

ITEM NO: 7

Report To:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	26 August 2015
Executive Member/Reporting Officer:	Councillor Lynn Travis Executive Member – Neighbourhoods and Health Emma Varnam – Head of Stronger Communities
Subject:	NEXT STEPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES
Report Summary:	The way in which people access Council Services is changing and it is necessary to consider the future face to face Customer Service offer to ensure it meets demand whilst being affordable and cost effective to deliver. Following an Executive Decision on the 14 May 2015 public consultation was undertaken via the Council's Big Conversation on 3 potential options for future service provision. This report considers the current provision, the reasons for reduction in demand, the cost to provide the service and the results of the public consultation.
Recommendations:	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">i) Option 1 is implemented as the future face to face Customer Service model.ii) The service is kept under review to ensure that it meets demand whilst at the same time being affordable and cost effective.
Links to Community Strategy:	The Community Strategy sets out a number of priorities and delivery of these priorities relies heavily on effective customer contact and care.
Policy Implications:	The report recommends a new model of face to face Customer Service provision is implemented to meet demand whilst being affordable and cost effective.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)	This report considers 3 options for the future delivery of Customer Services which have been consulted upon: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Option 1, as detailed in section 6.6, would reduce spending each year by £0.079m• Option 2, as detailed in 6.7, would reduce spending each year by £0.041m.• Option 3, as detailed in section 6.9, would reduce spending each year by £0.070m. <p>The report recommends Option 1 is considered as the proposed model for future face to face Customer Service provision. This option reduces spending by the greatest amount while also reflecting user needs.</p> <p>The Stronger Communities service has needs to reduce spending by £ 2.8m.</p>
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough	The Council has a statutory duty to deliver services in the most effective and efficient way possible. It is important that when

Solicitor)

subject to significant reductions in budget that the Council reviews all its functions and the way they are undertaken.

The service has undertaken consultation and engagement with those currently affected as set out in the report. Members will need to consider and take into account any feedback which may affect the making of the decision or require moderation, and consider any equality impact. The impact of the equality assessment has been summarised in the report and the assessment is attached at **Appendix 6**. Members' need to ensure they read and take into account the assessment before making their decision, as case law now requires them to do so to mitigate the risk of challenge. It is not sufficient to simply read the summary.

Risk Management:

There is a risk that some customers will be unable to travel to Ashton to access the service. However, the majority of survey respondents indicated that they would still be able to access services by other channels or by travelling to Ashton. Libraries will remain a central facility in the community and officers working in that service will ensure that customers can access relevant services. In some cases this may mean acting as an advocate for the customer and contacting a service on their behalf.

Access to Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Mandy Kinder, Head of Customer Care and Advocacy



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 2012 following a comprehensive review Executive Cabinet agreed a new face to face customer service offer. The new offer included the relocation of Hyde and Denton Customer Service Centres into the libraries in their respective towns and implementation of an appointment based service in satellite Customer Service Centres from October 2012.
- 1.2 Implementation of the new face to face customer service offer resulted in savings of £0.140m.
- 1.3 With the advent of social trends and technological advancements the way customers' access council information and services has changed. This change has seen a reduction in the need for face to face customer services. Whilst it is recognised that for some residents face to face is a necessary access channel, for many others the telephone, internet and phone applications are channels of choice to access services. UK Government figures estimate that 85% of the population now have access to the internet either directly or via a friend, family member or advocate. Access is available via public computer facilities within libraries.
- 1.4 The reduction in the demand for face to face customer services has continued since the implementation of the appointment based service in October 2012 resulting in the service no longer being as cost effective as it should be and the need to consider again the requirement for the future.
- 1.5 A report was taken to Executive Board on 11 February 2015 detailing the case for a review of the service provision and recommending that public consultation be undertaken to establish views on 3 options for future service delivery. Following an Executive Decision on the 14 May 2015 public consultation commenced on the 18 May 2015 and closed on the 28 June 2015.
- 1.6 This report reviews the impact of the appointment based service implemented in 2012, considers current demand for face to face customer service, details the findings of the consultation and recommends a cost effective service for the future which meets customer demand.
- 1.7 In this report level 1 and level 2 enquiries are referred to. Level 1 enquiries are regarding in-depth Housing Benefit claims and Council Tax queries; these are dealt with solely by the dedicated Customer Services Staff. Level 2 enquiries are to book, pay, request a service and also general enquiries e.g. report a missed bin, details of councillor surgeries etc. Also referred to are satellite offices which are those customer service access points based in libraries outside Ashton and include Micklehurst Housing Office.

2. BACKGROUND – CURRENT PROVISION

- 2.1 A Key Decision on the 4 July 2012 gave authority, amongst other things, to introduce an appointment system at all Customer Service Centre venues with the exception of Ashton which would remain a reactive drop-in service in addition to some appointments.
- 2.2 The same Key decision approved the relocation of both Hyde and Denton Customer Service Centres into the libraries in their respective towns. This was necessary to enable library staff to make appointments for customers who had previously been used to a drop in service and also to handle all level 2 enquires.
- 2.3 At the library locations all library staff can deal with level 2 enquiries. The ability for library staff to deal with the more common level 2 enquiries provides a customer services function

during library opening hours, which are generally longer than those of the dedicated Customer Service Centres.

2.4 Statistical data was analysed to determine the opening hours required at each office to ensure that customers could be provided with an appointment within a reasonable amount of time. The rule of thumb was that all level 2 enquiries would be handled by library staff immediately and there should be sufficient resource available to deal with all level 1 enquiries within a week of request of appointment.

2.5 Current opening hours for level 1 service at each venue is detailed in the table below:

	ASHTON	HYDE	DENTON	DROYLSDEN	DUKINFIELD	MOSSLEY	STALYBRIDGE
MONDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 12.00noon	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
TUESDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	9.00am to 5.00pm
WEDNESDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	9.00am to 11.30am	9.00am to 5.00pm
THURSDAY	8.30am to 4.30pm	CLOSED	9.00am to 4.30pm	CLOSED	9.00am to 2.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED
FRIDAY	8.30am to 4.00pm	9.00am to 4.00pm	CLOSED	12.00noon to 4.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Micklehurst Housing Office – Tuesday 10am – 12 noon Mottram/Hattersley – by appointment only							

2.6 Level 2 access is provided in Ashton as above plus all libraries across the Borough in accordance with each venues opening hours.

3. DEMAND FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES

3.1 Over the years there has been a reduction in demand for face to face Customer Services and this reduction has continued since the appointment system was introduced in October 2012. It is highly likely this downward trend will continue given the increase in access to digital services resulting in a need to reconsider the face to face customer service function and the requirement to meet future demand whilst providing a cost effective service.

3.2 Annual demand across the whole service

Year	Number of Visitors
2010/11	83,065
2011/12	75,828
2012/13	71,210
2013/14	62,440
2014/15	43,325 – 48% reduction on 2010/11 visitor numbers

3.3 Demand at each office

Year	Number of Visitors						
	Ashton	Denton	Droylsden	Dukinfield	Hyde	Mossley	Stalybridge
2010/11	39357	9219	4769	2927	16552	3110	7131
2011/12	33009	9012	4708	3099	16765	3229	6006
2012/13	44144	4999	3334	2136	11406	1795	3396
2013/14	52229	1704	1117	528	5348	143	1371

2014/15	36800	1378	872	436	2669	196	974
% change 2010/11 to 2014/15	-6.5%	-85.1%	-81.7%	-85.1%	83.9%	-93.7%	-86.3%

- 3.4 Since the implementation of appointments some customers chose to attend the Ashton office and visitors to this office initially increased, although have now decreased again in 2014/15, but there have been significant reductions in other offices in every location around the Borough.
- 3.5 Analysis has been undertaken of the use of appointments at all Customer Service Centres. Appointment times vary depending on the appointment type e.g. an appointment to check housing benefit claim status would be made for 10 minutes whereas for an appointment to explain housing benefit entitlement would be lengthier and 15 minutes would be scheduled. Appointments to complete a Disability Living Allowance application form would be scheduled for 90 minutes. Accordingly there are not a set number of appointments available in each session and therefore when demonstrating the take-up of appointment time the analysis is undertaken using minutes available against available minutes used.
- 3.6 The following table demonstrates the average percentage of take up of appointment time at each office over 3 separate months (November 2014, February 2015 and May 2015). The full analysis of each month is contained in **Appendix 1**.

Office	Average % take-up of appointment time available
Stalybridge	30%
Denton	25%
Hyde	29%
Dukinfield	30%
Droylsden	51%
Mossley	16%
Average Total	30%

- 3.7 The data above indicates that demand for appointments at each of the offices is extremely low and on average only 30% of the available appointment time is being used. Consideration therefore needs to be given to how the face to face customer service function should be delivered in the future to provide a service which meets customer needs but is also cost effective.

4. REASONS FOR REDUCTION IN DEMAND

- 4.1 There are a variety of reasons why demand at customer service centres would reduce and some of this at Hyde and Denton is due to library staff handling all the lower level enquiries but primarily this is because of more streamlined application processes, more services being available electronically and more people becoming self-sufficient and accessing services digitally.

Customers becoming more self-sufficient and accessing services digitally

- 4.2 Society is changing with the advent of technological advancement and more and more people are using the internet, phone applications and tablets to access services. UK Government figures estimate that 85% of the population now have access to the internet either directly or via a friend, family member or advocate. Access is available via public computer facilities within libraries.

- 4.3 The majority of the enquiries handled by Customer Services relate to Housing Benefit and Council Tax matters and many of these are about making a benefit claim, verifying documents to enable a benefit claim to be assessed and change of circumstances.
- 4.4 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims now have to be made on-line as opposed to via a paper form and similarly change of circumstances are notified on-line. Customers can do this from home and those without access can be assisted in the Hub within Ashton Customer Service Centre. Citizens Advice Bureau provides a volunteer in the Hub and during 2013/14 3529 accessed the service in this way, during 2014/15 this increased to 4708. A self-service portal is also available for claimants and landlords to use to access information about their claims without the need to attend customer services.
- 4.5 Tameside is a Universal Credit (UC) pathfinder area and as this benefit is rolled out wider this will potentially lead to a further reduction in the requirement for face to face customer services. Claimants of UC will still need to apply to the Council for Council Tax Support if they have a Council Tax Liability, however enquiries are likely to be quicker to resolve as this is a single enquiry without the need to resolve a Housing Benefit issue at the same time. The number of UC claimants in Tameside as at April 2015 was 2,610.

Implementation of Risk Based Verification (RBV)

- 4.6 In April 2013 the Housing Benefit service introduced a Risk Based Verification (RVB) policy. This policy saw the implementation of differing levels of checks for different circumstances depending on a complex mathematical risk profile given to each customer.
- 4.7 Prior to the implementation of this policy all customers applying for Housing or Council Tax Benefit (now Council Tax Support) had to provide a substantial amount of documentary evidence e.g. wage slips, passports, birth/marriage certificates, bank statements etc. Original documentation was required and this was brought to Customer Services who copied the documents, verified that the original documents had been seen and forwarded the evidence to the Housing Benefit Service.
- 4.8 Following implementation of RBV provision of original documents was required based on a low, medium or high risk rating with those classified as low risk only needing to provide a National Insurance Number and proof of identity. It was estimated that this would apply to 55% of new claims and change of circumstances. An estimated 25% of claims would be classified as medium risk and be required to provide proof of income and capital in addition to the requirements of the low risk category. However, the documentary evidence could be photocopies rather than original documents. This potentially increased the willingness of customers to send evidence through the post rather than bring the documentation in personally. The remaining 20% of claims were subject to more stringent checks. During 2014/15 the number of claims classified as low risk was 60%, those at medium risk was 17% and high risk 26%.
- 4.9 Implementation of this policy served to reduce the numbers of customers attending Customer Service Centres for verification of their evidence.
- 4.10 Reductions in demand have been seen in other areas due to either a service no longer being available unless there are exceptional circumstances e.g. clothing grants, moving to electronic channels e.g. education admissions or application processes being streamlined e.g. free school meals are now assessed from the information provided on the housing benefit claim.
- 4.11 The table below details significant reductions in demand between 2010/11 and 2014/5.

