



## **POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20TH JANUARY 2015**

**SUBJECT:        OPENING HOURS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRES AND  
                    NEWBRIDGE CASH OFFICE**

**REPORT BY:     ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151  
                    OFFICER**

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### **1.        PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1     At the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 8 December 2014 members considered proposals to make savings within Customer Services as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy by reducing the opening hours of Customer Service Centres and withdrawing the Cashiers Service from Newbridge Library.
- 1.2     As a result of these considerations officers were asked to consider the implications of all sites opening at 10:00 rather than 09:30 and retain the Cashiers Service at Newbridge Library. This report outlines the implications of this option.
- 1.3     Officers were also asked to consult customers and staff on the proposed changes, and to provide additional information on footfall and staffing levels.

### **2.        SUMMARY**

- 2.1.1   As part of the Medium Term Financial Plan, a budget saving of £250,000 has been proposed for the Customer Services budget. Amongst the proposals to achieve this saving was a reduction in staffing level of 5.7 FTE staff, including 2 FTE through vacancy management. This is in addition to a reduction of 2 FTE's in 2014/15. Members have indicated that they wish to retain the current network of Customer Service Centres, however, it is not feasible to maintain current levels of service with this reduction in staffing levels.
- 2.1.2   At the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 8 December 2014 members considered proposals to reduce service levels within Customer Services, including a reduction in opening hours of Customer Service Centres and withdrawing the Cashiers service from Newbridge Library. As a result of these considerations officers were asked to identify the implications of all sites opening at 10:00 rather than 09:30 (09:00 in Penallta House) as proposed in the report presented on 8 December and to retain the Cashiers Service at Newbridge Library.
- 2.1.3   Officers have looked at the implications of opening all sites at 10:00, whilst still achieving the same level of staffing reduction as in the earlier report. The results are included within the report. Also included in the report is further information on activity levels and staffing levels.
- 2.1.4   Officers were also asked to consult customers and staff on the proposed changes. However, at the time of writing the report, the consultation had not been completed due to the Christmas closedown and low customer numbers in the week before the closedown. A verbal report on

the consultation will be provided to members at the meeting.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The work of Customer Services, in particular the Customer Service Centres, contributes, in particular, to strategic objectives 3 and 4, Physical Access and Communications Access

### **4. THE REPORT**

- 4.1 To support the Medium Term Financial Plan, a Customer Services savings proposal of £250,000 has been identified as part of a package of proposals endorsed by Cabinet on 29 October 2014. To minimise the impact of this budget reduction on customers, officers have reviewed non-staff costs in detail and have identified savings of £89,348. A further £30,000 will be saved by reducing the Agency Staff budget that is used to cover seasonal demand changes and long-term absence such as maternity leave. Vacancy Management will yield further savings of £45,597 through the deletion of two vacant full-time Customer Service Advisor posts. The remainder of the savings will be found through reducing the salaries budget by £85,055 which equates to a staffing reduction of 3.7 FTE.
- 4.2 The proposed savings will reduce the staff establishment by 5.7 FTEs (including the 2 FTE vacant posts), which is in addition to a reduction of 2 FTEs in 2014/15. Members have indicated that they wish to retain the current network of Customer Service Centres. However, it is not feasible to maintain current levels of service with this reduction in staffing levels.
- 4.3 At the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 8 December 2014 members considered proposals to reduce service levels within Customer Services, including a reduction in opening hours of Customer Service Centres and withdrawing the Cashiers Service from Newbridge Library. As a result of these considerations officers were asked to present a further report setting out the implications of all sites opening at 10:00 rather than 09:30 (09:00 in Penallta House) and retaining the Cashiers Service at Newbridge Library. Officers were also asked to consult customers and staff on the proposed changes.
- 4.4 Activity levels at all sites have been analysed to identify the workload of each site that will be displaced by the proposals in the report presented on 8 December 2014. The proposal was that all sites with the exception of Penallta House would open at 09:30. Penallta House Customer Services would open at 09:00. This would harmonize the opening time at each site and better match the opening hours of the Caerphilly Customer Service Centre and Caerphilly Library. A similar analysis was conducted to identify the workload that would be displaced by all sites opening at 10:00. The workload was calculated by multiplying the average number of customer contacts for each contact type by the estimated average contact duration for each type. Across all sites the original proposal would see 8 hours of workload displaced into the rest of the morning. Opening at 10:00 would displace 16 hours of workload and would displace it into a shorter time period. At busier sites this would have a substantial effect on activity levels during the later morning.
- 4.5 As an example, in Caerphilly Customer Service Centre the current workload in the first two hours of opening is 6 hours and 11 Minutes. With a 09:30 opening this would rise to 8 hours and 38 minutes. A 10:00 opening would increase this to 10 hours and 28 minutes. If current staffing levels are maintained during the morning period customers would experience considerable delays and the backlog of work would spill over into the lunchtime period and on busier days it is unlikely that the backlog will not be cleared until mid-afternoon. It is also likely that the number of customers waiting to be seen will exceed the space available to accommodate them. Apart from the inconvenience to customers, there would be a substantial impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of staff due to increased workload and having to deal with customers stressed and aggrieved by substantial waiting times.
- 4.6 As a result of the amount of displaced workload the staffing levels in Caerphilly and Blackwood Customer Service Centres would have to increase by one Advisor between 10:00

