

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET BOARD

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES – DAVE REES

15TH JANUARY 2015

SECTION A – MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

BUDGET PROPOSAL TO REDUCE THE OPENING HOURS OF THE CIVIC CENTRE CASH OFFICES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the 2015/16 budget savings proposals for the Finance and Corporate Services Directorate, a savings target of £50k was set against the cashiering service. The savings proposal to achieve this target, that was presented to Members, was to reduce the opening hours of the cash offices at both the Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres.
- 1.2 The cash offices at both the Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres currently open between 8.45am and 4.30 pm Monday to Thursday and 8.45am to 4.00pm on Fridays.
- 1.3 A public consultation exercise was carried out in both cash offices by way of a paper questionnaire, for those visiting the cash offices along with an on-line questionnaire that people who do not currently use the cash offices could also complete if they so wished.
- 1.4 The exercise ran for 4 weeks from the 17th November to the 12th December 2014. A total of 678 responses were received, 3 of which were from people who do not currently use the cash office and the details of the answers given to the key questions are given below.
- 1.5 It must be noted that not everyone who used the cash office during this period did actually complete a questionnaire and where appropriate comparisons is with data gathered from total usage of the two cash offices for the 3 month period 1st April to 30th June 2014.

2. Summary of answers given

2.1 What time did you use the cash office?

2.1.1 From the opening time of 8.45am until 2.00pm, the spread of people who completed the surveys was fairly even with the highest being between 10.00am and 11.00 am. The afternoons in contrast were much quieter with only 14% of surveys being completed in the 2.00pm to 4.30pm period.

2.1.2 This contrasts slightly with the data of actual cash office transactions collected between April and June '14, which shows 24% usage in that time period.

Table of usage for the period 1st April to 30th June 2014

	8.45 to 8.59	9.00 to 9.59	10.00 to 10.59	11.00 to 11.59	12.00 to 12.59	13.00 to 13.59	14.00 to 14.59	15.00 to 15.59	16.00 to 16.30	Total
Port Talbot	188	1,636	1,306	1,217	916	784	900	689	156	7,792
Neath	238	923	1,095	1,198	1,039	851	961	748	197	7,250
Total	426	2,559	2,401	2,415	1,955	1,635	1,861	1,437	353	15,042

2.2 What was the purpose of your visit to the cash office?

2.2.1 The vast majority of people using the cash office in the survey did so to pay their Council Tax (74%). The next closest category was 'other' at 10% which consisted mainly of members of staff using the cash office for such items as Community Meals payments, Court Deputy Service, Licensing, petty cash etc.

2.2.2 This is consistent with the data collection carried out whereby again 74% of the usage was for Council Tax payments.

2.3 Would you be prepared to pay by alternative Methods?

2.3.1 Of those who completed the survey, 10% said they would be prepared to pay by direct debit, 4% would pay on-line and 5% would pay by post.

2.4 What options would you prefer if the cash office were to reduce its opening hours?

2.4.1 The split between the three options was fairly even between the 3 options, being:

- Open later, finish earlier (108 people)
- Close lunchtimes (116 people)
- Open fully 3 days, close 2 days (93 people)

2.4.2 The most popular option (261 people) was ‘other’ where most people wanted the service to remain as it is. A small number (17) specifically referred to the fact that they currently work and that changes may impact on their ability to get to the cash office while a small number of others wanted to extend the opening hours to evenings and/or Saturdays.

2.5 If the cash office were to close for two days which two days would you prefer?

2.5.2 There was a very even split on this question. Wednesday was the least favoured for closure (14% of those that answered), while the other 4 days varied between 20% and 22%.

2.6 Any Other Comments

2.6.1 The vast majority of the comments made here were similar to those included in the ‘other’ option above whereby people in the main wanted the cash office service to remain as it is and that they didn’t want any further cuts to services on top of those already experienced.

3. Other Work

3.1 As mentioned earlier a detailed data analysis was carried out of the transactions of both cash offices for the period 1st April 2014 to 30th June 2014. This data analysis not only assisted in arriving at the recommendation being made to members but will also help us in shaping the service provision going forward if the recommendation is accepted.