Type of enquiry	Number of Enquiries			% Reduction
	2010/11	2014/15	Reduction	
Housing Benefit	40027	23455	16572	41%
Council Tax	11986	8878	3108	26%
Education Admissions	457	284	173	38%
Clothing Grants	2954	3	2951	99.9%
Parking Services	1258	550	708	56%
Other enquiries	26383	10155	16228	62%
Total	83065	43325	39740	48%

5. COST OF THE SERVICE

- 5.1 The cost to serve for the traditional face to face customer service function far outweighs the cost of other channels. The table below details the cost for each channel:

Period	Web		Call Centre		Face to Face		Total Average	
	Volume	Average Cost	Volume	Average Cost	Volume	Average Cost	Volume	Average Cost
2003/04	452378	£0.45	303511	£1.29	100126	£8.57	856015	£1.70
2004/05	679813	£0.30	314602	£1.20	104986	£8.46	1099401	£1.34
2005/06	1499904	£0.14	275555	£1.31	92560	£8.92	1868019	£0.75
2006/07	1954604	£0.07	225516	£1.46	81110	£9.23	2261230	£0.53
2007/08	1984500	£0.06	272043	£1.28	83463	£9.07	2340006	£0.52
2008/09	2286087	£0.05	219804	£1.68	74694	£9.90	2580585	£0.47
2009/10	2423329	£0.05	211957	£1.65	77599	£8.70	2712885	£0.42
2010/11	2378582	£0.04	197061	£1.59	83065	£7.96	2658757	£0.41
2011/12	2601214	£0.014	170532	£1.61	75828	£7.62	2847642	£0.31
2012/13	2316793	£0.016	180135	£1.35	71210	£6.08	2568190	£0.28
2013/14	2244788	£0.017	166957	£1.36	62440	£5.55	2474185	£0.25
2014/15	3000404	£0.012	165369	£1.31	43225	£7.48	3208998	£0.18

- 5.2 The cost to serve is calculated using the number of visits against the cost of providing the service and therefore it follows that if the number of visits reduces and the cost to provide the service does not take a corresponding reduction, the cost per visit will increase.
- 5.3 In 2014/15, the number of visits reduced to 43225 a reduction of 19,215 from 2013/14. The cost per visit increased to £7.48. When compared to the cost for 2012/13 and 2013/14 the service is becoming less cost effective to deliver in its current format.
- 5.4 The trend of reduction in the requirement of face to face customer services has prevailed over the last 5 years and it is therefore safe to assume that this will continue. If we do nothing the service will become increasingly less cost effective to deliver.
- 5.5 The largest cost element within the budget to operate the customer service function is staffing costs. This comprises 97% of the expenditure. Staffing levels have reduced over the years and the budget has reduced accordingly which has enabled a cost effective service to be delivered. However it is not possible to reduce staffing levels further and retain the current operating hours as there is only 1 officer at each satellite office.

- 5.6 The reduction in demand for face to face customer services at the satellite offices coupled with the increasing cost to serve demonstrates that action is required. Whilst there is a need to retain the service for those residents who would be unable to access other channels, the offer needs to be proportionate to the demand and kept under review as the demand further reduces in years to come.

6. OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE SERVICE PROVISION

- 6.1 The Council has to make a cut of £38m in spending over the 2 year period of 2015/16 and 2016/17. This will bring the cumulative reductions since 2010/11 to £142.4m. It is incumbent on all services, including customer services, to continually review and refine the offer to ensure that it is affordable in the current financial climate whilst achieving the required outcomes. Continuing to deliver a service at the same level when demand is falling is not an option for the future when the Council is faced with unprecedented reduction in budgets.
- 6.2 Between the 16 September and the 9 December 2014, Tameside Council conducted a budget consultation exercise that sought residents and businesses views on how to make savings to set a balanced budget. The consultation was conducted via a budget simulator which enabled residents to reduce or increase different service budgets in order to balance the Council's budget. In total 3,000 people engaged with the budget consultation process with 1,004 people completing the budget simulator. On average residents reduced the budget for customer service functions by 21%; this was the joint highest percentage reduction to a service budget.
- 6.3 Analysis of the current usage of the face to face customer service function, the likely reduction in the need for this service in the future, the increasing cost to serve and the public's determination that this is an area where budget cuts could be made have led to the development of 3 possible options for future provision.

Option 1

- 6.4 Option 1 would achieve our offer by providing level 2 customer services at all Libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents etc).
- 6.5 Ashton customer services would be retained at the new location of Clarence Arcade in its current format and would therefore continue to provide level 2 service and also in-depth housing benefit claims and council tax queries (Level 1 service). Ashton is the most used Customer Service Centre and the only one which has seen an increase in use over recent years. All other level 1 service provided from customer service centres within libraries would stop. The opening hours for Ashton would remain as currently provided.
- 6.6 This option would achieve the greatest savings, an estimated £0.079m
- 6.7 The Tameside Administrative Centre is currently being demolished and re-developed. During this period if Option 1 were to be implemented the service would continue to be delivered at Clarence Arcade. However this is a temporary venue which will be reviewed prior to vacation. This would mean that Tameside would have a single provision for the face to face customer services and the most suitable location for that facility would be determined at the time that the Council has to vacate Clarence Arcade taking into account customer volumes and preferences at that time. It is predicted that this review will take place in early 2018.

Option 2

- 6.8 Option 2 would achieve our offer by providing level 2 customer services at all Libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents etc). In-depth housing benefit claims and council tax enquiries (Level 1 service)

would be retained at Dukinfield, Mossley and Droylsden Libraries and Micklehurst Housing Office at the current opening hours. However the opening hours of the following customer service provision would reduce as follows:

- Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **2 days per week**
- Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**
- Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

6.9 This option would allow more than sufficient time to handle current demand also a little extra in case of increased demand. This option would achieve estimated savings of £0.041m.

Option 3

6.10 This option would be as option 2 described above, however provision at Hyde would be further reduced from 4 days a week to **1 day per week**. The reduction in provision would be as follows:

- Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **1 day per week**
- Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**
- Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

6.11 This option would allow more than sufficient time to handle current demand whilst also providing estimated saving of £0.070m.

7. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

7.1 Public consultation on the 3 Options was undertaken for a 6 week period between 18 May and 28 June 2015 to seek views of those using the service and others who may wish to in the future before any decision was made on the future of the service

7.2 The consultation was in the form of a standard questionnaire with an introduction to explain the reason for the proposed changes followed by the options and a series of questions to seek relevant views which would be used to shape the future provision of face to face customer service. Additionally a free format text box was available to allow for people to provide any comments, views and suggestions they wished to be taken into account. Staff within Customer Service Centres and Libraries actively encouraged people to complete the questionnaire and have their say.

7.3 The survey formed part of the Council's Big Conversation consultation which is prominently publicised via the Council's website. The consultation pack was also available in paper format from any Customer Service Centre or Library. The pack which was used as the basis for the consultation is included at **Appendix 2**.

7.4 In order to encourage as many people as possible to express their views contact was made with the following organisations with a request to make their service users, tenant groups and members aware. The link to the on-line consultation along with a word document version for printing in paper format was provided.

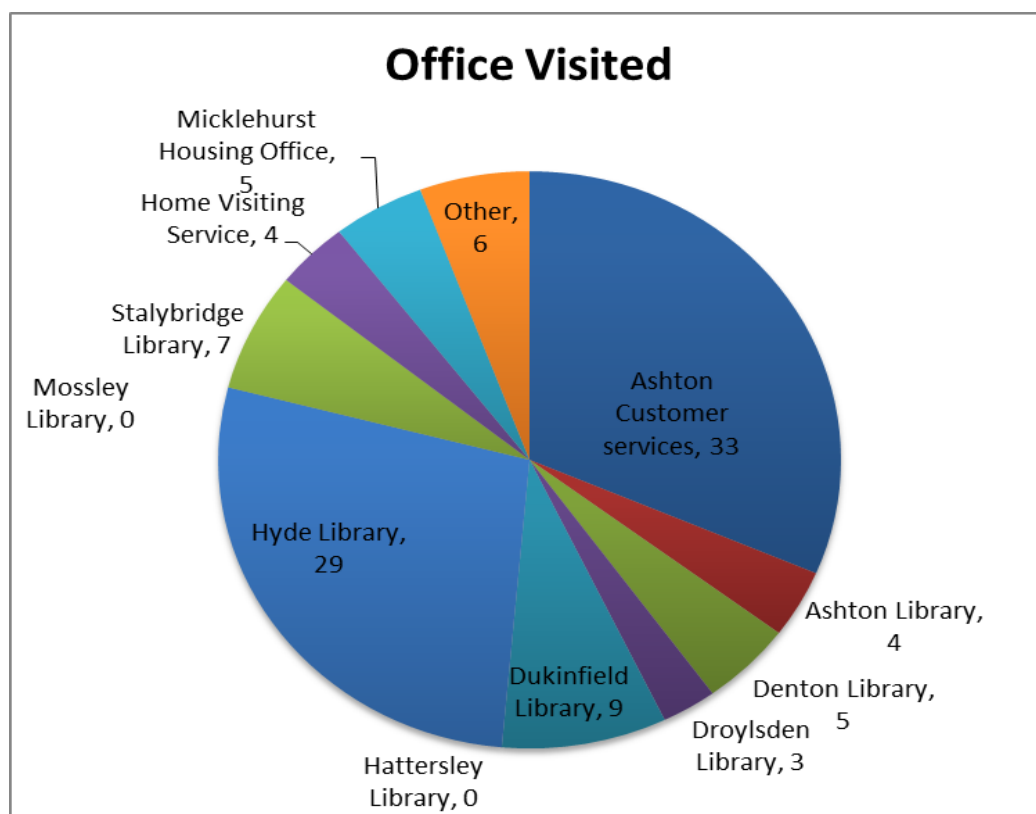
- Registered Housing Providers
- CVAT
- Bangladeshi Welfare Association
- Greater Manchester Fire Service
- MIND
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Job Centre Plus
- Carers Centre

Information Ambassadors Network (232 Ambassadors representing 215 community groups/outlets and potentially reaching 13,617 people across Tameside)

- 7.5 Views of elected Members were sought by way of a briefing note setting out the reasons for the consultation and encouraging their contribution.
- 7.6 Staff in Customer Services and Libraries were encouraged to complete the survey so that their perspective could be included in the evaluation.

8. RESULTS AND FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION

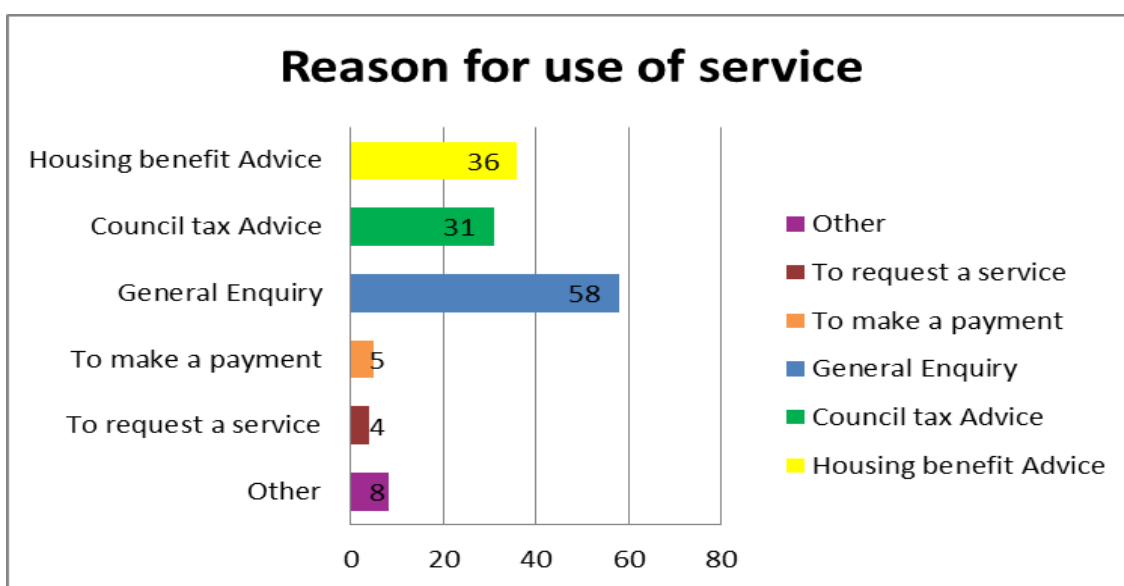
- 8.1 The consultation ran from the 18 May – 28 June 2015 during which 130 questionnaires were completed and responses were analysed. The full results are at **Appendix 3** and a summary is detailed below.
- 8.2 122 respondents answered the question on whether they had used customer services in the past 12 months. Of these 72.1% (88) indicated that they had used the service and 27.9% (34) indicated that they had not used the service.
- 8.3 84 responders indicated which office they had used; the majority at 39.29% (33) had used Ashton with the next popular office being Hyde at 34.52% (29), followed by Dukinfield at 10.71% (9). Two offices – Mossley and Hattersley Libraries were not used at all and the Droylsden Office was used only 3 times. **Survey respondents were asked to tick all that applied and therefore the total was greater than the 84 responders.**



