

Executive

Service Delivery in Kidlington

2 March 2009

Report of Head of Customer Service and Information Systems

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on research conducted into service access in Kidlington and to ask the Executive to support the preferred option for the development of multi-agency service delivery in Kidlington

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) Support the proposal to fully investigate the provision of a multi-agency service point at Exeter Hall in Kidlington in partnership with Kidlington Parish Council, and the development of a programme of co-hosted service delivery activities with the Oxfordshire Library Service.
- (2) Request that a report on the outcome of that investigation be brought forward to the Executive at its meeting in July 2009.

Executive Summary

Introduction

1.1 The development of centralised customer service at Cherwell District Council in 2006/07 presented new opportunities to develop the services available through local offices:

- Local offices are no longer staffed exclusively by a team of cashiers, but by members of the single customer service team able to deliver all services that are currently in the customer service remit
- That single team has access to the same computer systems both in the contact centre and at all local offices
- The team move regularly between the contact centre and all local offices
- The contact centre phone system is available at all local offices making it perfectly viable to staff those offices five days a week
- The layout of the local offices has been changed to make possible a much wider range of service delivery than the single function of cash handling, and to ensure equal access and DDA compliance

1.2 In Kidlington, these changes have enabled new services to be delivered by third parties. The Citizens' Advice bureau, for example, now offers two afternoon surgeries from our office, one for appointments and one for drop-in.

1.3 However, the small size of the space available, and lack of customer-facing frontage, limits what we can do for Kidlington residents. The changes we made to the space at Exeter Hall were largely cosmetic in anticipation of identifying a longer term service delivery proposal for the village through discussion with potential partners and stakeholders.

1.4 Demographic information about the population of Kidlington shows an older population than elsewhere in the district, and a larger proportion of people from black and minority ethnic communities. This is supported by the findings of the Kidlington Village health-check conducted for the Parish Council.

1.5 Our own research with customers at all our local offices, including Kidlington, show that both these groups have a preference for face to face contact. Both these groups access services from a range of providers including the Parish Council, the Kidlington Information Centre, also located within Exeter Hall, CAB and Oxfordshire County Council.

Proposals

1.6 To work with Kidlington Parish Council to develop a full proposal for a multi-agency service point within Exeter Hall, using a "food court" style of approach. CDC customer service staff to work alongside Kidlington PC staff and the physical design and layout would be such that representatives of other service delivery partners such as CAB and Charter Housing would be able to use the service point for their customer contact. This would provide a single access point to a wide range of services for Kidlington residents, and builds on the "co-location of teams" model successfully implemented at the Banbury one stop shop.

1.7 To ensure the proposal maximises the investment already made to the existing Exeter Close project by working closely with the Council's Urban and Rural, and Recreation and Health services, which are already working in partnership with the Parish Council in support of the Project.

1.8 To include in the development of the proposal, consultation with Kidlington residents, building on the consultation already undertaken in support of the development of the one stop shop delivery model.

1.9 To develop in tandem with the Exeter Hall proposal a programme of shared customer contact events with the Oxfordshire Libraries Service and Customer First programme so that specific groups of customers such as older and younger, are targeted with appropriate service information in a consistent way across all service providers. For example when young people are registering for higher and further education ensuring that benefits and housing advice is available.

Conclusion

1.10 Developing a multi-agency customer access point within Exeter Hall will support other investments made by this Council into the Exeter Close project which seeks to improve links between Exeter Hall and the main village centre. Other

options could work against these investments, removing a key reason for people to cross the road into Exeter Close.

Background Information

2.1 Cherwell District Council has had a physical presence in Kidlington since 1975. Its current location is within the Kidlington Parish Council (KPC) building Exeter Hall: it occupies 29 m² on a 99 year lease from KPC. Because of the capital contribution CDC made towards the cost of building Exeter Hall we pay a nominal rent of £75 plus rates and a service charge in respect of heat and lights, do our own internal repairs and sub-let the room used by the Information Centre (for which they pay rent).

2.2 Exeter Hall is situated to the west of the Oxford Road. The site also accommodates an Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) children's centre and the health centre, and has good car parking. Kidlington has one of the best local bus services in Oxfordshire and there are bus stops on the Oxford Road - north bound immediately outside Exeter Hall and southbound on the immediate opposite side of the road. There are also south and north bound stops close to the Oxford Road junction in Yarnton Road which deliver a bus service every few minutes. The location of this junction is approximately 50 yds only from the Exeter Hall entrance.

2.3 The Council's office within the building is somewhat hidden away, and the Parish Council operate their own reception facilities in a more prominent location.

2.4 Until 2008 the CDC office served more or less exclusively as a cash-taking counter, with an ever-dwindling customer base that in recent years became too small to make it economically viable to open the office more than three days a week, closed at lunchtimes.

2.5 The development of centralised customer service at Cherwell District Council in 2006/07 presented new opportunities to develop the services available through local offices. However, the small size of the space available, and lack of customer-facing frontage, limits what we can do. The changes we made to the space at Exeter Hall were largely cosmetic in anticipation of identifying a longer term service delivery proposal for the village through discussion with potential partners and stakeholders.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