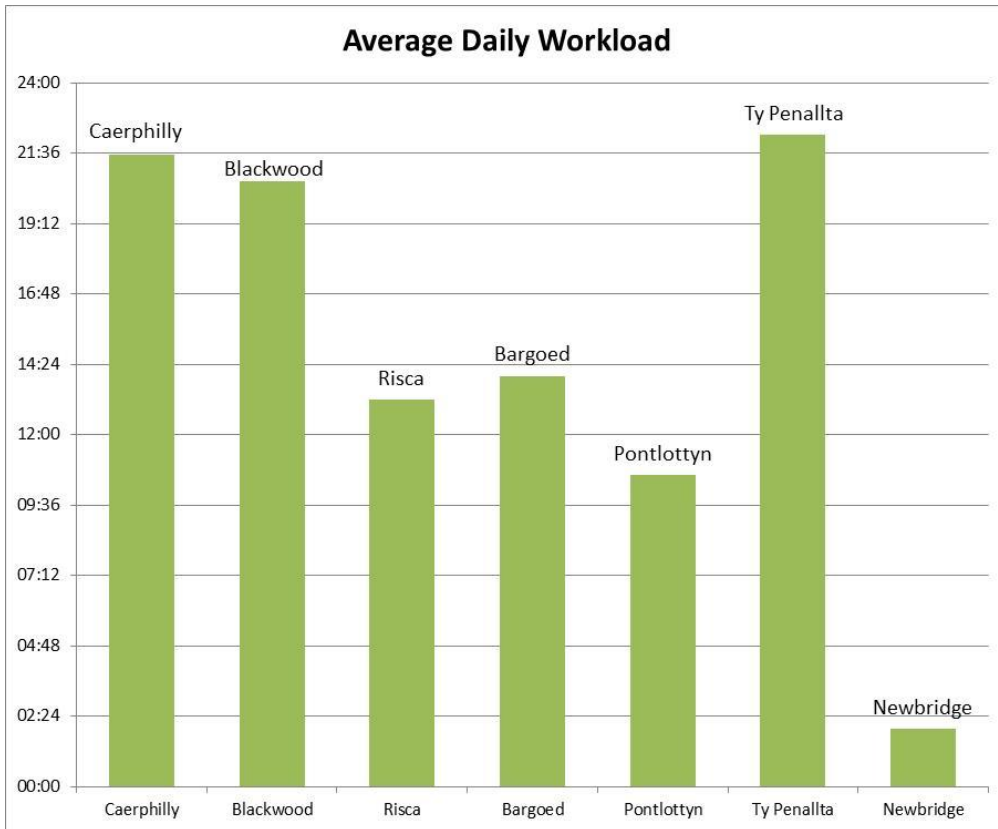
and 13:00. Staffing levels in Penallta House would have to increase by one Advisor between 10:00 and 12:00.

4.7 Taking into consideration the additional staffing requirements for the late morning period at the three busiest sites, the staff time released by opening all sites at 10:00 rather than 09:30 would allow the Cashiers service to be available in Newbridge during the following hours:

Monday	10:00 to 13:30 14:30 to 16:00
Tuesday	10:00 to 13:00
Wednesday	Closed
Thursday	Closed
Friday	10:00 to 13:00

4.8 This would result in the opening hours of Newbridge Cash Desk being reduced by 6 hours 30 minutes each week, which is 8% of the total reduction in opening hours across all seven sites. Blackwood, Caerphilly, Risca and Pontllytyn will all have reductions in opening hours of more than 13 hours per week.