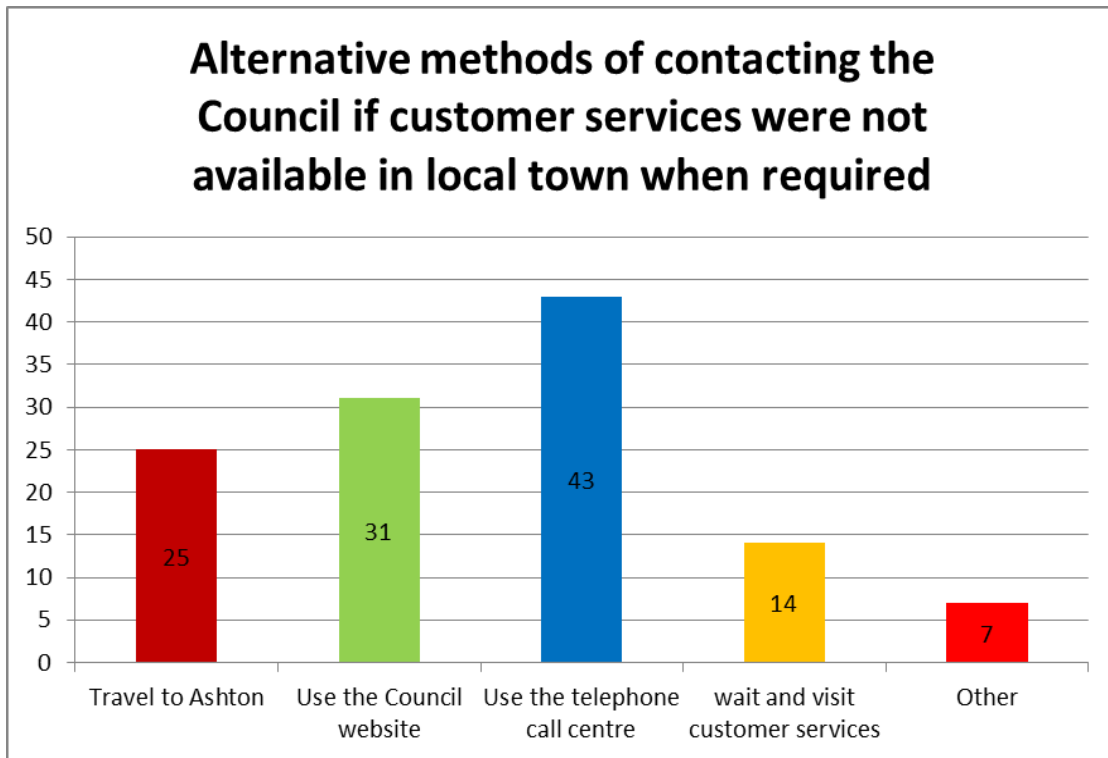
- 8.4 Respondents were asked to provide detail on the reason why they had used Customer Services. This question was asked to ascertain if the service was being used for level 1 enquiries – in-depth housing benefit and council tax matters or level 2 enquiries comprising of book, pay or request a service and general information. Level 1 enquiries require a Customer Service Officer fully conversant in both the Council Tax/Housing benefit system and also the

regulations in order to handle these more complex enquiries. Level 2 enquiries can be handled at a lower level and need less specific training.

- 8.5 Respondents were able to select all services they had used within the last 12 months. Of the 85 respondents who answered this question, 42.35% (36) customers used the service for Housing Benefit and 36.47% (31) for Council Tax enquiries. The majority of people used the service for general enquiries 68.24% (58), to make a payment 5.88% (5) or to request a service 4.71% (4). Housing Benefit and Council Tax are level 1 type enquiries whilst the rest are all level 2 enquiries.
- 8.6 As a multi response question respondents could tick all services they had used. Additional analysis was undertaken to determine those respondents who had selected the use of level 1 services only, level 2 services only and those who had contacted customer services for both a level 1 and level 2 enquiry. Of those who provided a reason for contact the majority (48.8%) did so for a level 2 enquiry only. A fifth (20%) did so for a level 1 enquiry only and 31.2% had been in contact for both a level 1 and 2 enquiry.

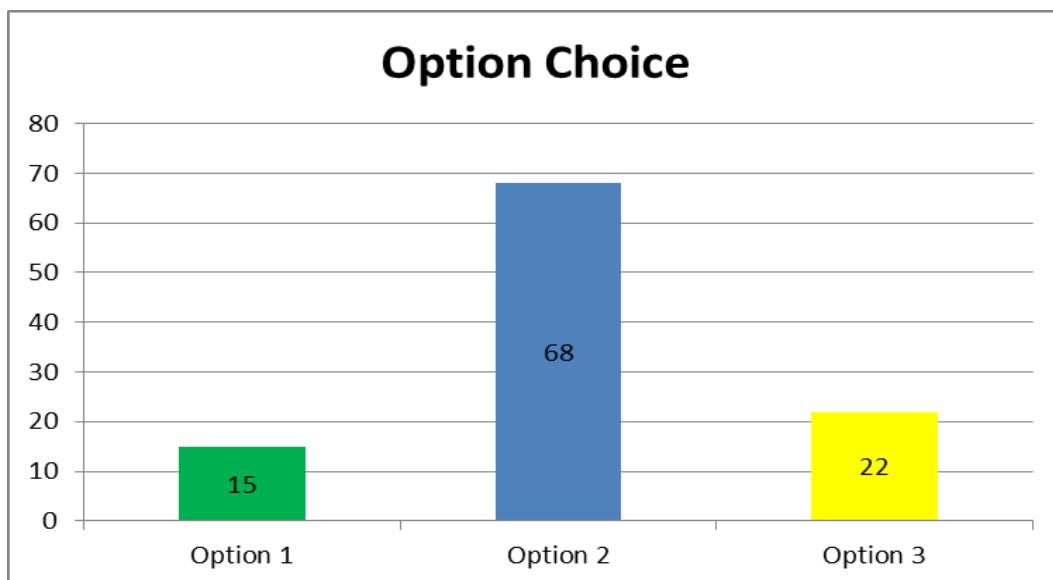


- 8.7 Question 5 posed the question of how customers would choose to contact the Council if Customer Services was not available at the time it was required in their local town. 120 respondents answered this question. Over three quarters of respondents 76.2% (99) indicated that if the service was not available in their local town when they required it they would travel to Ashton 20.83% (25); use the web 25.83% (31) or use the telephone 35.83% (43). Less than a quarter 11.67% (14) indicated they would wait until the service was available in their local town. 5.83% (7) indicated they would do something else and these included – get daughter to contact on my behalf, use the Mossley Hub, use the new care system after 6 April 2015, ask for support from website, and use carers.



8.8 Question 6 asked respondents to indicate which of the 3 options they would prefer the Council to implement. Only 105 respondents of the 130 completing the survey chose to respond to this question meaning 25 people did not express a view on which would be their preferred option.

- Option 1 – 14.292% (15)
- Option 2 – 64.76% (68)
- Option 3 – 20.95% (22)



8.9 Respondents were asked for their reasons for choosing their preferred option to which only 92 comments were made. A table of the full responses is at **Appendix 4** but the most commonly mentioned themes were:

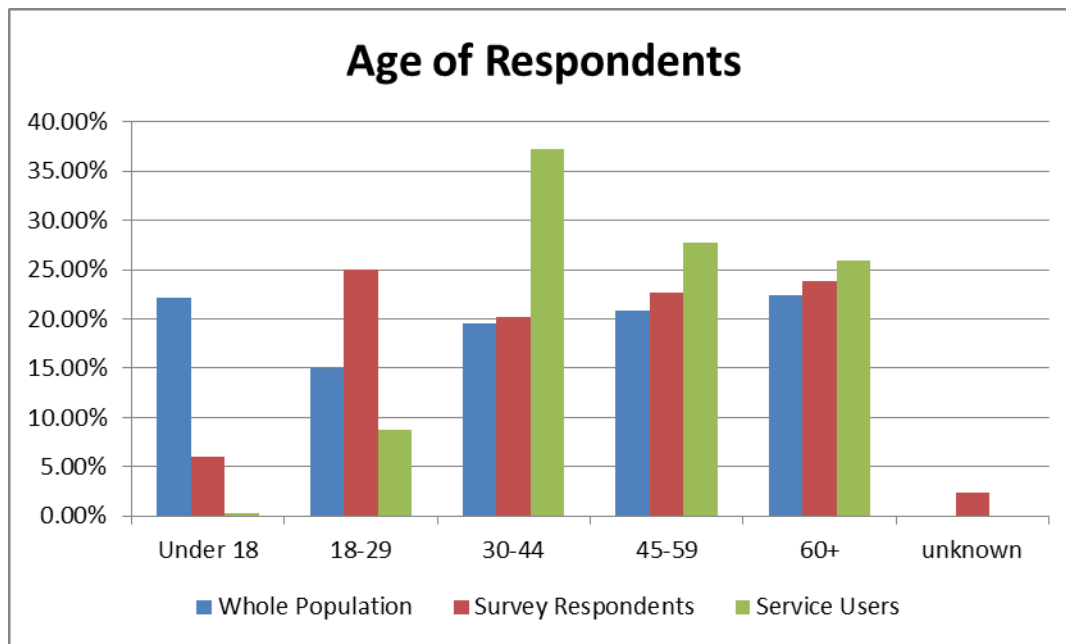
- More accessible – 38 comments
- Convenience – 31 comments

Travel – cost/time/difficulty – 18 comments

- 8.10 In the event of Option 2 or 3 being implemented respondents were asked which day of the week they would prefer Hyde, Denton and Stalybridge to be closed. 61 people responded to this question with regard to Denton with a slight majority at 55.74% (34) expressing a preference for Denton to be closed on Thursday. 60 respondents answered with regard to Stalybridge with 63.33% (38) expressing a preference for closure on Tuesday.
- 8.11 With regard to Hyde if Option 2 was implemented of the 76 respondents who expressed a preference 46.05% (35) wished Hyde to be closed on Tuesday and Wednesday but if Option 3 were to be implemented preferred closed days were Wednesday (62.50%), Tuesday (58.33%) and Friday (47.22%).
- 8.12 As the requirement for face to face customer service has reduced dramatically over the years respondents were asked if they agreed that the service should be kept under review and adjustments made to ensure customer demand is met but that the service remains affordable and cost effective. 99 survey respondents chose to answer this question and of those 85.86% (85) indicated that they agreed service should be kept under review whereas 14.14% (14) did not agree.
- 8.13 Question 13 offered the opportunity for respondents to provide any comments they wished to make about the future customer service provision. Only 20.8% (27) of respondents made comments. A full table of responses is contained in **Appendix 5** but the main comments were:
- Want to keep the service x 9
 - Enough cuts been made already x 3
 - Do not have internet access x 1
 - need to sort the website x 1
 - Travel issues x 2
 - Appointments should be implemented x 2
 - Must always be face to face for vulnerable people x 1

About You

- 8.14 Survey respondents were asked to best describe their interest in the issue. 106 respondents answered this question with the overwhelming majority of 83.96% (89) indicating that they were a member of the public and 4.72% (5) members of staff. However respondents also included CAB, MIND, Tameside Housing Advice. People First and a Mossley Town Councillor.
- 8.15 Of the 108 people who chose to disclose their gender 50% (54) were female and 50% (54) were male. This is representative of the overall population of 50.8% female and 49.2% male.
- 8.16 84 people responded to the question about their age and of those a quarter (25%) were between 18 – 29 years of age. There was a fairly even split between 30 – 44 years (20.24%), 45 – 59 years (22.62%) and 60+ (23.81%). Fewer respondents were under 18 at (5.59%) and 2 people (2.38%) declined to provide their exact age but classed themselves as over 21 and 40+. The graph below displays the age of the respondents against the whole population and also against the age, where data is available, of customers using the service. It should be noted that the Service Users data covers the age range under 16 – 19 years in the first column of the graph.



8.17 In all age brackets with the exception of under 18 years of age survey respondents were over representative when compared against Tameside population as a whole. Analysis of statistical data collected from those in the age range 16 – 19 years who contacted the council during 2014/15 and provided equalities data indicate that only 0.28% have used the service which also indicates an under representation when compared to Tameside population as a whole.

8.18 With regard to ethnicity 102 people answered the question. Of these the large majority 81.37% (83) classed themselves White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British. 18.63% (19) classed themselves as White and Asian/Asian/Asian British/Indian/Bangladeshi/Black African/mixed. 28 respondents skipped the question and there is no way of determining their ethnicity. For Tameside population as a whole the vast number of residents are from a white background 90.9% with only 9.1% being black and minority ethnic and therefore survey respondents were over represented from BME communities and under-represented from White backgrounds.

8.19 87 people answered a question regarding whether their day to day activities were limited a little or a lot due to a health problem or disability lasting or expecting to last over 12 months. Of these 70.11% (61) stated they had no limitations, whereas 16.09% (14) were limited a little and 13.79% (12) were limited a lot. This is higher than the census figures for 2011 which indicated 79.1% were not limited at all, 10.3% being limited a little and 10.6% of people being limited a lot. Statistical analysis of data of those using the service during 2014/15 indicated that 75.58% had no limitations and 24.42% had limitations.

8.20 88 people responded when asked if they looked after or undertook support for others. Of these 73.86% (65) indicated they did not carry out this function, whereas 15.91% (14) did so for between 1 – 19 hours a week, 4.55% (4) between 20 – 49 hours a week and 5.6% (5) for 50+ hours a week. Those respondents providing unpaid care were over represented when compared with the Census 2011 which indicated that 11% of the population were providing unpaid care.

9. ADDRESSING CONCERNS

9.1 Survey responders were asked their reasons for choosing the option they preferred for the future delivery model. This was in a free format text box to enable concerns to be detailed and considered.

- 9.2 A full table of the comments provided as detailed at **Appendix 4**. The main comments are detailed below
- More accessible – 38 comments
 - Convenience – 31 comments
 - Travel – cost/time/difficulty – 18 comments
- 9.3 Only 92 comments were made by the 130 respondents to the survey meaning that 29% (38) of people declined to share reasons for their choice of the three options being consulted upon.
- 9.4 The comments were very similar throughout and centred on local offices being more convenient and therefore easier to access for people. There were some concerns about travelling to Ashton if Option 1 were implemented. However over three quarters of respondents 76.2% (99) indicated that if the service was not available in their local town when they required it they would either travel to Ashton 20.83% (25); use the web 25.83% (31) or use the telephone 35.83% (43). Less than a quarter 11.67% (14) indicated they would wait until the service was available in their local town. A conclusion could be drawn from this that whilst people would prefer to access the service in their local town, if it were not available they would be able to either access by other channels or travel to Ashton and would therefore not be excluded from accessing the service.
- 9.5 The home visiting service for those who are housebound will remain a feature of the face to face service.