- 3.2 Two members of staff have accepted the Council's offer of voluntary redundancy so there will be no requirement for any cash office staff to be made compulsorily redundant, or to reduce their hours of working if the recommendation is accepted. There will however, have to be a change to the working patterns of the cashiers and this will be carried out through the management of change process.
- 3.3 An exercise aimed at encouraging cash office payers to make their Council Tax payments by direct debit instead will be carried out in the New Year which should reduce the numbers of people who use the cash office in future.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 In order to achieve the target savings for the cashiering service, staff costs have to be reduced and this can best be achieved by reducing the opening hours of the two Civic Centre cash offices.
- 4.2 It is clear that most people who currently use the cashiering service do not want it to change and do not want further cuts to their service. A major factor in not wanting a change to the service is the high quality service that the cashiering team have provided over many years that people have grown accustomed to and very much appreciate.
- 4.3 Having said that, the change being proposed will affect the fewest number of service users possible. This along with the fact that a number have said they are prepared to use alternative methods of payment and the exercises to promote direct debit use and otherwise accommodate Council services use, means that the vast majority of cash office users will be unaffected by the recommended change. Also, for those who will still wish to pay their Council Tax by cash they can still do so at the Post Office in the same way, if the cash offices are not open.

5. Appendix

- 5.1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Report Form – Cashiering Service

6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 It is recommended that in order to achieve the target savings of £50k for 2015/16, the cash office opening hours should be amended to 10.00am to 3.00pm Monday to Friday from the 1st April 2015.

7. Reasons for Proposed Decision

- 7.1 To satisfy budget saving proposal included in the Forward Financial Plan for 2015/16.

List of Background Papers

Cashiers Questionnaire

Budget Reports to Cabinet of 10 September & 1 October 2014, P&R Scrutiny Committee of 13 October 2014

Officer Contact:

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COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

BUDGET PROPOSAL TO REDUCE THE OPENING HOURS OF THE CIVIC CENTRE CASH OFFICES

(a) **Implementation of Decision**

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

(b) **Sustainability Appraisal**

Community Plan Impacts:	
Economic Prosperity	Negative
Education and Lifelong Learning	No Impact
Better Health and Well Being	No Impact
Environment and Transport	No Impact
Crime and Disorder	No Impact
Other Impacts:	
Welsh Language	No Impact
Sustainable Development	Negative due to reduced hours
Equalities	Some Negative Impacts due to reduced hours but alternative payment arrangements available
Social Inclusion	No Impact

(c) **Consultation**

This item has been included in the Forward Financial Plan.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Report Form – Cashiering Service

This form should be completed for each Equality Impact Assessment on a new or existing function, a reduction or closure of service, any policy, procedure, strategy, plan or project which has been screened and found relevant to Equality and Diversity.

Please refer to the ‘Equality Impact Assessment Guidance’ while completing this form. If you would like further guidance please contact the Corporate Strategy Team or your directorate Heads of Service Equality Champion.

Where do you work?
Service Area: Financial Services Division
Directorate: Finance and Corporate Services

(a) This EIA is being completed for a...

Service/ Function	Policy/ Procedure	Project	Strategy	Plan	Proposal
x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x

(b) Please name and describe below... A proposal is being put to members to reduce the opening hours of the civic centre cash offices which, together with other cost reductions, seeks to generate savings of £50,000 on the current net budget for the service of £184,000.

There are a number of options available in terms of reduced opening hours including opening later and closing earlier each day, closing for a set period at lunchtimes and only being open on certain days of the week. A decision on which of the options available will be recommended to members will be made following detailed data analysis work and a public consultation exercise.

The cashiering service operates from two cash offices based at the civic centres of Neath and Port Talbot. On average the service currently deals with 1,900 transactions per week, between the two cash offices. Of these approximately 1,080 are in respect of council tax payments. Of the total council tax payments made currently only 6.5% of them are made by cash/cheques.

In total there are seven members of staff (4.00 FTE) employed between the two cash offices. Both cash offices are open to the public from 8.45am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and 8.45am to 4.00pm on Fridays.

Following the public consultation exercise, the recommendation that will be made to members is for the opening hours of the Civic Centre cash offices to be amended to 10.00am to 3.00pm Monday to Friday.

(c) It was initially screened for relevance to Equality and Diversity on ... No screening work was carried out as it was felt that a full Equality Impact Assessment would be appropriate.

(d) It was found to be relevant to...