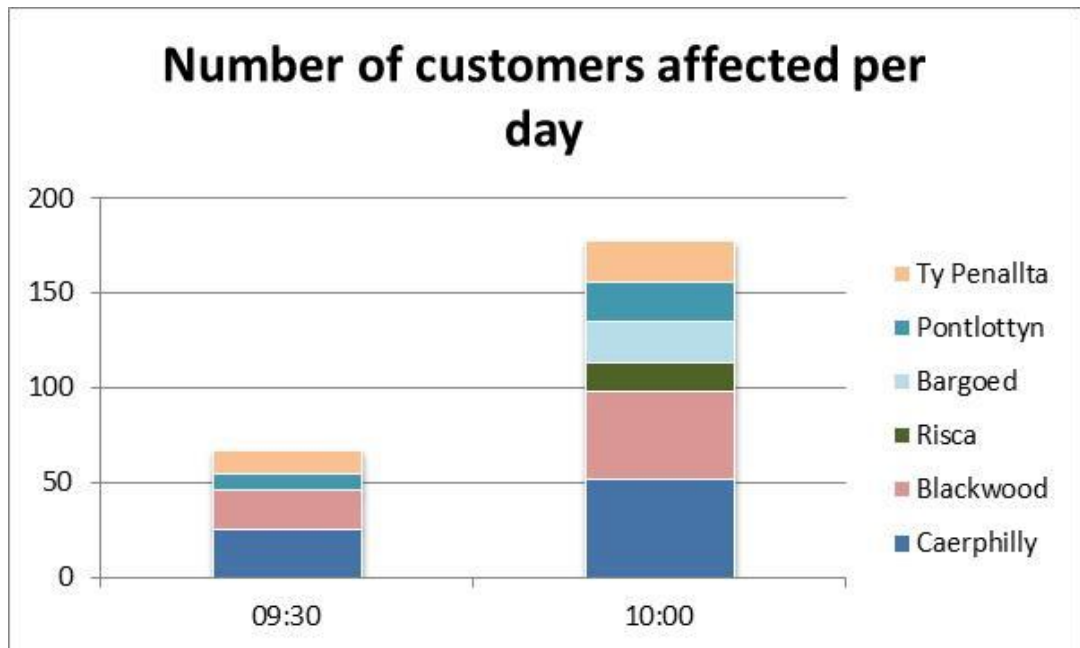
4.9 Using the calculations described in para 4.4 the current workload (in hours of customer contact) across all seven sites has been analysed and is shown in the following chart:



4.10 Average daily customer visits have also been compared and are as follows:

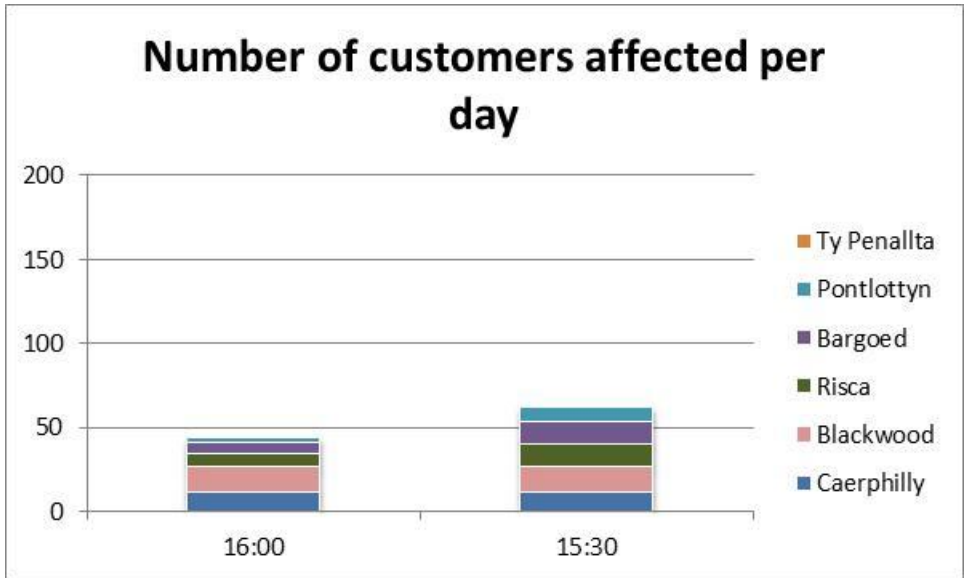
Average daily footfall	
Site	Customers
Caerphilly	303.1
Blackwood	284.4
Risca	127.5
Bargoed	149.8
Pontlottyn	108.6
Ty Penallta	163.9
Newbridge	78.3

4.11 The number of customers affected each day by opening at 09:30 and 10:00 has been analysed. Across all sites excluding Newbridge, an average of 67 customers a day will be affected by changing the opening time to 09:30, and 178 will be affected by changing the opening time to 10:00, an additional 111 customers per day. The average total number of customers using Newbridge Cash Desk is 78 customers per day.