10. PROPOSED NEW SERVICE PROVISION

- 10.1 64.76% (68) of people indicated a preference for option 2 which would provide the least reduction in the service. Whilst a conclusion could be drawn that Options 1 and 3 are less favourable and therefore should not be adopted, consideration needs to be given to all factors affecting this decision. Factors include the alternatives respondents would take if the service was not available in their local town, the type of enquiry respondents need assistance with, usage of the service, cost to provide the service and the financial constraints that the Council finds itself in.

Alternatives if service unavailable in local town

- 10.2 The majority of people (76.2%) indicated that they would either travel to Ashton, use the internet or the telephone if their local office was not open at the time they required it. This is an indication of the appetite for channel migration for the services which can be accessed by channels other than face to face and this would fit in with the latest government figures estimating that 85% of the population now has access to the internet with directly or via a friend, family member or advocate.

Type of enquiry customers need assistance with

- 10.3 The majority of responders to the survey 48.8% used customer services for level 2 service only (book, pay, request a service or general enquiry). All libraries within the Borough will continue to offer this level of service to customers on a drop in basis and for longer hours than the Customer Service Officer is available.

Usage of the service

- 10.4 Usage of the face to face customer service function has reduced dramatically over the past 5 years and this reduction is set to continue. The roll out of Universal Credit will mean for the majority of claimants their housing costs will be included in their benefit payment rather than via housing benefit. Increasingly more residents are becoming self-sufficient and are accessing services on-line and the Council has commenced a program of work – digital by design – which will ensure more services are delivered digitally.

Cost to provide the service

- 10.5 Since the appointment based system was introduced in 2012 only an average of 30% of available appointment time is being utilised making this a cost prohibitive way to provide the service. The cost per visit has increased from £6.08 in 2012/13 to £7.48 in 2014/15 and this is set to increase further if the service remains in its current format.

Financial position of the Council

- 10.6 The Council has made savings of £104m from 2011 to 2015 and has to save a further £38m between 2015 – 2017 and therefore must continue to review all services to ensure they are as cost effective and efficient as possible. Consultation undertaken between September and December 2014 revealed that 21% of residents would reduce the budget for customer service functions in order to achieve a balanced budget.

Proposed model

- 10.7 Taking all the relevant factors into consideration it is proposed that Option 1 would provide an offer suitable to meet the majority of residents needs whilst also being affordable for the Council.
- 10.8 Option 1 would provide Level 2 customer service at all Libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents. Ashton Customer Services would be retained in its current format and would therefore continue to provide level 2 service and also in-depth housing benefit claims and council tax enquiries (Level 1 service). Ashton is the most used Customer Service Centre which has only seen a very small reduction in visits during the last 12 months. All other Level 1 service provided from customer service centres within libraries and Micklehurst Housing Office would stop. The opening hours for Ashton Customer Services would remain as currently provided.
- 10.9 Whilst some customers would be affected if this option is implemented the majority of the survey respondents could still access the service they require in their local town at the library. As three quarters of people have indicated that they would access services by alternative methods it is not felt that Option 1 would cause a significant detrimental impact on residents.

11. STAFF IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 If Option 1 was implemented staffing levels within the service would also need to be reduced accordingly. Analysis of the relevant data indicates that the service could be delivered by 9.7 Full Time Equivalent staff (FTE). The current structure for Customer Services provides for 12.8 FTE and therefore a reduction of 3.1 FTE would be required.
- 11.2 A new staffing structure would be developed and there may be a competitive process for some of the positions. However, some officers within the service requested voluntary severance/early retirement when the offer was previously available in 2012 but were unable to exit the authority as their posts were required at that time. With a reduction in the service if severance/early retirement were available there are likely to be officers wishing to take this option. If this option is unavailable staff will be placed at risk and alternative posts will need to be sought.
- 11.3 One officer in the service retired in December 2014 and another has recently requested to exit the Authority for personal reasons unrelated to their employment with the Council. Therefore implementation of Option 1 would mean a reduction of 1.41 FTE.
- 11.4 To date staff have been briefed on the service review and the consultation that has been undertaken in the public realm. It will be necessary to consult with staff to ensure they are fully aware of the changes to the service and the new staffing structure which would be required.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The proposed Option 1 model generates an annual saving of £0.079m for a full financial year. This results from reducing staffing levels and operating Level 1 service from Ashton Customer Services only.
- 12.2 This assumes that 3.1FTE posts within the service will be deleted. It is important to note that the savings will only be achieved if staff are released by the service and do not remain as a cost ie supernumery. Early indications are that some staff would like to exit the Authority and 2 officers have approached managers for details of job sharing opportunities.
- 12.3 The savings would contribute to the overall savings allocation for Community Services in 2015/16 of £0.329m. The Option which is implemented would deliver a part year saving in 2015/16 with full year savings achievable from 2016/17 onwards.

13. IMPLEMENTATION

- 13.1 Should the proposed option be implemented communication with residents and potential service users would be required. Publicity would be undertaken through Customer Service Centres, Libraries and on the web site. Flyers would be produced to hand to current service users for a period of time prior to any changes being implemented. Partner organisations such as Registered Housing Providers, Community Voluntary Action Tameside and internal networking groups such as Information Ambassador Network would be asked to assist in circulating information on the new service provision. The publicity campaign would provide details of how customers can access services including on-line, telephone and face to face at Libraries and Ashton Customer Services.
- 13.2 It is proposed that the new service would be implemented with effect from the 2 November 2015.

14. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 14.1 A full equality impact assessment has been undertaken on the consultation process and how the proposed changes to the face to face customer service might impact on customers and particularly those with a protected characteristic. The full equality impact assessment can be found at **Appendix 6**.
- 14.2 It is not proposed to withdraw the face to face customer service facility, but to provide level 2 service at all Libraries around the Borough and retain the centralised Ashton Customer Service facility. This will be on a reactive drop in basis although appointments can be made if necessary.
- 14.3 The Equality Impact Assessment revealed that some negative impact could be felt by residents due to **age** and **disability** if Option 1 were implemented as there may be difficulty in travelling to Ashton Customer Service Centre to access level 1 customer service.
- 14.4 Tameside has a comprehensive bus service operating within the Borough. Over 85% of buses operating in Greater Manchester are easy access and largely meet the accessibility standards laid out below:
- Brightly coloured grab rails;
 - Slip resistant flooring;
 - Brightly coloured stop buttons that are reachable from a seated position;
 - A route number and destination display on the front and nearside of the bus, and a route

- number display on the back of the bus;
- A ramp or other device to bridge the gap between the bus and the kerb;
- A space on the bus for a wheelchair user (this space is also accessible for pushchairs)

Following the introduction of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, design standards were introduced for accessible buses. Since 2000 all new buses must meet these standards. All buses used on local services must meet the design standards by 1 January 2016 for single-deck buses and 1 January 2017 for double-deck buses.

- 14.5 All libraries around the Borough will continue to offer access to Level 2 service to residents and there will be assistance from staff at these venues both in terms of enquiries and free access to the internet. In addition level 1 service is available over the telephone and on the Council's website which the majority of survey respondents (76.2%) indicated they would access if their local office were unavailable when they required it. The majority of residents using customer services are already travelling to Ashton to access the service. The home visiting service will remain a feature of the future provision for those residents who are housebound and unable to access services by other channels. In addition access to the telephone interpreter service and loop hearing systems will continue to be available.
- 14.6 It is felt that implementing Option 1 is reasonable and proportionate and offers the best value for money in terms of usage of the service against the cost to provide and the financial constraints of the Council

15. RISKS

- 15.1 Concerns were raised around the convenience and accessibility of the service in local towns and some customers being unable to travel to Ashton if Option 1 were implemented. However, the majority of survey respondents indicated that they would still be able to access services by other channels or by travelling to Ashton. Libraries will remain a central facility in the community and officers working in that service will ensure that customers can access relevant services. In some cases this may mean acting as an advocate for the customer and contacting a service on their behalf.
- 15.2 The Council is currently relocating services out of the Council Offices in order to build a new service centre on the same site which is expected to be complete during 2018. Customer Services will be relocating to a different venue and customers will need to know the location of this venue. A comprehensive communication strategy is in place to ensure customers know where the new customer service centre in Ashton is located.

16. CONCLUSIONS

- 16.1 Although there is still a demand for traditional face to face customer service, this is reducing over time with technological advances and therefore changes to the service must be made to ensure it is affordable and efficient going forward.
- 16.2 Analysis of the use of the service at the current provision reveals that take up is on average only 30% at satellite offices. Delivery of the service in the current format is no longer efficient and the cost to serve has increased from £6.08 in 2012/13 to £7.48 in 2014/15 and this is set to increase further if the service remains in its current format. Coupled with that is the indication from the budget simulator consultation that the public would make cuts to customer service functions in order to achieve a balanced budget. The Council has made savings of £104m from 2011 to 2015 and has to save a further £38m between 2015 – 2017 and therefore must continue to review all services to ensure they are as cost effective and efficient as possible

- 16.3 Public consultation revealed that although customer preference would be to retain local customer service centres, three quarters of people would still access the service by either travelling to Ashton, using the internet or telephone call centre. Less than a quarter at 11.67% would wait for the service to be available in their local town.
- 16.4 The majority of responders to the consultation indicated that they were using the face to face service for level 2 enquiries only which can be undertaken at libraries in their local town.
- 16.5 Taking all the relevant factors into consideration it is proposed that Option 1 would provide an offer suitable to meet the majority of residents needs whilst also being affordable for the Council. It is further proposed to keep this model under review and make any further adjustments as necessary to ensure customer demand is met but that the service remains affordable.

17. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 17.1 As detailed on the front of this report.

APPENDIX 1

Percentage of take-up of available appointment time in satellite offices

Stalybridge – current availability Tuesday and Wednesday each week

Month	Minutes available	Minutes used	Percentage take-up
November 2014	3520	1294	37%
February 2015	3520	949	27%
May 2015	3520	969	28%
Total	10560	3212	30%

Denton – current availability Monday and Thursday each week

Month	Minutes available	Minutes used	Percentage take-up
November 2014	3400	762	22%
February 2015	3400	816	24%
May 2015	2520	803	32%
Total	9320	2381	25%

Hyde – current availability Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday each week

Month	Minutes available	Minutes used	Percentage take-up
November 2014	6800	2129	31%
February 2015	6800	1959	29%
May 2015	6300	1748	28%
Total	19900	5836	29%

Dukinfield – current availability Thursday from 9am – 2pm

Month	Minutes available	Minutes used	Percentage take-up
November 2014	1200	492	41%
February 2015	1200	329	27%
May 2015	1200	253	21%
Total	3600	1074	30%

Droylsden – current availability Monday 9am – 12 noon and Friday 12 noon – 4pm

Month	Minutes available	Minutes used	Percentage take-up
November 2014	1680	720	43%
February 2015	1440	831	58%
May 2015	1170	658	56%
Total	4290	2209	51%

Mossley – current availability Wednesday 9am – 11.30am

Month	Minutes available	Minutes used	Percentage take-up
November 2014	720	70	10%
February 2015	600	114	19%
May 2015	600	115	19%
Total	1920	299	16%

APPENDIX 2

YOUR VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF THE FACE TO FACE CUSTOMER SERVICES FUNCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The way in which customers and residents interact with the council and access council information and services is changing. The traditional face to face contact is no longer preferred by many customers as they find telephone contact and web contact to be quicker and more effective. Advances in technology have allowed a much wider range of queries to be dealt with effectively on line and over the telephone. UK Government figures estimate that 85% of the population now have access to the internet either directly or via a friend, family member or advocate. This trend towards web and telephone contact has accelerated over the years and the Council needs to constantly review its services to meet future customer needs.
- 1.2 In addition, the Council is faced with unprecedented budget cuts of £38 million over the next two years. These cuts mean that we have to look at all our services to see how best we can continue to deliver excellent services whilst offering value for money for our residents. Between 16th September and 9th December 2014, Tameside Council conducted a budget consultation exercise that sought residents and businesses' views on where these cuts should be made. The consultation was conducted via a budget simulator which enabled residents to reduce or increase different service budgets in order to balance the Council's budget. In total 3,000 people engaged with the budget consultation process with 1,004 people completing the budget simulator. The customer services budget was included along with the budget for communications. On average residents reduced this budget by 21%; this was the joint highest percentage reduction to a service budget along with Core Corporate Services.
- 1.3 In October 2012 we introduced an appointment based system for face to face contact at all Customer Service locations around the Borough with the exception of the Ashton office. At the same time we relocated Denton and Hyde Customer Services into the libraries in their respective towns. The reason for this was so that library staff could deal with the lower level enquiries immediately without customers having to make an appointment and the Customer Service Officers could concentrate on the more complex enquiries, typically about Housing Benefit and Council Tax matters. This system has worked well and has meant that customers can choose an appointment time which suits their requirements rather than having to queue and enquiries are handled efficiently and in the most cost effective manner.
- 1.4 We are now two years further on and face to face contact at Customer Service Centres has reduced significantly. There are a number of reasons for this including more streamlined application processes, library staff at Denton and Hyde handling all lower lever enquiries but primarily this is because more services are available electronically and more people are becoming self-sufficient and accessing services digitally.
- 1.5 The table below indicates the decline in face to face contact. With the exception of Ashton, use of all Customer Service Centres has fallen significantly between 2010/11 and 2014/15 (projected figures)