Age	x	Race	x
Disability	x	Religion or belief.....	x
Gender reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sex	x
Marriage & civil partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation.....	<input type="checkbox"/>

Pregnancy and maternity

Welsh language

(e) Lead Officer

Name: Janet North

Job title: Chief Accountant - Technical

Date: 1st October 2014

(f) Approved by Head of Service

Name: Dave Rees

Date: 1st October 2014

Updated: 5th January 2015

Section 1 – Aims (See guidance):

Briefly describe the aims of the function, service, policy, procedure, strategy, plan, proposal or project:

What are the aims? To reduce the opening hours of the cash offices which, together with other cost reductions, seeks to generate savings of £50,000 on the current net budget for the service of £184,000. Whilst the availability of a cashiering service to the public will be reduced, the aim will be to encourage greater take up of other methods of payment such as direct debit and on-line payments. If however, some members of the public still wish to pay in cash but find the new opening times inconvenient, they can still pay in cash in the same way at the Post Office. **(29.9.14)**

Who has responsibility? The initiative is the responsibility of the Head of Financial Services. It will be the responsibility of the Chief Accountant (Technical and Exchequer) to monitor and review the outcomes. **(29.9.14)**

Who are the stakeholders? The initiative will affect both the public and staff. It is expected that the effect on the public will be neutral due to the alternative methods of payment available.

It is hoped that the cost savings required will be achieved via voluntary redundancy or redeployment thereby creating a neutral effect for staff. **(29.9.14)**

Following the offer of voluntary redundancy, two members of staff have accepted and will leave on 31st March 2015. This means that no-one will be under threat of compulsory redundancy or reduced hours. There is however likely to be a requirement to change working patterns of staff which will be dealt with through the management of change process. **(5.1.15)**

Section 2 - Information about Service Users (See guidance):

Please tick what information you know about your service users and provide details / evidence of how this information is collected.

Age	x	Race	x
Disability	x	Religion or belief.....	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sex	x
Marriage & civil partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation.....	x
Pregnancy and maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	Welsh language.....	x

What information do you know about your service users and how is this information collected? Very little current information is available on the cash office service users, other than that based on data on the citizens of Neath Port Talbot in general. A service user survey will be carried out over the next few weeks to rectify this lack of information. **(29.9.14)**

An equalities monitoring questionnaire was included as part of the service user survey which provided data on those users who completed it. **(5.1.15)**

Any Actions Required?

1. Carry out a thorough data analysis of cash office usage for the most recent three month period. **(29.9.14)**











This was completed and the information was provided. **(5.1.15)**

2. Carry out a customer survey on the proposal. **(29.9.14)**

The survey was carried out over a period of four weeks from 17.11.14 to 12.12.14. **(5.1.15)**

Section 3 - Impact on Protected Characteristics (See guidance):

Please consider the possible impact on the different protected characteristics. This could be based on service user information, data, consultation and research or professional experience (e.g. comments and complaints).

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Needs further investigation
Age	 <input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	 <input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender reassignment	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage & civil partnership	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy and maternity	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion or belief	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sex	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welsh language	 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thinking about your answers above, please explain in detail why this is the case? including details of any consultation (and/or other information), which has been undertaken to support your view? The Council offers a variety of alternative options to paying by cash including direct debit and on-line payments. Cash payments can still be made at the cash offices though the times when this option is available will be restricted. If however members of the public still wish to make cash payments for council tax at a time when the cash offices are no longer open they can still do so at the local Post Office.

Option to open each day but for fewer hours – Some people may take the opportunity to access other facilities at the civic centres when visiting the cash office that they would not be able to do elsewhere, which may be a negative impact for them. Also, there are more likely to be queues at the time when the cash offices are open which would have been less likely previously. This will be a negative impact particularly for any service users that may have difficulty in standing to queue.

Option to only open on particular days of the week – In addition to the above, the days chosen to open may not be suitable for certain service users for a variety of reasons which will mean that the opportunity to use the cash office service is taken away from them completely. **(29.9.14)**

The survey suggested that there was no clear preference from the service users on the options other than the majority would prefer the service to remain as it is. A small number (17) did make a particular point that they worked and as such reducing the opening hours might make it more difficult to use the cash offices. Given the usage data from the analysis exercise and the survey it would appear that opening later in the morning and closing earlier in the afternoon would impact on the least number of service users. **(5.1.15)**

What consultation and engagement has been undertaken (e.g. with the public and/or members of protected groups) to support your view?

None to date, but a service user survey will be carried out. **(29.9.14)**

A public consultation exercise was carried out in both cash offices by way of a paper questionnaire along with an on-line questionnaire that people who do not currently use the cash offices could also complete if they so wished. The exercise ran for 4 weeks from the 17th November to the 12th December 2014. A total of 678 responses were received, 3 of which were from people who do not currently use the cash office. **(5.1.15)**

Any actions required (to mitigate adverse impact or to address identified gaps in knowledge)

None to date but the above possible negative impacts will be explored via the data analysis and service user survey. If these or any other negative impacts come to light then details of actions required for example providing chairs for people to sit on if they are required to queue at the cash office, will be provided. **(29.9.14)**

The following actions will be taken to mitigate possible impacts of the proposal:

1. Recommend the reduction in hours mirrors the period of least usage by the public, thereby affecting the fewest number of people possible.
2. Continue to offer the option of paying Council Tax by cash at the post office.
3. Encourage and support the use of alternative payment methods such as direct debit and on-line.
4. Explore alternative options for staff use of the cash offices.

