

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE
4 FEBRAURY 2014

OPENING HOURS FOR CIVIC CENTRE-BASED SERVICES

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Members with a review of the data related to the Thursday late night opening pilot for Civic Centre-based services and seeks Members' views on future opening hours for the relevant services.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The development of the Council's Customer Access work will include researching and analysing the most cost effective way of meeting customer demand, with a particular focus on determine the most appropriate channels for accessing the range of the Council's services. This report focuses on the Face to Face channel as well as the main telephone access point.
- 2.2 Members have expressed a commitment to ensuring that the services based at the Civic Centre are being offered to the public in a way that ensures that residents can access those services at a time that is suitable for them.
- 2.3 To determine what demand exists for services outside of 'traditional' Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm (the Customer Services Centre has always opened at 8:30am) operation of Civic-centre based services, Members agreed a pilot for Saturday morning opening of the Customer Service Centre (CSC). The conclusion of that pilot was that because only the CSC, including the telephone room was opened on Saturday morning, this did not provide a complete service for customers which led to frustration for both customers and staff. It also meant that once services returned on a Monday morning, they had a backlog of work from Saturday in addition to their work that was being generated during the working week.
- 2.4 As part of the development of the Help Me with My Financial/Housing System (the 'Help Me System'), the Council learned about the unseen costs of services dealing in isolation with residents who approach the Council with issues that span across services. Work has continued to analyse Customer Demand coming into the CSC via Face to Face and Telephone channels in order to determine how best to resource the CSC against that demand in order to maximise the use of staff resources as well as meet customers' needs.

3. THURSDAY LATE NIGHT OPENING

- 3.1 Members agreed on 19 March 2013, to test the demand for late night opening of Civic Centre-based services by agreeing an extension of the opening hours on Thursday by staying open until 7pm.

3.2 Members have been keen to demonstrate the Council's support for the development of the late night economy in the City by encouraging local businesses to extend their opening hours into the evening. Having the Council's main access channels of telephones and Face to face contact available until 7pm on Thursday demonstrated the Council's commitment to leading by example.

3.3 Members were mindful of the introduction of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme in April 2013. Some working-aged residents are now required to pay a proportion of their Council Tax liability for the first time. In addition, other changes as a result of Welfare Reform were introduced which together had an impact on residents. The Council was keen to ensure that working residents were able to access services outside of the hours that they might be at work.

3.4 The services that were included in late night opening were those identified as having the largest volumes of enquiries into the CSC and included:

- The Customer Service Centre
- Switchboard
- Housing Advice
- Housing Repairs
- Housing Estates
- 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

3.5 Data of footfall within the CSC was collected which related to a number of the service areas above; this is presented as Appendix One to this report. The data compares demand for the frontline service across the days of the week and broken down by hours of the day. The data in the chart 'Thursday - Service Demand by Hour' shows that whilst there is demand for services outside of 'traditional' opening hours on Thursday, this is mostly between 5pm and 6pm.

3.6 The data in Appendix One also presents customer demand broken down over the course of the working day and identifies the peak times where the Council would want to maximise its use of staff resources to ensure that we are responding to customer demand. This data shows that there is low demand between 8:30am and 9:00 am and high demand over the late morning/early afternoon period.

3.7 The data also confirms that that the majority of customer demand for services into the CSC and telephones outside of traditional opening hours falls into the Help Me system, i.e. Council Tax, Benefits and Housing Advice.

4 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Based on the evidence of customer demand, it is proposed to make two amendments to the opening hours for the CSC.
- 4.2 It is proposed that, effective from 10 February 2014, the CSC opening time to the public be altered from 8:30am to 9am throughout the week. There may be implications for officers hosting meetings at Civic Centre which commence before 9am; if that is the case, those officers will be expected to make arrangements for their visitors to be met.
- 4.3 It is further proposed that the opening hours of the CSC be altered *from* 8:30am-5pm Monday to Friday and 8:30am to 7pm Thursday *to* 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 6pm on Monday and Thursday. The later opening alongside reallocation of staff resources will make a positive contribution to efforts to ensure that there are more resources allocated to the time of peak demand around lunchtime. The later opening time proposed from 8:30am to 9:00am will allow for staff resources within the CSC to be available until 6pm on two evening a week, without the need to use overtime payments or vary staff contracts.
- 4.4 Remaining open until 6pm two days a week would allow the Help Me System to continue to support working residents who find it difficult to visit during traditional opening hours and also reflects the findings from the Pilot in that there is some demand for services between 5pm and 6pm.
- 4.5 In preparation for Members' consideration, work has been done to establish the impact on customers of opening at 9:00am instead of 8:30am. In November, an average of 8 customers per day was recorded as visiting the CSC between 8:30am and 9:00am. This is out of an average of 243 recorded customers visiting the CSC daily. There were 3 occasions where visitors numbered between 20 and 40. These peaks resulted from pre arranged meetings.