Year	Number of Visitors						
	Ashton	Denton	Droylsden	Dukinfield	Hyde	Mossley	Stalybridge
2010/11	39357	9219	4769	2927	16552	3110	7131
2011/12	33009	9012	4708	3099	16765	3229	6006
2012/13	44144	4999	3334	2136	11406	1795	3396
2013/14	52229	1704	1117	528	5348	143	1371
2014/15 projection	41693	1301	797	464	2785	205	992
% change 2010/11 to 201415 (projection)	5.9%	-85.9%	-83.3%	-84.1%	-83.2%	-93.4%	-86.1%

1.6 The current opening hours of the Council's Customer Services Centres are as follows:

	ASHTON	HYDE	DENTON	DROYLSDEN	DUKINFIELD	MOSSLEY	STALYBRIDGE
MONDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 12.00noon	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
TUESDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	9.00am to 5.00pm
WEDNESDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	9.00am to 11.30am	9.00am to 5.00pm
THURSDAY	8.30am to 4.30pm	CLOSED	9.00am to 4.30pm	CLOSED	9.00am to 2.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED
FRIDAY	8.30am to 4.00pm	9.00am to 4.00pm	CLOSED	12.00noon to 4.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
Micklehurst – Tuesday 10am – 12 noon Mottram/Hattersley – by appointment only							

1.7 Below is the average take-up of appointment time over 3 separate months at each office (with the exception of Ashton)

Stalybridge – 30%
Denton – 24%
Hyde – 34%
Dukinfield – 29%
Droylsden – 48%
Mossley – 20%

Overall this equates to an average of only 32% of the available appointment time being used. We therefore need to consider how we deliver the face to face customer service function in the future in order to provide a service which meets customer demand but is also cost effective.

2. OUR PROPOSAL

2.1 Based on the evidence in section one, we are proposing to reduce the opening hours of our customer services provision.

- 2.2 Our proposal could be delivered by three different models and the purpose of this consultation is to get views on these models and to understand further, the impact that any changes may have on people.
- 2.3 We would like your views on the following 3 options.

Option 1

Option 1 would achieve our offer by providing level 2 customer services at all Libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents etc).

Ashton customer services would be retained in its current format and would therefore continue to provide level 2 service and also in-depth housing benefit claims and council tax queries (Level 1 service). Ashton is the most used Customer Service Centre and the only one which has seen an increase in use over recent years. All other level 1 service provided from customer services within libraries would stop. The opening hours for Ashton would remain as currently provided.

This option would achieve savings in the region of £79,351.

Option 2

Option 2 would achieve our offer by providing level 2 customer services at all Libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents etc). In-depth housing benefit claims and council tax enquiries (Level 1 service) would be retained at Dukinfield, Mossley and Droylsden Libraries and Micklehurst Housing Office at the current opening hours. However the opening hours of the following customer service provision would reduce as follows:

Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **2 days per week**

Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

This option would allow more than sufficient time to handle current demand also a little extra in case of increased demand. This option would achieve savings in the region of £40,818.

Option 3

This option would be as option 2 described above, however provision at Hyde would be further reduced from 4 days a week to **1 day per week**. The reduction in provision would be as follows:

Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **1 day per week**

Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

This option would allow more than sufficient time to handle current demand whilst also providing saving of £69,993.

- 2.4 It is also proposed to keep the service under review and reduce appointment availability further if required to achieve best use of resources whilst continuing to meet customer demand.

3 HOW DO YOU HAVE YOUR SAY

- 3.1 To allow everyone to have their say and get as many views as possible, we have developed a questionnaire that asks for your views.

- 3.2 The questionnaire is attached and can be either completed on-line or at any of our Libraries or Customer Service Centres. If assistance is required in completing the questionnaire this can be obtained at any of our libraries or through customer services.
- 3.3 Consultation will run from the 18 May to 28 June 2015. All returns will be considered along with our existing information to form firm recommendations for the Council's Executive Cabinet to consider.



THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

Q1 We want to hear your views. Please help us by providing your personal details so that we can verify that the responses are valid, and so that we can give due weight and consideration to your views. This information will only be used as part of the public consultation and will not be used or processed for any other purpose. Thank you for joining in our Big Conversation.

Name:

Address 1:

Address 2:

Town:

Postcode:

Email Address:

HOW YOU CONTACT THE COUNCIL

Q2 Have you used face to face customer services in the past 12 months? (Please tick one box only)

- Yes No (If no, please go to question 5)

Q3 If you have used face to face customer services, where did you do this? (Please tick all that apply)

- Ashton Customer Services Tameside Central Library Denton Library
Droylsden Library Dukinfield Library Hattersley Library Hyde
Library Mossley Library Stalybridge Library Home visiting
Service Micklehurst Housing Office Other – please specify

Q4 What do you use customer services for? (Please tick all that apply)

- Housing Benefit Advice Council Tax Advice
 General Enquiry To make a payment
 To make a request for a service eg refuse collection
 Other – please specify

Q5 If face to face customer services were not available at the time you needed it in your local town, how would you choose to contact the council? (Please tick one box only)

- Travel to Ashton Use the Council website
 Use the telephone call centre Wait and visit customer services in your local town
 Other – please specify

OUR PROPOSALS

Q6 Which of the options would you prefer the Council to implement? (Please tick one box only)

PLEASE NOTE – In all options provision of Level 2 customer services (book, pay for or request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents etc) would remain at all libraries. The options concern the more in-depth enquiries regarding Housing Benefit and Council Tax matter.

Option 1

Customer services retained at Ashton only with the current opening hours (Monday to Friday)

Option 2

Customer services retained at Ashton with the current opening hours. The service provided at Dukinfield, Mossley and Droylsden libraries would also stay the same, in addition to that at Micklehurst Housing Office. The opening hours of the in-depth customer services provision would reduce as follows:

Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **2 days per week**

Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Option 3

As option 2, however the opening hours at Hyde would reduce further to 1 day a week. The reduction in opening hours of the in-depth customer services provision would be as follows:

Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **1 day per week**

Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Q7 Please explain your reasons for choosing this option (Please state your reasons in the box below)

THE QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION ARE ENTIRELY OPTIONAL. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SKIP ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU PREFER NOT TO ANSWER.

Q12 Please tick the box that best describes your interest in this issue? (Please tick one box only)

- A member of the public
- A staff member working at a library in Tameside
- A staff member at a Tameside School / A Tameside School Governor
- Other Council staff member
- A community or voluntary group (please specify below)
- A partner organisation (please specify below)
- A business /private organisation (please specify below)
- Other (please specify below)

Q13 Are you.....?

- Male
- Female

Q14 What is your age? (Please state)

Q15 What is your postcode? (Please state)

Q16 What is your ethnic group? (Please tick one box only)

White

- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background (Please specify)

Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Groups

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background (Please specify)

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- African
- Carriibbean
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background (Please specify)

Asian / Asian British

- Indian
- Pakistani

- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background (Please specify)

Other ethnic group

- Arab
- Any other ethnic group (Please specify)

Q17 Are your day-to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? This may include problems related to old age. (Please tick one box only)

- Yes, limited a lot
- Yes, limited a little
- No

Q18 Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: (Please tick one box only)

- Long term physical or mental ill-health / disability?
- Problems due to old age?

- No
- Yes, 1-19 hours a week
- Yes, 20-49 hours a week
- Yes, 50 or more a week

QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS

If you have completed a paper copy of this questionnaire please hand in to a member of the library or customer services staff by **28 June 2015**

PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT YOUR PERSONAL DETAILS WILL BE KEPT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL AND THAT NO INDIVIDUAL WILL BE IDENTIFIED IN THE REPORTING OF RESULTS.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Please see attached Appendix 3

APPENDIX 4

Question 7 - Please explain your reasons for choosing this option
All areas need easy access for all.
All main services in one place, more convenient.
As I live in Mossley, the office at the library is local for me
Ashton is central
Aware that savings need to be made across all services and towns within Tameside. This option saves money and will maintain a service to the residents of all towns in the borough. It will also mean that if further reductions are required there would be a possibility to re visit and do a further review.
Because I live in Ashton
Because it's in Mossley
Because it's local to Mossley
Because of the language barrier I have no one to take with me.
Because this offers least reduction in provision
Bernie the lady I deal with has always been very helpful and courteous with my enquiries and I have every confidence in her. The library is only a short walk from my home and as I am almost 72 I really don't fancy the idea of traipsing all the way to Ashton when I can have contact with someone locally who is very efficient.
best balance of comprehensive service vs cost savings
Best for everyone
best for everyone
Better for me
Close to where I live
Convenience and high demand
Convenient for me in terms of times and days that are available
difficult for people to get to Ashton if only had service in Ashton
Difficult for people to travel if only had c/service in Ashton.
Doesn't reflect people of one location - more choice
Doesn't restrict people of one location - more choice
Each one have a day so people will get know which one is available
each one have a day so people will get to know which one is available
EASE OF STILL BEING ABLE TO SEE SOMEONE AT THE LIBRARY
Easier to reach for me
Easy access to me living in Mossley
Easy and more local
easy to get to Dukinfield and it is nicer atmosphere than Ashton
Expensive to travel to Ashton
Gives me more option to come again another day. Rather than travelling to Ashton.
Greater access for residents.
having these hours and being at different location is a life line for so many , not just because it's convenient for people and there are a lot of people that are in work that need help in sorting things it is hard for people just to get to Ashton
HYDE NEEDS TO BE SEEN AS BEING JUST AS IMPORTANT AS ASHTON
I cannot afford transport costs too often as I am on benefits. If there is an option for a local office to be open at least one day a week I would use it. I am completing this form with the help of my Threshold Customer Involvement worker as I do not have a computer and no internet access.

I live in Ashton
I live in Stalybridge
I live near to Ashton
I think reducing Hyde to just 1 day would make it hard to get an appointment
I use the Stalybridge Library and Ashton for everything related to the council
I want to
I want to keep this service in local area
I want to keep this service in my local town
I want to keep this service in my local town
I want to keep this service in my local town
I want to keep this service in my local town
I want to keep this service in my local town.
I want to keep this service in my town
I want to keep this service in my town
I want to keep this service in my town
I want to keep this service in your local area
I would struggle to get to Ashton but could manage to get to Hyde if the Denton office was not open on the day. However, I would prefer Denton as it is easier for me to get to.
If Customer Service staff were only at outlying post one day a week there would be more of them at Ashton to deal with people quicker
If want to keep costs to minimum makes sense for everyone to know when and where are available simple for customer
It is expensive for me to travel to Ashton
It is expensive to travel to Ashton and time consuming.
It seems to be the best option in retaining provision in most areas. (Ideally provision should be provided in all areas at least 4 days per week!)
It's expensive to travel to Ashton and time consuming
It's hard for me to travel and I have to take somebody with me
It's not easy to travel with children
Live in Ashton
More availability
More convenient
More days are required because if I can't make it one day, I can always make it another day.
More days required due to convenience. If I need my documents checked again I don't have to travel to Ashton on another day.
More online facilities and telephone advise available so could use that or get to Ashton if really needed urgent face to face information
More places the better
Mossley hub is much better for Mossley people
Mossley hub is much better for Mossley people
Mossley to stay the same
Most enquiries can be resolved by the Internet. If one needs to see customer services in person then there is still the option there if it can't be resolved over the phone.
My daughter can access at Denton locally on my behalf. I gave mobility problems and if I needed to attend with my daughter this is better for me.my daughter supports ne in all these matters
Near to where I live
No travelling is required a local place is available if you want important documents verified and posted internally.
Not always convenient to travel to Ashton.

People use Mossley hub because it's easier to get to
Provide residents of Tameside more opportunities and easier access to services (relating to elderly and immobile people)
Provide services to people who need it
Some people might feel the need to see someone and not be happy going to Ashton. Ashton is not the centre of everyone's world
staff in Ashton are more amenable and knowledgeable regarding different requests
The more services open the better for everyone
The reason being is that a lot of older people cannot travel far
There are still a number of people in particular the elderly who are not happy using telephone or internet for contacting. I am also pretty sure that staff would find it easier to extract the requirements face to face.
There needs to be a fair distribution and access to services not just in Ashton.
This option provides some access for everyone
this option provides some access for everyone
this would retain the very handy services near where I live parking in Ashton and the road systems through Ashton are a nightmare now
To enable more people with various starting time in their daily work to visit the officers as and when required. It's hard enough for employers to give time off.
To make sure I can always get support
We need more days if possible as there is high demand
WE STILL NEED TO ACCESS COUNCIL OFFICES IN DENTON. SOME PEOPLE CAN NOT GO ON BUSES TO THE OFFICES ELSEWHERE DUE TO THERE CIRCUMSTANCE IE HEALTH, FINIANCIAL REASONS. PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE THE ALTERMATED SYSTEIM ON THE TELEPHONE AND WOULD PREFER TO TALK FACE TO FACE WITH SOMEONE.
Would be most suitable as in the area.

