. Number of transactions	Increase / (Decrease)
Total cashiering transactions	23,732	21,243	(2,489) – 10%
Paye.net departmental transactions	2,390	3,434	1,044 – 44%
Council Tax transactions at cash offices	14,082	10,565	(3,517) – 25%
Council Tax transactions by direct debit	98,124	101,663	3,539 – 4%
Court Deputy supported clients – Cash Office	1,202	1,214	12 – 1%

19. The cashiers service encompasses more than the receipt of external income and also includes:

- Direct services to internal departments and schools for:
- Banking income directly through the Cash Office for a wide range of Council services.
- Petty Cash – providing cash facilities for local offices and schools to ensure they have funds available for reimbursing claims
- Supported client payments – providing money to Social Service clients who are provided with direct cash support.
- Non domestic rates – transacting charges from the Council's ledger into the individual NNDR accounts for the Council's properties.

- Car Parking – Issue and renewal of Resident Parking Permits, this includes verification of vehicle documents to the address of the resident.
- Bank credits – the cashiers assist with clearing income received directly into the Income bank account. This is a growing service area as more payments are moved to electronic methods.

20. The proposal to take £50k out of the Cashiering Service required a considerable amount of planning and commitment from all the staff within the cashiering team. As a result of that commitment the change has proved successful in terms of both generating the savings required and helping to move more people on to direct debit payment rather than cash. Also, whilst it is accepted that the public would have preferred to have kept the previous opening times, it has caused minimal disruption to the public and has resulted in only one formal complaint in 8 months of operation.

Financial Impact

21. The financial impact is a budget saving of £50k on the cashiering service which contributed to the Council's Forward Financial Plan for 2015/16.

Equality impact assessment

22. A full equality impact assessment was carried out on the original proposal, there was no requirement for one in respect of this report.

Workforce impacts

23. There are no workforce impacts arising from this report.

Legal impacts

24. There are no legal impacts arising from this report.

Risk management

25. There are no risk management issues arising from this report.

Consultation

26. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

27. It is recommended that members note that the new opening times of the cash offices in both the Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres will be maintained as 9.00 am until 3.15 pm, Monday to Friday.

Reasons for proposed decisions

28. To provide members with details of the revised opening hours of the civic centre cash offices.

Implementation of decision

29. The report is for noting only.

Appendices

30. None

List of background papers

31. Cash office usage data

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