4.12 If members wish to retain a Cashiers Service in Newbridge an alternative approach would be to change the closing times at the Bargoed, Risca and Pontlottyn Customer Service Centres to 15:30 rather than 16:00. This reduction would still generate the required saving in staff hours but would affect an additional 18 customers per day rather than an additional 111 customers per day if the opening time was moved back to 10:00 at all sites. Although this option would retain the service in Newbridge it would still result in a reduction in opening hours to:

Monday	09:30 to 13:30 14:30 to 15:30
Tuesday	10:00 to 13:00
Wednesday	Closed
Thursday	Closed
Friday	09:30 to 13:00



4.13 Staffing levels at each site vary through the day and across the working week to match customer demand. Staffing levels are higher in the morning than the afternoon and are often lower midweek. Staffing levels are increased on the days when higher customer volumes are expected such as the first working day after a bank holiday.

- Newbridge has a single Cashier.
- Pontlloftyn has 2 Advisors.
- Risca and Bargoed have 2 or 3 Advisors in busy periods dropping to 1 or 2 during quiet periods.
- Caerphilly, Blackwood and Penallta House have 4 or 5 Advisors during peak periods, dropping to 2 or 3 during quiet periods

The staff in the Customer Service Centres and Contact Centre are managed as a single pool of staff, with staff regularly working across the three customer contact channels (Phone, Face-to-face, and e-mail). This has been achieved by deploying telecommunications equipment at each site to allow staff at Customer Service Centres to be switched to Contact Centre work for part of the day. This has made it possible to fine-tune staffing levels to best meet customer demand across the 7 sites and the Contact Centre. The efficiencies that this has generated has allowed us to open the Risca and Bargoed Customer Service Centres with no additional staff.

4.14 In the longer term customer contact will increasingly be through lower cost access channels with self-service (e.g web) being the lowest cost option. Phone or e-mail contacts are more expensive than self-service but are significantly cheaper than face-to-face. Encouraging our customers to use lower cost methods of contact will be a significant part of our customer contact strategy in the future.

4.15 Staff and customers have been consulted about the proposed changes, but at the time of writing this report, the consultation had not been completed due to the Christmas closedown and low customer numbers in the week before the closedown. A verbal report on the consultation will be provided to members at the meeting.

## **5 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 No full impact assessment has been undertaken on these proposals as yet, however the reduction in availability of face to face services will have a detrimental effect on customers who fall under some of the protected characteristics groups, in particular people with different types of disabilities and the elderly. An EIA will be undertaken on this savings proposal prior to Cabinet endorsing their final savings proposals and full council decision in respect of the budget on the 25th February 2015.
- 5.2 Consultation on these proposals with service users, ensuring that elderly and/or disabled people are specifically included, will ensure that any final decision taken has been done robustly, and if challenged on the grounds of failure to take due regard of the Public Sector Equality Duty in Wales, can be fully and properly evidenced.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 These proposals will generate savings of £250,000 as part of the MTFP. However, due to the nature of the reductions it will not be possible to achieve these savings in full during 2015/16. As a result these savings will be phased in over 2 years with £125,000 being saved in 2015/16 and a further £125,000 in 2016/17
- 6.2 This report does not change the financial implications of the report presented to Policy and Resources Committee on 8 December 2014.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1.1 As part of these proposals the staff establishment will reduce by 5.7 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, including 2 FTE vacant posts. This reduction is likely to be made up of a mixture of full-time and part-time staff which will result in the loss of between 4 and 6 staff. This reduction will need to be achieved by September 2015 to achieve the required savings.
- 7.1.2 Every effort will be made to avoid compulsory redundancies and full use will be made of the recently updated personnel policies to achieve this if redeployment of the staff is not achievable in the first instance.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 The views of consultees are included within the report.
- 8.2 Customers using the Customer Service Centres and Newbridge Cash Desk, and Customer Service staff potentially affected by the proposals are being consulted and the results will be reported verbally to members.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That members consider the three options to reduce staffing costs and determine whether they support any of the proposals as follows:-
- The original proposals presented on 8 December 2015
  - A modification of the proposals to include the retention of a reduced Cashiers Service in Newbridge and all sites to open at 10:00
  - A modification of the proposals to include the retention of a reduced Cashiers Service in Newbridge and Bargoed, Risca, and Pontllytyn to close at 15:30 rather than 16:00.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 To inform Members of proposed changes within Customer Services to deliver savings requirements identified in the Cabinet Report of 29 October 2014.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 Local Government Act 2000

Author: David Titley, Corporate Customer Services Manager,  
Davidtitley@caerphilly.gov.uk

Consultees: Cllr Barbara Jones, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services  
Nicole Scammell, Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer  
Stephen Harris, Interim Head of Corporate Finance  
Gareth Hardacre, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development  
Colin Jones, Head of Performance and Property  
Gail Williams, Interim Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer  
Tony Maher, Assistant Director Planning & Strategy  
Gareth Evans, Interim Community Education Manager  
David A. Thomas, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities and Welsh Language)