APPENDIX 5

Question 13 - Please make any other comment you wish to make about the future options for our Customer Services provision
deadlines/timescales should be set to deliver a service i.e. replacement of wheelie bins etc
Dealings with customer services have always been okay. At one time customer Services and specified which department you wanted; now you are unable to do this. Had a problem in the past with Blue bin collections, a number of residents rang to say the bins hadn't been emptied,
Enough with the cuts already
I am more than happy with the service provided at Droylsden library and I cannot see what on earth my opinion on the closure of Stalybridge, Hyde or Denton has anything to do with me as I will never visit these options. I do not have a car so as stated before I would much rather walk round to my public library and have my enquiry dealt with in an efficient manner.
I THINK ENOUGH CUTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO THIS SERVICE ALREADY AND THOSE OF US THAT HAVE DISABILITIES ARE FINDING IT HARDER AND HARDER TO ACCESS SERVICES EASILY
I think lots of people are not aware of 'cost effective'
I think that appointments should be able to be implemented, so the time can be spent what's needed.
I think that appointments should be able to be implemented, so the time can be spent what's needed.
I want to keep it
I want to keep it
I want to keep it
I want to keep it
I want to keep it
I want to keep it
I want to keep it
I want to keep it
I want to keep to it
I would the office in Denton to be kept open. Not everyone can travel, use a computer and it is expensive and time consuming trying to get through on the phone - long queues
In the current economic climate, however. Services should always be flexible in their approach to providing a service. However the level of funding cuts being done to local councils is disgraceful!
It is difficult for me to access advice when I do not have internet access.
Keep up the good work
none I can think of
Service should be available every day and early evenings for people who work.
Stay open as long as possible
There must always be a provision for the vulnerable people of Tameside who require face to face help at point of contact
They were ok as they where
until you sort out the website that never crashes and is updates all the time and all things run smooth with everything and people with zero hours contract etc are all running until then should have as much customer service as possible
with Ashton being accessible from all areas of Tameside I feel it best that only Ashton stays open the 5 days

APPENDIX 6

Subject	NEXT STEPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES	
Service / Business Unit	Service Area	Directorate
Customer Care and Advocacy	Customer Services	Directorate of People
EIA Start Date (Actual)	EIA Completion Date (Expected)	Completion Date (Actual)
10 January 2015	17 July 2015	17 July 2015

Lead Contact / Officer Responsible	Mandy Kinder
Service Unit Manager Responsible	Mandy Kinder

EIA Group (lead contact first)	Job title	Service
Mandy Kinder	Head of Customer Care and Advocacy	Customer Care and Advocacy
Denise Lockyer	Libraries and Customer Services Manager	Customer Care and Advocacy
Margaret Knowles	Customer Services Team Leader	Customer Care and Advocacy

SUMMARY BOX
<p>A review of the face to face customer service function was undertaken in 2012 at which time an appointment based service was implemented at venues around the Borough with the exception of Ashton Customer Services which remained a reactive drop in service.</p> <p>The way in which customers and residents interact with the Council and access Council information and services is changing. Advances in technology have allowed a much wider range of queries to be dealt with effectively on line and over the telephone. UK Government figures estimate that 85% of the population now have access to the internet either directly or via a friend, family member or advocate. Access is also available via public computer facilities within libraries. This trend towards web and telephone contact has accelerated over the years and has led to a reduction in visits to the face to face customer services facilities resulting in a need to review the service again.</p> <p>Analysis of statistical data of visitors to the satellite customer service centre reveals that on average only 30% of appointment time is being utilised.</p> <p>The Council has to make a cut of £38m in spending over the 2 year period of 2015/16 and 2016/17. This will bring the cumulative reductions since 2010/11 to £142.4m. It is incumbent on all services, including customer services, to continually review and refine the offer to ensure that it is affordable in the current financial climate whilst achieving the required outcomes. Continuing to</p>

deliver a service at the same level when demand is falling is not an option for the future when the Council is faced with unprecedented reduction in budgets.

3 possible options for delivery of the face to face customer service provision in the future have been developed and public consultation has been undertaken between 18 May 2015 and 28 June 2015. This EIA examines the consultation process, the future proposal for delivery of face to face customer services and the impact on customers.

Part of the function of the EIA is to ensure that sufficient due regard is paid to the public sector equality duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010), and that no protected characteristic group(s) are disproportionately affected by the proposals.

It is not proposed to withdraw face to face customer services in its entirety but to implement a model based on a single centralised facility (Ashton Customer Services) handling all Level 1 enquiries (in-depth Housing Benefit and Council Tax) and also Level 2 (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of documents for housing benefit purposes) supplemented by Level 2 service at all libraries in the Borough. The home visiting service will be a feature of the service for those who are housebound due to disability/condition and unable to access services by other channels as will access to a telephone interpreter service for those where language may be a barrier and loop hearing systems.

The EIA revealed that some negative impact could be felt by residents due to **age** and **disability** if Option 1 were implemented as there may be inability to travel to Ashton Customer Service Centre to access level 1 customer service.

Tameside has a comprehensive bus service operating within the Borough. Over 85% of buses operating in Greater Manchester are easy access and largely meet the accessibility standards laid out below:

- Brightly coloured grab rails;
- Slip resistant flooring;
- Brightly coloured stop buttons that are reachable from a seated position;
- A route number and destination display on the front and nearside of the bus, and a route number display on the back of the bus;
- A ramp or other device to bridge the gap between the bus and the kerb;
- A space on the bus for a wheelchair user (this space is also accessible for pushchairs)

Following the introduction of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, design standards were introduced for accessible buses. Since 2000 all new buses must meet these standards. All buses used on local services must meet the design standards by 1 January 2016 for single-deck buses and 1 January 2017 for double-deck buses.

All libraries around the Borough will continue to offer access to Level 2 service to residents and there will be assistance from staff at these venues both in terms of enquiries and free access to the internet. In addition level 1 service is available over the telephone and on the Council's website which the majority of survey respondents (76.2%) indicated they would access if their local office were unavailable at the time they required it. The majority of residents using customer services are already travelling to Ashton to access the service.

Should the proposed option be implemented communication with residents and potential service users would be required. Publicity would be undertaken through Customer Service Centres, Libraries and on the web site. Flyers would be produced to hand to current service users for a period of time prior to any changes being implemented. Partner organisations such as Registered Housing Providers, Community Voluntary Action Tameside and internal networking groups such as Information Ambassador Network would be asked to assist in circulating information on the new service provision. The publicity campaign would provide details of how customers can access services including on-line, telephone and face to face at Libraries and Ashton Customer Services.

Resident's ability to access the service would be monitored via feedback from the libraries and any complaints.

Section 1 - Background

BACKGROUND

This EIA has been undertaken to examine the options for the potential future face to face customer service provision, the subsequent implementation of the chosen option and any impact this may have on groups of people with a protected characteristic.

A Key Decision on the 4 July 2012 gave authority, amongst other things, to introduce an appointment system at all Customer Service Centre venues with the exception of Ashton which would remain a reactive drop-in service in addition to some appointments.

The same Key decision approved the relocation of both Hyde and Denton Customer Service Centres into the libraries in their respective towns. This was necessary to enable library staff to make appointments for customers who had previously been used to a drop in service and also to handle all level 2 enquires.

At the library locations, all library staff can deal with level 2 enquiries; these enquiries are to book, pay, request a service and also general enquiries eg report a missed bin, details on councillor's surgeries, verification of documents for housing benefit claims etc. Level 1 enquiries are regarding in-depth housing benefit claims and Council Tax queries; these are dealt with solely by the dedicated Customer Services Staff. The ability for library staff to deal with the more common level 2 enquiries provides a customer services function during library opening hours which are generally longer than those of the dedicated Customer Service Centres.

Current opening hours for Level 1 service at each venue is detailed in the table below:

	ASHTON	HYDE	DENTON	DROYLSDEN	DUKINFIELD	MOSSLEY	STALYBRIDGE
MONDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 12.00noon	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED
TUESDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	9.00am to 5.00pm
WEDNESDAY	8.30am to 5.00pm	9.00am to 5.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED	9.00am to 11.30am	9.00am to 5.00pm
THURSDAY	8.30am to 4.30pm	CLOSED	9.00am to 4.30pm	CLOSED	9.00am to 2.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED
FRIDAY	8.30am to 4.00pm	9.00am to 4.00pm	CLOSED	12.00noon to 4.00pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	CLOSED

Micklehurst Housing Office– Tuesday 10am – 12 noon

Mottram/Hattersley – by appointment only

Level 2 access is at Ashton as detailed above plus all libraries in accordance with the opening hours for each venue.

The way in which customers and residents interact with the council and access council information and services is changing. The traditional face to face contact is no longer preferred by many customers as they find telephone contact and web contact to be quicker and more effective. Advances in technology have allowed a much wider range of queries to be dealt with effectively on line and over the telephone. UK Government figures estimate that 85% of the

population now have access to the internet either directly or via a friend, family member, advocate or via public computer facilities such as within libraries. This trend towards web and telephone contact has accelerated over the years and the Council needs to constantly review its services to meet future customer needs and be as cost effective as possible.

The table below indicates the decline in face to face contact. With the exception of Ashton, use of all Customer Service Centres has fallen significantly between 2010/11 and 2014/15

	Number of Visitors						
Year	Ashton	Denton	Droylsden	Dukinfield	Hyde	Mossley	Stalybridge
2010/11	39357	9219	4769	2927	16552	3110	7131
2011/12	33009	9012	4708	3099	16765	3229	6006
2012/13	44144	4999	3334	2136	11406	1795	3396
2013/14	52229	1704	1117	528	5348	143	1371
2014/15	36800	1378	872	436	2669	196	974
% change 2010/11 to 2014/15	-6.5%	-85.1%	-81.7%	-85.1%	-83.9%	-93.7%	-86.3%

There are a number of reasons for declining visits including more streamlined application processes, library staff at Denton and Hyde handling all lower lever enquiries but primarily this is because more services are available electronically and more people are becoming self-sufficient and accessing services digitally.

Analysis has been undertaken of the use of appointments at all Customer Service Centres with the exception of Ashton. Appointment times vary depending on the appointment type e.g. an appointment to check housing benefit claim status would be made for 10 minutes whereas for an appointment to explain housing benefit entitlement would be lengthier and 15 minutes would be scheduled. Appointments to complete a Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independence Payment application form would be scheduled for 90 minutes. Accordingly there are not a set number of appointments available in each session and therefore when demonstrating the take-up of appointment time the analysis is undertaken using minutes available against available minutes used.

Below is the average take up of appointment time over 3 separate months at each office (with the exception of Ashton)

Stalybridge – 30%

Denton – 25%

Hyde – 29%

Dukinfield – 30%

Droylsden – 51%

Mossley – 16%

Overall this equates to an average of only 30% of the available appointment time being used.

The Council has to make a cut of £38m in spending over the 2 year period of 2015/16 and 2016/17. This will bring the cumulative reductions since 2010/11 to £142.4m. It is incumbent on all services, including customer services, to continually review and refine the offer to ensure that

it is affordable in the current financial climate whilst achieving the required outcomes. Continuing to deliver a service at the same level when demand is falling is not an option for the future when the Council is faced with unprecedented reduction in budgets.

Between the 16 September and 9 December 2014 Tameside Council conducted a budget consultation exercise that sought residents and businesses views on where budget cuts should be made. The consultation was conducted via a budget simulator which enabled residents to reduce or increase different service budgets in order to balance the Council's budget. In total 3,000 people engaged with the budget consultation process with 1,004 people completing the budget simulator. On average residents reduced the customer service functions budget by 21%; this was the joint highest percentage reduction to a service budget.

Analysis of the current usage of the face to face customer service function, the likely reduction in the need for this service in the future, the increasing cost to serve and the public's determination that this is an area where budget cuts could be made have led to the development of 3 possible options for future provision.

Option 1

Option 1 would achieve our offer by providing level 2 customer services at all our libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries eg report missed bin, councillor surgery details, verification of housing benefit documents etc)

Ashton customer services would be retained and would continue to provide the current level 2 service and also the in-depth housing benefit and council tax enquiries (Level 1 service). Ashton is the most used customer service centre and the only one which has seen an increase in use over recent years. All other level 1 service from customer service centres within libraries would stop. The opening hours for Ashton would remain as currently provided.

This option would achieve the greatest savings in the region of £79,351

The Tameside Administrative Centre is currently being demolished and re-developed. During this period if Option 1 were to be implemented the service would continue to be delivered at Clarence Arcade. However this is a temporary venue which will be reviewed prior to vacation. This would mean that Tameside would have a single provision for the face to face customer services and the most suitable location for that facility would be determined at the time that the Council has to vacate Clarence Arcade taking into account customer volumes and preferences at that time. It is predicted that this review will take place in early 2018.

