

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE
19 MARCH 2013**

**COUNCIL
23 APRIL 2013**

EXTENDED OPENING FOR CIVIC CENTRE-BASED COUNCIL SERVICES

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks to inform Members about the arrangements for extending the availability for a wider range of the Council's services by making them available until 7pm on Thursday via telephone and the Customer Service Centre. The report also seeks a budget to facilitate this extension to some Civic Centre-based services' opening hours.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Exeter residents make contact with the Council in numerous ways, for example, online through our broad range of web-based services, in writing either through letter or email, through social networking, by telephone and face to face. A relatively small proportion access the Council's Customer Service Centre (CSC) to access a broad range of services.
- 2.2 The Council as a whole is open from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday inclusive. In addition to this, various services operate in extension to these hours, for example, Waste Collection commences prior to 8.30am; the Royal Albert Memorial Museum operates from Tuesday to Sunday 10am to 5pm; and the Control Centre provides a 24-7 operation.
- 2.3 Members support the concept of offering extended hours opening in order to improve access to services. A pilot for extended opening was run last year, initially for six months and later extended to a year. This involved opening the CSC, including telephony for three hours on Saturday morning. This pilot ended in September of last year.
- 2.4 There is also a commitment by members to supporting the City in developing not only a strong and thriving economy generally, but also a sustainable evening economy. To this end, whilst the decision was taken not to proceed with Saturday opening, Members are interested in testing the demand for extended hours opening.
- 2.5 In order to test this demand, a Pilot will be run for six months, commencing 11 April 2013 whereby some services will be available to residents until 7pm on Thursdays, commencing 11 April 2013.

3. SERVICES INCLUDED IN LATE NIGHT OPENING

3.1 Based on looking at the demands for service that are channelled through the CSC, and discussions with managers across various services, the services in scope for extended opening are:

- The Customer Service Centre
- Switchboard
- Housing Advice
- Housing Estates
- Reactive Repairs
- Housing Development
- Income Recovery
- Programmed Major Works
- Planning
- Council Tax Recovery
- Council Tax Billing
- Business Rates
- Environmental Health and Cleansing Support teams
- Housing Benefits
- ICT

3.2 It is also expected that the Council's Switchboard will be opened until 7pm; although publicity for late night opening will make clear that it is not the entire Council that will be open.

3.3 There are other services which may be included if there proves to be a demand from customers for them, including Building Control, Supported Accommodation and Parking Enforcement.

4 ASSESSING THE SUCCESS OF THE PILOT

4.1 Success criteria for the Pilot are proposed to be based on measuring the volume of demand from face-to-face customers as well as on the telephones as a total and by service. We would also look at measures of capability at the point of transaction to identify whether we have the right resources available up to 7pm on Thursday to meet residents' demands.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Based on the services currently in scope for Thursday evening opening, it is estimated that 27 staff will be involved.

5.2 Based on an average wage of £21,500, the staff costs to Council of the six-month pilot will be in the region of £38,610 which includes on-costs. The costs of publicity will be in the region of £1,500.

5.3 The Strategic Management Team has agreed to certain temporary measures in order to facilitate staff volunteering to be part of the Pilot. This includes provision of overtime payments for staff above grade eight and the rate of overtime payments to staff on part time contracts. Similarly, certain working arrangements have been amended to respond to staff concerns, for example, the provision of a parking permit to the staff area of Dix's Field Car Park for those staff working until 7pm

whose access to their normal mode of transport to work is affected by them working until 7pm.

- 5.4 Payment of overtime will be used in order to mitigate the impact of staff taking time off during the day where this is likely to impact on service delivery. However, the use of overtime to support Thursday evening opening is clearly not sustainable in the long term. We will therefore need to ensure that all employment contracts are amended to provide for a flexibility clause enabling future changes in demands to be met. This work will involve negotiation with Trades Unions in respect of changes to the Council's Single Status Agreement, and will commence immediately after the introduction of the Pilot in order to ensure that if Members assess that the Pilot is successful and support its introduction as a permanent feature of the Council's offer at the end of the Pilot period; this can be supported through contractual arrangements.

6 RECOMMENDED

- 6.1 Members are asked to note the actions being taken to implement the Pilot Extended Hours Opening on Thursday; and
- 6.2 Members are requested to recommend to Council the creation of a budget of £50,000 which includes an allowance for contingencies. This will be used to support the implementation of the six-month Pilot, funding in the main the costs of overtime as well as Publicity.

BINDU ARJOON
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None