

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

8th NOVEMBER 2023

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER H.JONES

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED

All

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF CASH OFFICES AT NEATH AND PORT TALBOT CIVIC CENTRES

Purpose of Report

To seek Cabinet approval to permanently close the cash desks at Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centre's to the public.

Executive Summary

With demand for the cash desks being significantly diminished, and also comparing service provisions to other neighbouring local authorities, Cabinet are requested to approve the permanent closure to the public of both the Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres cash offices

Background

In March 2022 a report was presented to Cabinet outlining the position with regard to not re-opening the cash desks in both the Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres. At this point in time both cash offices had been closed to the public since entering lockdown in March 2020. Members of the public had utilised various alternative methods of payment and as an authority we saw a 5% increase in the number of people paying their Council Tax by Direct Debit.

During this initial phase of re-opening of the civic buildings to the public, Cabinet approved that the cash desks were to remain closed and a further review of demand for the service be undertaken.

This review of demand has now been completed by customer services staff. In summary during the 6 month period reviewed a total of 78 persons were recorded as requiring cash office services (an average of

13 customers per month). The detailed breakdown of services required and method of payment to be used can be found below:

	Cash	Cheque	Card	Unknown	Total
Council Tax	25	1	13	3	42
Parking	12	0	8	4	24
Lifeline	2	1	0	0	3
Licensing	0	0	1	0	1
Bulk Collection	2	0	0	0	2
Trade Waste	1	0	0	0	1
Business Rates	1	0	0	0	1
BID	0	0	1	0	1
Hygiene rating	1	0	0	0	1
Other	2	0	0	0	2
Total	46	2	23	7	78

All of the above service users were sign posted to alternative payment arrangements.

During this time the cash office staff have continued to provide an internal banking facility to Council departments and also providing a cash distribution service to court deputy clients.

The cash office budget currently allows for 3.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) cashier posts, of these 1 FTE is currently held as vacant following retirement of staff concerned during the covid pandemic, 0.5 of a post is a relief hours post utilised to cover staff sickness and holidays with a further 0.5 being held by a cashier who will shortly be leaving the organisation through retirement.

Alternative arrangements

Should members of the public attend the civic buildings with the intention of utilising the cash desks Customer Service staff will re-direct to alternative methods of payments available as outlined in Appendix 1.

Customers wishing to pay by card will be directed to the council's website payment portal or to the automated payment line to make the payment or to the local post office. Cheque payments will be able to be accepted and forward to the accountancy team for processing. Any persons wishing to make payment by cash will be directed to the post

office should the service allow payment by this method, the majority of payments can now be made at all local post offices.

Financial Impacts

The proposal for the cash offices to remain closed to the public would require vacant and relief posts to be deleted from the structure and would result in a budget saving of circa £52k per annum. The remaining staff within the team (1.4 FTE) will remain in post to carry out the internal cashiering duties.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

An integrated impact assessment is included at Appendix 2. When considering the impact assessment Cabinet are reminded that the two cash offices have now been closed to the public since March 2020.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

The increased ability to pay at post offices within the borough will provide customers with more local payment facilities.

Workforce impacts

Workforce implications are included in the report.

Legal Impacts

There no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management

There are no risk management impacts with this report.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

It is recommended that members approve the permanent closure to the public of the cash offices at Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centre's.

Reason for Decision

To agree a permanent arrangement in relation to the two cash offices.

Implementation of Decision

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

Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of available payment methods

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Officer Contact

Huw Jones

Chief Finance Officer

h.jones@npt.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – List of available payment methods

	Council Tax	Benefit Over payments	NNDR (Business Rates)	Debtor invoices	Penalty Charge Notices	Pest Control	BID Business Improvement District Levy)
Internet	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Cheque	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Telephone (via call centre / department)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Automated Telephone Line	x	x	x	x	x		
Direct Debit	x	x	x	x			x
Bank Transfer	x	x	x	x	x		x
Post Office Counter (cash cheque or card)	x	x		x			

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

This Integrated Impact Assessment considers the duties and requirements of the following legislation in order to inform and ensure effective decision making and compliance:

- Equality Act 2010
- Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Version Control

Version	Author	Job title	Date
e.g. Version 1	Diane Mulligan	Chief Accountant - Technical & Governance	5/10/2023

1. Details of the initiative

	Title of the Initiative: Cash Office Service Review
1a	Service Area: Cash Office
1b	Directorate: Finance & Corporate Services
1c	Summary of the initiative: Closure of Cash Offices to the public
1d	Is this a 'strategic decision'?
1e	Who will be directly affected by this initiative? Residents, future residents & businesses of Neath Port Talbot formally utilising cash office services. Council employed cashiers.
1f	When and how were people consulted? 6 months data of attendees at civic offices undertaken to determine need for attendance.

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

1g	What were the outcomes of the consultation? Demand was found to be low, with only 74 attendees requiring the service in the 6 month window.
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2. Evidence

What evidence was used in assessing the initiative?