Option 2

Option 2 would achieve our offer by providing level 2 customer services at all Libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents etc). In-depth housing benefit claims and council tax enquiries (Level 1 service) would be retained at Dukinfield, Mossley and Droylsden Libraries and Micklehurst Housing Office at the current opening hours. However the opening hours of the following customer service provision would reduce as follows:

Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **2 days per week**

Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

This option would allow more than sufficient time to handle current demand also a little extra in case of increased demand. This option would achieve savings in the region of £40,818.

Option 3

This option would be as option 2 described above, however provision at Hyde would be further reduced from 4 days a week to **1 day per week**. The reduction in provision would be as follows:

Hyde – provision to be reduced from 4 days to **1 day per week**

Denton – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

Stalybridge – provision to be reduced from 2 days to **1 day per week**

This option would allow more than sufficient time to handle current demand whilst also providing saving of £69,993.

Following an Executive Decision taken on the 14 May 2015 public consultation on the 3 options was undertaken from 18 May 2015 – 28 June 2015.

Section 2 – Issues to consider & evidence base

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Consideration needs to be given to equality issues relating to ability to complete the questionnaire (it being on an-line tool) which could impact upon protected characteristic groups such as disability (it being a visual tool); age (issues relating to elderly having access to the internet, ethnicity (it being in English, and the need to ensure the full range of participation from all Tameside's communities); and the need to access the full range of views and opinions from Tameside's communities to reflect the impact any changes to the face to face customer service function on protected characteristic groups.

Face to face contact is in some instances a matter of preference for the customer. However, for certain groups it is a necessity for example particular customers who find it difficult to complete forms without assistance. This may include, amongst others, elderly customers, customers who require assistance with language barriers such as the Asian community in Hyde and customers who are disabled. In addition there are customers who do not fall into these groups but would still have difficulty completing transactions either by phone or on the internet. It is imperative that the views of these customers were received during the consultation to ensure that their needs were considered.

The consultation was in the form of a standard questionnaire with an introduction to explain the reason for the proposed changes followed by the options and a series of questions to seek relevant views which would be used to shape the future provision of face to face customer service. Additionally the consultation included 2 free format text boxes, 1 to give reasons for the option chosen and the other to make any comments about the future service provision. The consultation formed part of the Council's Big Conversation consultation which is prominently publicised via the Council's website. The consultation pack was also available in paper format from any Customer Service Centre or Library.

In order to encourage as many people as possible to express their views contact was made with the following organisations with a request to make their service users, tenant groups and members aware. The link to the on-line consultation along with a word document version for printing in paper format was provided.

- Registered Housing Providers
- CVAT
- Bangladeshi Welfare Association
- Greater Manchester Fire Service
- MIND
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Job Centre Plus
- Careers Centre
- Information Ambassadors Network (232 Ambassadors representing 215 community groups/outlets and potentially reaching 13,617 people across Tameside)

Views of elected Members were sought by way of a briefing note setting out the reasons for the

consultation and encouraging their contribution.

Staff in Customer Services and Libraries were encouraged to complete the survey so that their perspective could be included in the evaluation.

Consideration needs to be given to the likely impact experienced by groups with a protected characteristic for each of the proposed options. For example, some residents may require more support in terms of accessing services (elderly / disabled) whilst others may face language barriers (ethnicity).

The consultation undertaken with residents helps us to identify where such impact might be experienced. Analysis from the consultation will be used to evidence where residents / service users may be affected and enables us to find ways to mitigate any anticipated impact.

LIST OF EVIDENCE SOURCES

Demographic data collected during customer transactions at customer service centres

Demographic data of residents of the Borough

Results of the public consultation on the 3 proposed options for future service provision

Service areas records of numbers of visitors and appointment take-up

Census 2011

Mid-year population estimates 2013 ONS

Financial data

Section 3 – Impact

IMPACT

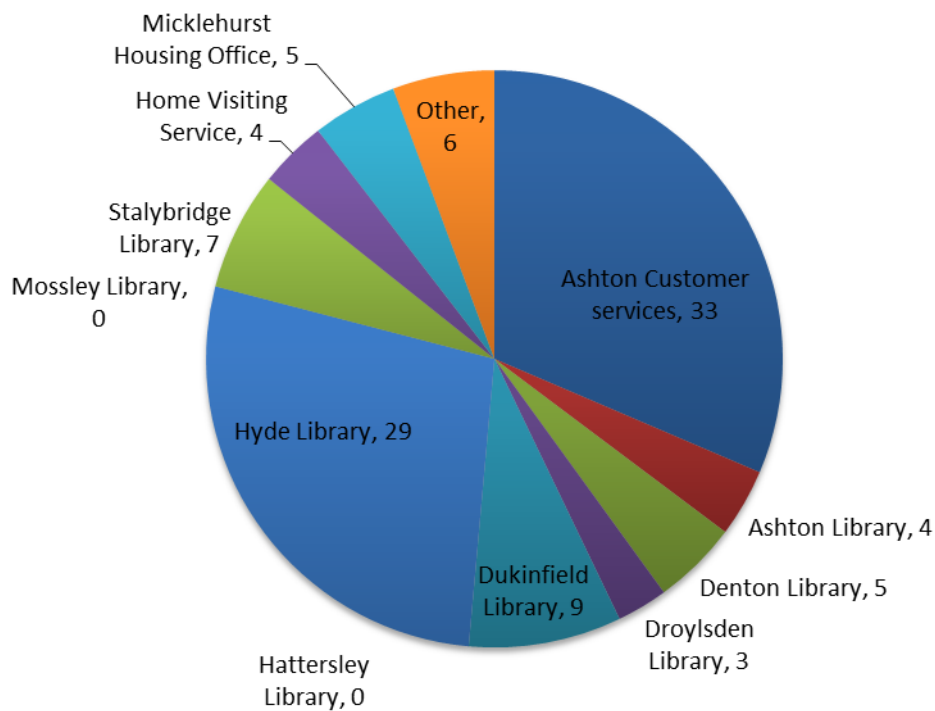
Results of the consultation

The consultation ran from the 18 May – 28 June 2015 during which 130 questionnaires were completed and responses were analysed. The full results are at **Appendix 3** and a summary is detailed below.

122 respondents answered the question on whether they had used customer services in the past 12 months. Of these 72.1% (88) indicated that they had used the service and 27.9% (34) indicated that they had not used the service.

84 responders indicated which office they had used; the majority at 39.29% (33) had used Ashton with the next popular office being Hyde at 34.52% (29), followed by Dukinfield at 10.71% (9). Two offices – Mossley and Hattersley Libraries were not used at all and the Droylsden Office was used only 3 times. **Survey respondents were asked to tick all that applied and therefore the total was greater than the 84 responders.**

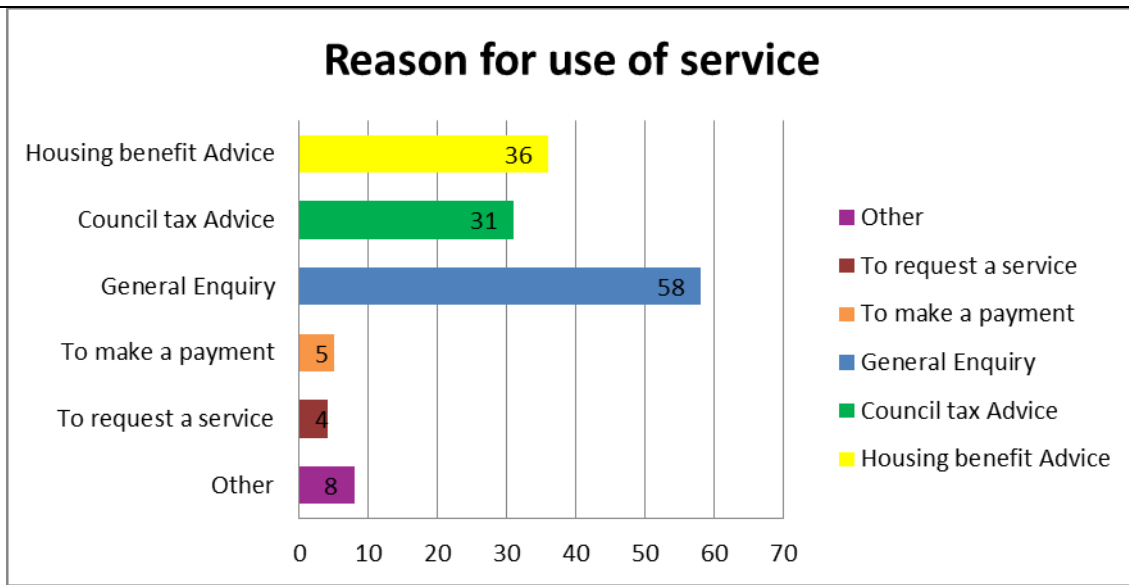
Office Visited



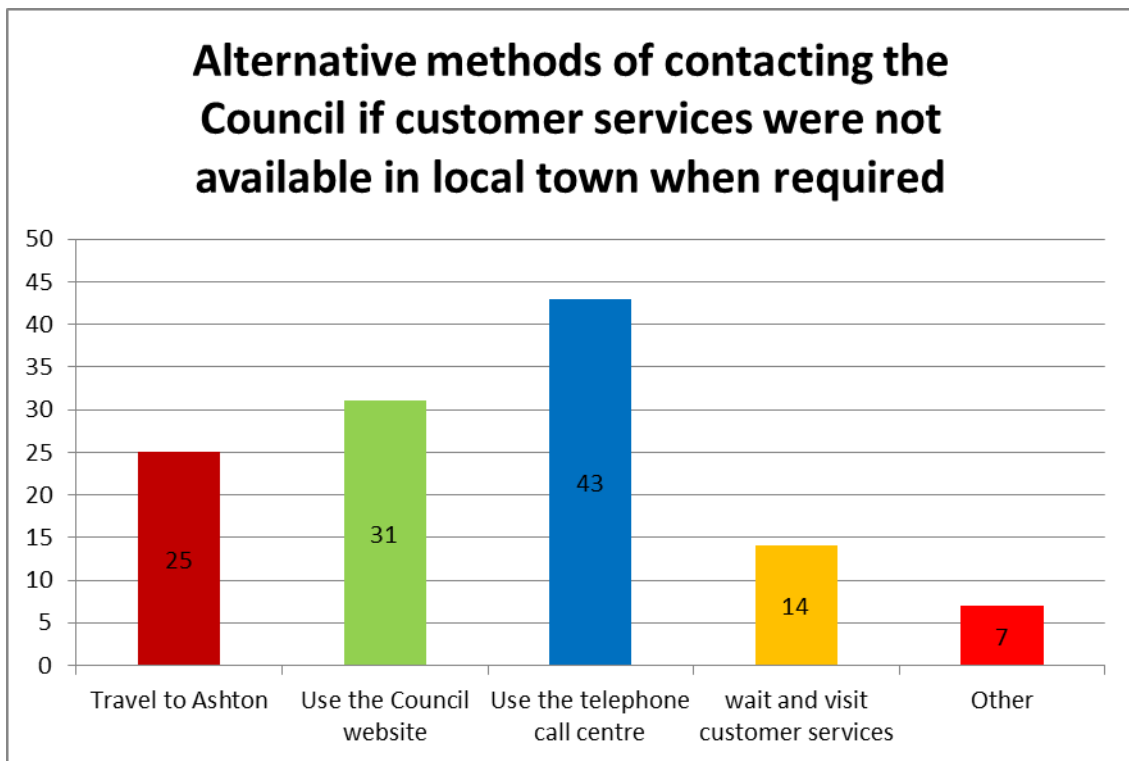
Respondents were asked to provide detail on the reason why they had used Customer Services. This question was asked to ascertain if the service was being used for level 1 enquiries – in-depth housing benefit and council tax matters or level 2 enquiries comprising of book, pay or request a service and general information. Level 1 enquiries require a Customer Service Officer fully conversant in both the Council Tax/Housing benefit system and also the regulations in order to handle these more complex enquiries. Level 2 enquiries can be handled at a lower level and need less specific training.

Respondents were able to select all services they had used within the last 12 months. Of the 85 respondents who answered this question, 42.35% (36) customers used the service for Housing Benefit and 36.47% (31) for Council Tax enquiries. The majority of people used the service for general enquiries 68.24% (58), to make a payment 5.88% (5) or to request a service 4.71% (4). Housing Benefit and Council Tax are level 1 type enquiries whilst the rest are all level 2 enquiries.

As a multi response questions respondents could tick all services they had used. Additional analysis was undertaken to determine those respondents who had selected the use of level 1 services only, level 2 services only and those who had contacted customer services for both a level 1 and level 2 enquiry. Of those who provided a reason for contact the majority (48.8%) did so for a level 2 enquiry only. A fifth (20%) did so for a level 1 enquiry only and 31.2% had been in contact with both a level 1 and 2 enquiry.