Between 4 and 13 December, 25 customers visited the CSC between 8:30am 30 and 9am. Of these, 17 could have accessed the service in another way, (electronically or by phone), and 19 could have visited the CSC after 9am. In addition to these 25, we had 40 customers who were evenly spread between: contractors returning keys, appointments for the Registrar Service, (which opens at 9am), and general appointments and meetings. Consideration will need to be given to the services these affect but it should be noted that Registration appointments are now made later than 5pm on Thursdays in line with late opening.

- 4.6 Starting at 9:00am will not in isolation address the issue of peak demand at lunchtime; however, officers are seeking input from staff in the CSC on how best to address this.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Council approved a budget of £50,000 for the Thursday Late Night Opening Pilot, which included provision for contingencies. The cost of the Pilot is £22,314 which is allocated as: £5,516 for publicity and £16,798 for Staff Overtime costs. This includes on-costs and are based on overtime cost projections up to the end of January 2014.
- 5.2 There are no significant additional financial resources required for the proposed variance to the CSC opening hours with the exception of informing the public of the revised opening hours which will be done in the main through the Citizen, the Council's website, Social Media and the local media.
- 5.3 Should members agree the recommended amendment to opening hours, any required consultation with take place with affected staff.

6 RECOMMENDED

- 6.1 That Members note efforts to ensure that the staff resources are used effectively in order to meet customer demand as part of the Council's systems thinking approach;
- 6.2 That Members agree to the revised opening hours for the CSC effective from the completion of consultation with affected staff 2014 for the services included in the 'Help Me' System; and
- 6.3 That Members determine the end date of the current pilot of opening until 7pm on Thursdays.

BINDU ARJOON
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR CUSTOMER ACCESS

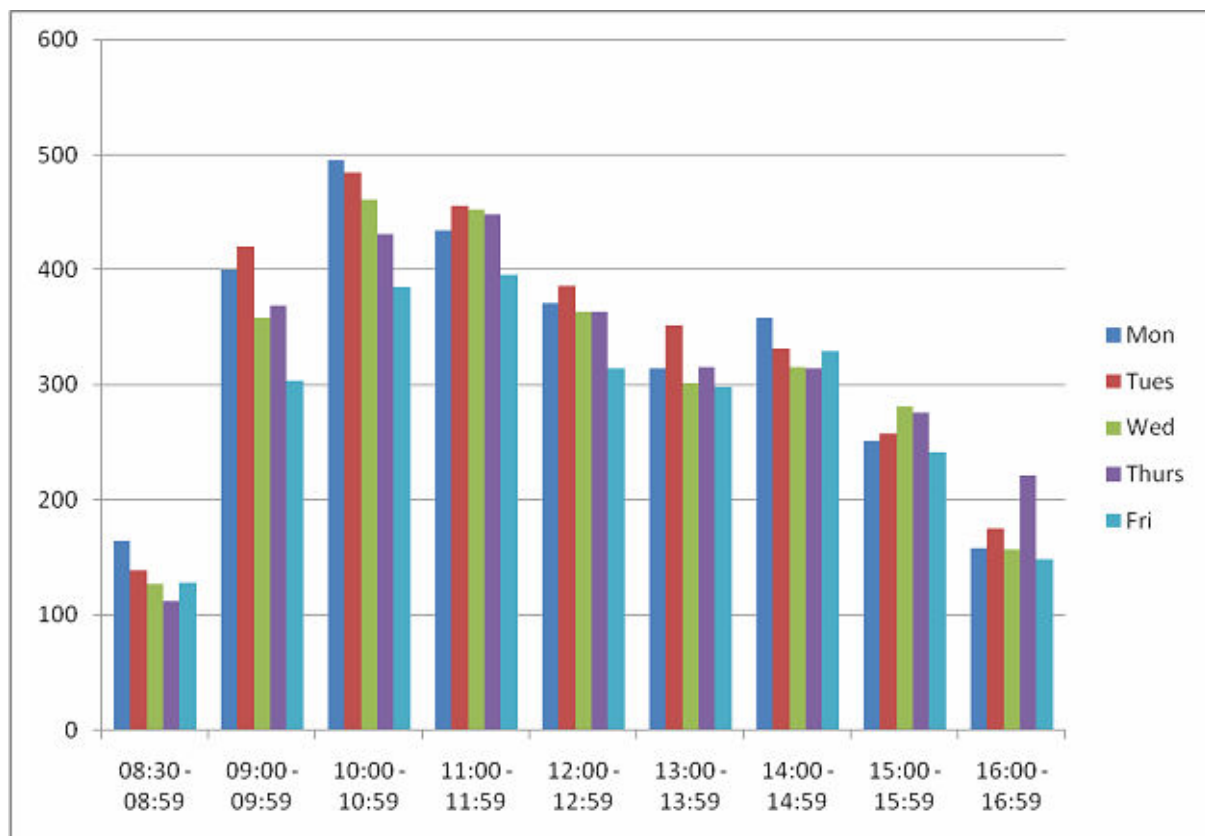
Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-

APPENDIX ONE

Measuring Customer Demand

All figures shown are for the period 1 April 2013 to 17 October 2013

Daily Demand by Hour



Breakdown of Service Demand