Cash offices have not re-opened to the public since closure of the civic offices in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Following the partial reopening of the civic centres the cash offices remained closed and 6 months data of person attending the civic centres to make payment at the cash offices was undertaken. Customer services staff recorded client needs over the period April – September 2022.

A comparison of income collected from the public during financial year 2018-19 & 2019-20, whilst offices were open, prior to the pandemic, has also been undertaken and highlighted income collection via cash offices fell by 34% from £12.322m to £8.101m.

3. Equalities

a) How does the initiative impact on people who share a **protected characteristic**?

Protected Characteristic	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
Age				Ability to pay majority of payments via telephone, Direct Debit & local post offices & internet. Post office, telephone line payments direct debits were previously available for council tax NNDR Debtor invoices. However implementation of the new debtors system now allows all invoices to be paid at any local post office. Therefore, no impact as additional improved methods of payment have been made available and cash offices have not been open to the public since March 2020.
Disability				As for age
Gender reassignment				No impact
Marriage & civil partnership				No impact
Pregnancy and maternity				No Impact
Race				No Impact
Religion or belief				No Impact

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Sex				No Impact
Sexual orientation				No impact

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Ability to pay at post office counters is already available for Council tax, Debtors, and Business rates.
Online or telephone payments accepted on all debt types as well as direct debit arrangements for recurring debt types.

b) How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the **Public Sector Equality Duty**?

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
To eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation				No Impact
To advance equality of opportunity between different groups				No Impact
To foster good relations between different groups				No Impact

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Ability to pay from home via online / telephone or for some services at the local post office means payment options are more local for all customers.

4. Socio Economic Duty

Impact	Details of the impact/advantage/disadvantage
Positive/Advantage	Increased ability to pay more local to customer i.e. post offices.
Negative/Disadvantage	No impact
Neutral	No Impact

What action will be taken to reduce inequality of outcome

Ability to pay from home via online / telephone or for some services at the local post office means payment options are more local for all customers.

5. Community Cohesion/Social Exclusion/Poverty

	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
Community Cohesion				Ability to pay at the local post office means payment options are more local for all customers.
Social Exclusion				Ability to pay from home via online / telephone or for some services at the local post office means payment options are more local for all customers.
Poverty				No impact

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Ability to pay from home via online / telephone or for some services at the local post office means payment options are more local for all customers.

6. Welsh

	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this effect?
What effect does the initiative have on: people's opportunities to use the Welsh language				Currently Cash office staff do not have the ability to speak in Welsh.
- treating the Welsh and English languages equally				No Effect

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Ability to pay more locally will improve ability to pay at post offices with Welsh speaking post masters and telephone & internet services provided in Welsh

7. Biodiversity

How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the **Biodiversity Duty**?

Biodiversity Duty	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity				Unknown. There is no clear route to demonstrate either positive or negative impact on biodiversity.

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment, such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.				Ability to pay more locally in outlying community's thereby reducing need to travel thereby reducing pollution via travel.
What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?				
No Action required				

8. Well-being of Future Generations

How have the five ways of working been applied in the development of the initiative?

Ways of Working	Details
i. Long term – looking at least 10 years (and up to 25 years) ahead	Improved digitalisation of payments
ii. Prevention – preventing problems occurring or getting worse	Improved payment facilities meaning 24 hour payment facilities available.
iii. Collaboration – working with other services internal or external	Utilises post office network
iv. Involvement – involving people, ensuring they reflect the diversity of the population	Improved payment facilities meaning 24 hour payment facilities available.

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

v. Integration – making connections to maximise contribution to:	
Council’s well-being objectives	Improved payment facilities meaning 24 hour payment facilities available.
Other public bodies objectives	Improved payment facilities meaning 24 hour payment facilities available.

9. Monitoring Arrangements

Provide information on the monitoring arrangements to:

Monitor the impact of the initiative on Equalities, Community Cohesion, the Welsh Measure, Biodiversity Duty and the Wellbeing Objectives.

None required

10. Assessment Conclusions

Please provide details of the conclusions reached in relation to each element of the assessment:

	Conclusion
Equalities	
Socio Economic Disadvantage	
Community Cohesion/ Social Exclusion/Poverty	
Welsh	

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Biodiversity	
Well-being of Future Generations	

Overall Conclusion

Please indicate the conclusion reached:

- **Continue** - as planned as no problems and all opportunities have been maximised
- **Make adjustments** - as potential problems/missed opportunities/negative impacts have been identified along with mitigating actions
- **Justification** - for continuing with the initiative even though there is a potential for negative impacts or missed opportunities
- **STOP** - redraft the initiative as actual or potential unlawful discrimination has been identified

Please provide details of the overall conclusion reached in relation to the initiative

Continue as planned

11. Actions

What actions are required in relation to obtaining further data/information, to reduce or remove negative impacts or improve positive impacts?

Action	Who will be responsible for seeing it is done?	When will it be done by?	How will we know we have achieved our objective?

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

12. Sign off

	Name	Position	Date
Completed by	Diane Mulligan	Chief Accountant – Technical and Governance	5 th October 2023
Signed off by	Huw Jones	Chief Finance Officer	5 th October 2023