



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY**

**to
FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE
28 NOVEMBER 2017**

PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE TO OFFICE OPENING TIME TO PUBLIC

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Members' views on the proposals to change the opening time to the public to create opportunities for improved staff engagement, communication and training.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that proposals to implement a regular later opening of the office to the public be considered;
- (ii) that the frequency and duration of the later opening be considered by Members.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 As part of our workforce development programme we are committed to be a
- 1. a high performing organisation, and
 - 2. a learning organisation
- 3.1.2 Investing in our staff, through regular communication via team meetings, and managing performance through one to one meetings and appraisals is a key element of helping us to achieve these key aims
- 3.1.3 We are embarking on a Transformation journey, with clear Corporate Goals and an emerging vision to become a more commercial organisation and it is vital that our vision is shared and understood by all of our staff. To be successful it is vital that we invest in good quality, regular communication with our staff, to ensure they feel engaged and empowered.
- 3.1.4 At present the opening times of the office to the public mean that any communication and meetings have to take place during the times that the office is open to the public:
8.30 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Thursday
8.30am to 4.30 pm Friday.

- 3.1.5 Consequently access by the public to those services during team meetings can be limited, affecting the quality of the service received. Staff briefings are very difficult to hold without causing significant disruption to services.
- 3.1.6 The customer service team themselves are reliant on other departments to provide cover for its team meetings, creating a further disruption to service for customers and also for our own staff.
- 3.1.7 During the course of a month there will be at least 20 separate team meetings a month, resulting in teams being not available to the public for at least 20 hours every month.
- 3.1.8 The current arrangements not only impact upon the service we provide to our customers, it makes it difficult for staff to have good regular uninterrupted communication within teams and also makes the logistics of having wider communication across teams a significant challenge.
- 3.1.9 Some businesses and other Local Authorities have decided to have one day a month where they open for business to customers at a later time to allow the opportunity for regular training and meetings.
- 3.1.10 The benefits of this approach are:
- The service provided to customers outside of the late opening time will be improved through increased availability of staff and increased efficiency for the organisation: for example, if Members chose to open one hour later each month instead of staff being unavailable for at least 20 hours a month at various times, they will all be unavailable for one hour each month;
 - The opportunity to have a period of uninterrupted training/ meeting time each month will not only improve communication across the organisation and in teams but will also help deliver a better quality of service to customers, as staff will have a dedicated time each month for uninterrupted sharing of information and delivering key training and performance management. This will help us to meet the priorities of our Workforce Development Strategy which Members have previously approved.
 - The opportunity for the Corporate Leadership Team to engage with staff through staff briefings on key priorities such as the Transformation Programme.
 - A consistent day and time can be communicated to customers and partners, making it easier for customers to become familiar with it.
- 3.1.11 A recent survey of Essex Councils has identified that half of all Councils open regularly at 9am, two currently open later once a month (10am and 10.30am) and one council is consulting on opening later once a month.
- 3.1.12 Partner organisations that share the building have been consulted with and there are no barriers that would prevent these changes being implemented.

3.2 Options

3.2.1 Should Members wish to support a late opening on a regular basis there are a range of options that could be considered including (but not limited to) the following:

(i) **Telephones or face to face**

The levels of telephone calls earlier in the morning tend to be lower than other parts of the day, and the same is true of visitors to the office. Closing the office only to visitors **or** only to telephone callers will still require staff to be available, and the real benefits of having an uninterrupted opportunity for quality meetings with staff will not be realised. The true benefit of any late opening arrangement will only be achieved if we decide to not open the office to visitors, and not to take calls. *Members may wish to consider whether the late opening arrangements will apply to both telephone callers and visitors.*

(ii) **Duration of late opening**

A later opening time of one hour should provide an opportunity for effective staff meeting/ briefings. *Members may wish to consider an one hour duration, or an alternative duration.*

(iii) **Frequency of late opening arrangements**

A later opening every 6 - 8 weeks would provide an appropriate frequency for staff meetings. However, it would be difficult for customers to become familiar with a regular pattern of late opening times.

A monthly late opening pattern (such as last Wednesday of every month, or first Friday of every month) would be easier for customers to become familiar with, and would not require them to know the exact date. *Members may wish to consider a monthly frequency, or an alternative frequency. Councils that currently open late or are considering it are all monthly arrangements.*

3.2.2 Any changes to the Council's opening times will be delivered in collaboration with our partners and publicised ahead of implementation to minimise the impact upon customers.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The opportunity to improve the overall quality of the service to our customers as well as availability of staff would be greatly improved if we adopted a late opening arrangement.

4.2 Using the late opening arrangements to enable staff meetings and training to be held at a consistent date and time would reduce the amount of time that staff would be unavailable to deal with customer enquiries during the normal working week, as a result of team meetings from 20 hours a month to 1 hour per month, thereby providing a more effective and efficient service.

4.3 It would also improve the overall quality of service we are able to offer to customers at all other times, providing staff with an opportunity to undertake uninterrupted staff meetings and training.

- 4.4 It would offer an opportunity for the Corporate Leadership Team to have regular staff briefings to ensure consistent communication on key priorities, helping to ensure engagement with our vision delivery of our priorities.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

- 5.1 Introducing a later opening to the public to enable staff training and meetings to take place directly contributes to the Corporate Goal of Delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The changes proposed would reduce the overall time the offices are open by 1 hour per month, however the quality of the service to the customer would be greatly enhanced if we utilised the hour to ensure that staff briefings / team meetings and training were carried out, thereby minimising the time that officers were unavailable to deal with the public as a result of team meetings. It would also reduce the total number of hours that staff were not available to the public due to team meetings (for example a late monthly opening would reduce the time from 20 hours to 1 hour).
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Failure to publicise the change adequately could result in customers attending the office when it is closed, leading to customer dissatisfaction and reputational damage. Failure to have a regular pattern of late opening that it is easy for customer to remember will make it difficult for the change to embed.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – None.
- (v) **Impact of Resources (human)** – Maximising the use of the late opening arrangements for team meetings/ training and staff briefings would make more efficient use of staff time and would improve the service to customers. It would also improve organisational communication, enabling consistent and clear messages to be delivered by the Corporate Leadership Team.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None.

Background Papers: None.

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