(5.1.15)

Section 4 - Other Impacts:

Please consider how the initiative might address the following issues.

You could base this on service user information, data, consultation and research or professional experience (e.g. comments and complaints).

Foster good relations between different groups	Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
Elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation	Reduction of social exclusion and poverty

(Please see guidance for definitions)

Please explain any possible impact on each of the above.

As the initiative may have a small negative impact on a small number of people it is possible that it will impact negatively in terms of the first three items detailed above. Whilst possible, this is felt to be unlikely and any impact would be small. Further information will be available on this when the data analysis and service user survey are completed. In terms of a reduction in social exclusion and poverty this proposal will have no impact either negative or positive. **(29.9.14)**

Following the survey, there is very little change to the above statement. Two relevant pieces of data from the survey show that 32% of those who completed the survey declared their age as 60 or over, whilst 35% declared themselves as having a disability. However, it is felt that any impact will be mitigated by limiting the reduction in hours to periods which will affect the least number of people. **(5.1.15)**

What work have you already done to improve any of the above?

Not applicable**(29.9.14)**

Is the initiative likely to impact on Community Cohesion?

The proposal should have no impact on community cohesion. **(29.9.14)**

How will the initiative treat the Welsh language in the same way as the English language?

It is unclear whether the option of using the Post Office will have an impact.

(29.9.14)

Actions (to mitigate adverse impact or to address identified gaps in knowledge).

- None required at this stage. **(29.9.14)**
- Also, none required following the survey **(5.1.15)**

Section 5 - Monitoring arrangements:

Please explain the arrangements in place (or those which will be put in place) to monitor this function, service, policy, procedure, strategy, plan or project:

Monitoring arrangements: If the proposal is accepted and implemented, data usage information will be compared with that available prior to the proposal being put in place. Also, relevant information from the Council's customer comments, compliments and complaints process will be analysed and acted upon. **(29.9.14)**

This remains the case. **(5.1.15)**


Actions:

1. Maintain and analyse data usage statistics.
2. Monitor customer comments, compliments and complaints. **(29.9.14)**

These remain the actions on monitoring arrangements. **(5.1.15)**

Section 6 – Outcomes:

Having completed sections 1-5, please indicate which of the outcomes listed below applies to your initiative (refer to guidance for further information on this section).

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Outcome 1: Continue the initiative... | x |
| Outcome 2: Adjust the initiative... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Outcome 3: Justify the initiative... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Outcome 4: Stop and remove the initiative... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 

For outcome 3, detail the justification for proceeding here

Section 7 - Publication arrangements:

On completion, please contact the Corporate Strategy Team for advice on the legal requirement to publish the findings of EIAs.

Action Plan:

Objective - What are we going to do and why?	Who will be responsible for seeing it is done?	When will it be done by?	Outcome - How will we know we have achieved our objective?	Progress
Carry out a data analysis of usage of the cashiering service for the last 3 months.	David Rees via the Finance Project Team.	31 st October 2014	We will be able to analyse cash office usage over a number of pre-set criteria.	Data analysis completed. Data used to inform the proposal.
Carry out a service user survey.	David Rees	14 th November 2014	We will have details of who our service users are, and their opinions, in order to help us shape the proposals.	Survey completed, data used to inform the proposal and update the EIA.
Maintain and analyse data usage statistics.	Chief Accountant Technical and Exchequer.	On-going	Having greater management information on the service.	On-going. Data used to prepare service report.
Monitor customer comments, compliments and complaints.	Chief Accountant Technical and Exchequer.	On-going	Having greater management information on the service. (29.9.14)	On-going
Seek approval from Members to reduce the opening hours of the Civic Centre cash offices to 10.00am – 3.00pm Monday to Friday	David Rees	1 st April 2015	Approval granted at Committee	
Encourage and support the use of alternative payment methods such as direct debit and on-line.	Principal Council Tax Officer	31 st March 2015	Reduced numbers of people paying Council Tax by cash.	
Explore alternative options re staff use of cash offices	David Rees	31 st March 2015	Reduced number of services using the cash office. (5.1.15)	