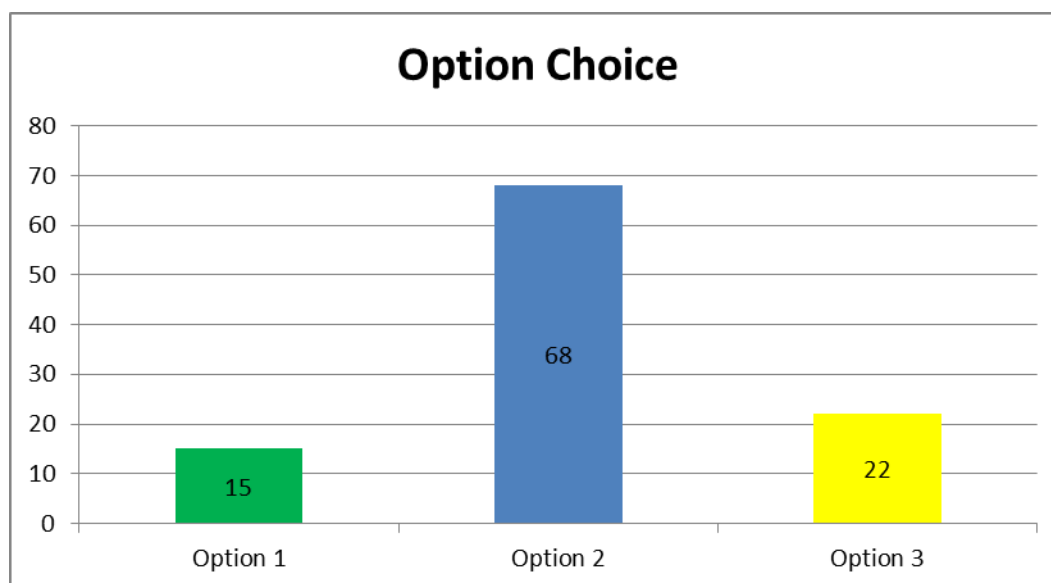
Question 5 posed the question of how customers would choose to contact the Council if Customer Services was not available at the time it was required in their local town. 120 respondents answered this question. Over three quarters of respondents 76.2% (99) indicated that if the service was not available in their local town when they required it they would travel to Ashton 20.83% (25); use the web 25.83% (31) or use the telephone 35.83% (43). Less than a quarter 11.67% (14) indicated they would wait until the service was available in their local town. 5.83% (7) indicated they would do something else and these included – get daughter to contact on my behalf, use the Mossley Hub, use the new care system after 6th April 2015, ask for support from website and use carers.



Question 6 asked respondents to indicate which of the 3 options they would prefer the Council to implement. Only 105 respondents of the 130 completing the survey chose to respond to this question meaning 25 people did not express a view on which would be their preferred option.

- Option 1 – 14.292% (15)
- Option 2 – 64.76% (68)

Option 3 – 20.95% (22)



Survey responders were asked their reasons for choosing the option they preferred for the future delivery model. This was in a free format text box to enable concerns to be detailed and considered. The main comments are detailed below

More accessible – 38 comments

Convenience – 31 comments

Travel – cost/time/difficulty – 18 comments

Only 92 comments were made by the 130 respondents to the survey meaning that 29% (38) of people declined to share reasons for their choice of the three options being consulted upon.

The comments were very similar throughout and centred on local offices being more convenient and therefore easier to access for people. There were some concerns about travelling to Ashton if Option 1 were implemented. However over three quarters of respondents 76.2% (99) indicated that if the service was not available in their local town when they required it they would either travel to Ashton 20.83% (25); use the web 25.83% (31) or use the telephone 35.83% (43). Less than a quarter 11.67% (14) indicated they would wait until the service was available in their local town.

As the requirement for face to face customer service has reduced dramatically over the years respondents were asked if they agreed that the service should be kept under review and adjustments made to ensure customer demand is met but that the service remains affordable and cost effective. 99 survey respondents chose to answer this question and of those 85.86% (85) indicated that they agreed service should be kept under review whereas 14.14% (14) did not agree.

Question 13 offered the opportunity for respondents to provide any comments they wished to make about the future customer service provision. Only 20.8% (27) of respondents made comments and these were:

- Want to keep the service x 9
- Enough cuts been made already x 3
- Do not have internet access x 1
- need to sort the website x 1
- Travel issues x 2
- Appointments should be implemented x 2

- Must always be face to face for vulnerable people x 1

Impact

Gender

Of the 108 people who chose to disclose their gender 50% (54) were female and 50% (54) were male. This is representative of the overall population of 50.8% female and 49.2% male. It is not felt that either gender will be disproportionately affected by any of the Options being considered as both male and female are equally likely to be able to access the service in whichever form the provision is provided.

Age

Consultation responses were over representative of the population with the exception of under 18 years where there was an under representation. It is likely that there is under representation of under 18s as the majority of the community in this age range do not contact the Council for services. Analysis of statistical data collected from those in the age range 16 – 19 years who contacted the council during 2014/15 and provided equalities data indicate that only 0.28% have used the service which also indicates an under representation when compared to Tameside population as a whole.

Age may be a factor in accessing the future service if Option 1 were to be implemented as some older residents may be unable to travel to Ashton due to infirmity, difficulty in using public transport or driving; also there may be inability to use newer technology such as the internet. If Option 2 or 3 were implemented whilst the appointment availability would reduce at satellite offices it would not be withdrawn completely.

Ethnicity

With regard to ethnicity 102 people answered the survey question. Of these the large majority 81.37% (83) classed themselves White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British. 18.63% (19) classed themselves as White and Asian/Asian/Asian British/Indian/Bangladeshi/Black African/mixed. 28 respondents skipped the question and there is no way of determining their ethnicity. For Tameside population as a whole the vast number of residents are from a White background 90.9% with only 9.1% being Black and Minority Ethnic and therefore survey respondents were over represented from BME communities and under-represented from White backgrounds.

There is no evidence that any of the Options would disproportionately impact on groups due to ethnicity. The majority of comments from all sections of the community were around convenience/travel/accessibility only 1 person out of 19 from a BME background made a comment concerning language being a barrier to travel. Of the 19 people who identified themselves with a BME background 10 indicated they would use the telephone, 7 would travel to Ashton and 2 would use the website if their local office was unavailable. None indicated that they would wait until their local office was available.

The telephone interpreter service will remain a feature of the face to face customer service in the future.

Disability

87 people answered a question regarding whether their day to day activities were limited a little or a lot due to a health problem or disability lasting or expecting to last over 12 months. Of these 70.11% (61) stated they had no limitations, whereas 16.09% (14) were limited a little and 13.79% (12) were limited a lot. This is higher than the census figures for 2011 which indicated 79.1% were not limited at all, 10.3% being limited a little and 10.6% of people being limited a lot. Statistical analysis of data of those using the service during 2014/15 indicated that 75.58% had no limitations and 24.42% had limitations.

There may be some impact on those with a disability in terms of ability to travel to another location or ability to use technology such as the internet if Option 1 were implemented. Of the

25 people who responded to the survey and indicated they were either limited a little or a lot in their day to day activities 6 stated they would use the telephone, 6 would travel to Ashton, 6 would use the internet, 4 would wait until their local office was available and 3 would do something else (use carers, ask for support on web, get daughter to contact on my behalf) if their local office was unavailable.

Carers

88 people responded when asked if they looked after or undertook support for others. Of these 73.86% (65) indicated they did not carry out this function, whereas 15.91% (14) did so for between 1 – 19 hours a week, 4.55% (4) between 20 – 49 hours a week and 5.6% (5) for 50+ hours a week. Those respondents providing unpaid care were over represented when compared with the Census 2011 which indicated that 11% of the population were providing unpaid care.

There was no indication from the consultation that carers would be adversely impacted if any of the Options were implemented. Of the 22 respondents to the survey who indicated that they undertook some caring responsibilities 10 indicated they would use the telephone, 8 would use the website, 2 would travel to Ashton and 1 advised they would use the new care system if their local office were unavailable. 1 respondent did not complete this question. No respondents indicated that they would wait for their local office to be available.

Sexual Orientation/Religion/Belief/Gender

Reassignment/Pregnancy/Maternity/Marriage/Civil Partnership

No issues of this nature were raised in the consultation nor is it anticipated that there will be an impact on these protected characteristic groups as a result of the proposed changes. We will continue to monitor feedback from service users to identify any specific instances where changes to the service will impact on a protected characteristic.

Section 4 – Proposals & Mitigation

PROPOSALS & MITIGATION

PROPOSED NEW SERVICE PROVISION

64.76% (68) of people indicated a preference for option 2 which would provide the least reduction in the service. When making a decision as to which option to implement consideration needs to be given to a wide range of factors. These factors include the alternatives respondents would take if the service was not available in their local town, the type of enquiry respondents need assistance with, usage of the service, cost to provide the service and the financial constraints that the Council finds itself in.

Alternatives if service unavailable in local town

The majority of people (76.2%) indicated that they would either travel to Ashton, use the internet or the telephone if their local office was not open at the time they required it. This is an indication of the appetite for channel migration for the services which can be accessed by channels other than face to face and this would fit in with the latest government figures estimating that 85% of the population now has access to the internet with directly or via a friend, family member or advocate.

Type of enquiry customers need assistance with

The majority of responders to the survey 47.7% used customer services for level 2 service only (book, pay, request a service or general enquiry). All libraries within the Borough will continue to offer this level of service to customers on a drop in basis and for longer hours than the Customer Service Officer is available.

Usage of the service

Usage of the face to face customer service function has reduced dramatically over the past 5 years and this reduction is set to continue. The roll out of Universal Credit will mean for the majority of claimants their housing costs will be included in their benefit payment rather than via housing benefit. Increasingly more residents are becoming self-sufficient and are accessing services on-line and the Council has commenced a program of work – digital by design – which will ensure more services are delivered digitally.

Cost to provide the service

Since the appointment based system was introduced in 2012 only 30% of available appointment time is being utilised making this a cost prohibitive way to provide the service. The cost per visit has increased from £6.08 in 2012/13 to £7.48 in 2014/15 and this is set to increase further if the service remains in its current format.

Financial position of the Council

The Council has made savings of £104m from 2011 to 2015 and has to save a further £38m between 2015 – 2017 and therefore must continue to review all services to ensure they are as cost effective and efficient as possible. Consultation undertaken between September and December 2014 revealed that 21% of residents would reduce the budget for customer service functions to achieve the necessary savings.

Proposed model

Taking all the relevant factors into consideration it is proposed that Option 1 would provide an offer suitable to meet the majority of residents needs whilst also being affordable for the Council.

Option 1 would provide Level 2 customer service at all Libraries (book, pay, request a service and general enquiries including verification of housing benefit documents. Ashton Customer Services would be retained in its current format and would therefore continue to provide level 2 service and also in-depth housing benefit claims and council tax enquiries (Level 1 service). Ashton is the most used Customer Service Centre which has only seen a very small reduction in visits during the last 12 months. All other Level 1 service provided from customer service centres within libraries and Micklehurst Housing Office would stop. The opening hours for Ashton Customer Services would remain as currently provided.

Whilst some customers would be affected if this option is implemented the majority of the survey respondents could still access the service they require in their local town at the library. As three quarters of people have indicated that they would access services by alternative methods it is not felt that Option 1 would cause a significant detrimental impact on residents.

Mitigating Impact

Some negative impact may be felt by residents due to **age** and **disability** if Option 1 were implemented as there may be difficulty in travelling to Ashton Customer Service Centre to access level 1 customer service.

Tameside has a comprehensive bus service operating within the Borough. Over 85% of buses operating in Greater Manchester are easy access and largely meet the accessibility standards laid out below:

- Brightly coloured grab rails;
- Slip resistant flooring;
- Brightly coloured stop buttons that are reachable from a seated position;
- A route number and destination display on the front and nearside of the bus, and a route number display on the back of the bus;
- A ramp or other device to bridge the gap between the bus and the kerb;
- A space on the bus for a wheelchair user (this space is also accessible for pushchairs)

Following the introduction of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, design standards were introduced for accessible buses. Since 2000 all new buses must meet these standards. All buses

used on local services must meet the design standards by 1 January 2016 for single-deck buses and 1 January 2017 for double-deck buses.

All libraries around the Borough will continue to offer access to Level 2 service to residents and there will be assistance from staff at these venues both in terms of enquiries and free access to the internet. In addition level 1 service is available over the telephone and on the Council's website which the majority of survey respondents (76.2%) indicated they would access if their local office were unavailable. The majority of residents using customer services are already travelling to Ashton to access the service. The home visiting service will remain a feature of the future provision for those residents who are housebound and unable to access services by other channels as will the telephone interpreting service for those where language is a barrier and loop hearing systems.

Should the proposed option be implemented communication with residents and potential service users would be required. Publicity would be undertaken through Customer Service Centres, Libraries and on the web site. Flyers would be produced to hand to current service users for a period of time prior to any changes being implemented. Partner organisations such as Registered Housing Providers, Community Voluntary Action Tameside and internal networking groups such as Information Ambassador Network would be asked to assist in circulating information on the new service provision. The publicity campaign would provide details of how customers can access services including on-line, telephone and face to face at Libraries and Ashton Customer Services.

It is proposed that the new service would be implemented with effect from the 2 November 2015.

It is felt that implementing Option 1 is reasonable and proportionate and offers the best value for money in terms of usage of the service against the cost to provide and the financial constraints of the Council.

Section 5 – Monitoring

MONITORING PROGRESS

Mandy Kinder, Head of Customer Care and Advocacy

Issue / Action	Lead officer	Timescale
Ensure residents are able to access the service by monitoring feedback from libraries and via any complaints	Mandy Kinder	Following implementation of the new service model

Sign off

Signature of Service Unit Manager	Date
Signature of Assistant Executive Director / Assistant Chief Executive	Date