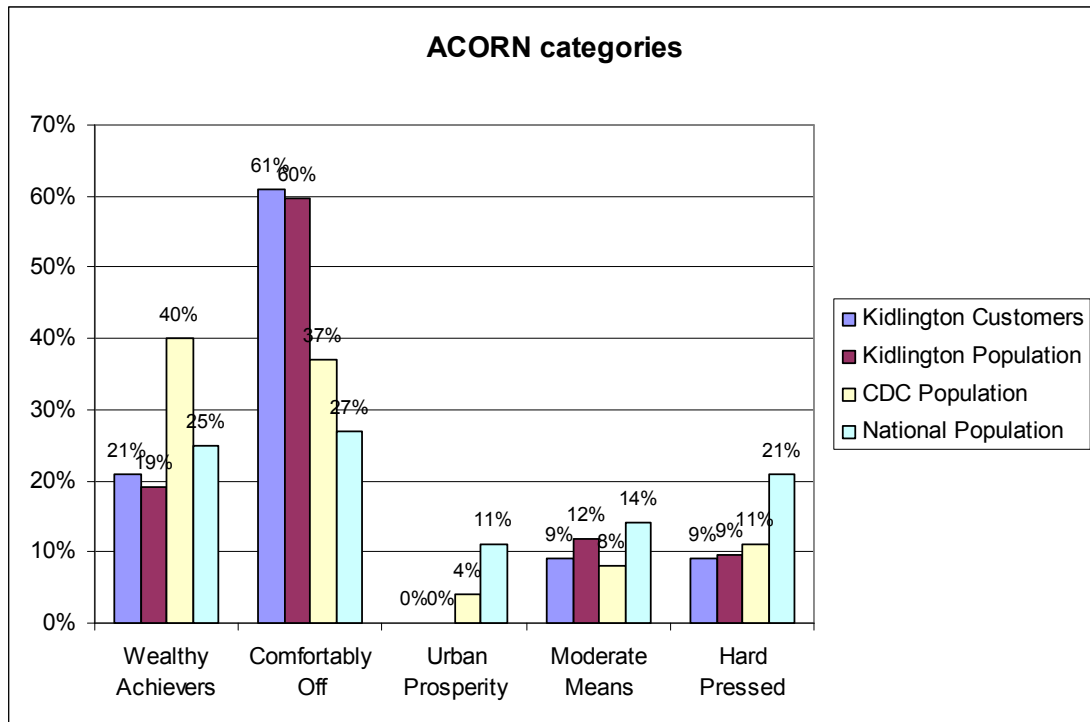
3.1 In the summer of 2007 Kidlington Parish Council carried out a village healthcheck as part of its work to develop a village action plan, in line with SEEDA and countryside Agency best practice guidelines. The full report is available as a background paper but the highlights, relevant to service provision in the village, are given here.

“local population characteristics reflect national and regional trends, including in particular the fall in numbers of children which is having a knock-on effect of falling school rolls and a review of school places. There has been an increase in number of 50+ and the active elderly, one of the effects of which, as the population ages, is more pressure on health and other facilities.”

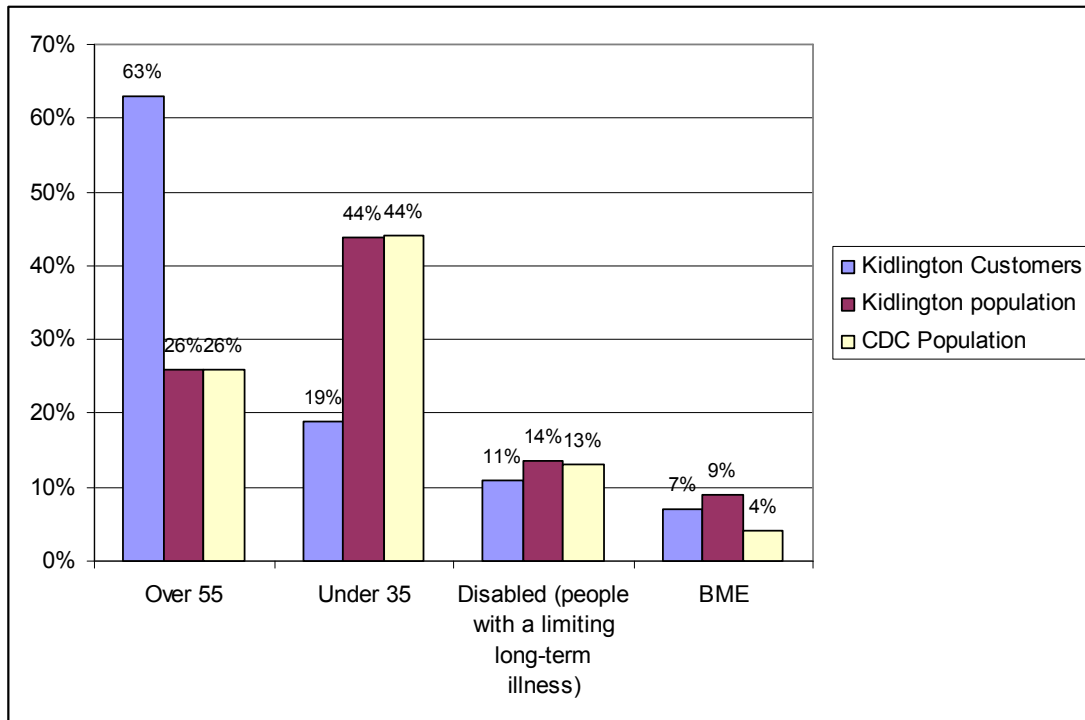
3.2 The population of Kidlington is predicted to fall (from 2001 levels) by between 5 and 12% by 2016, leaving the proportion of older people greatly increased.

Kidlington Customers and the wider population

3.3 An exit survey of customers at Exeter Hall was conducted in September 2008. Almost two thirds of the customers of our Kidlington office are in the “comfortably off” ACORN category (A Classification Of Residential Neighbourhoods). Comfortably off is really the middle of the road category. Not wealthy but with few real money worries, all kinds of lifestyles, and with younger singles and couples predominating nationally, but in Kidlington this group largely comprises “empty-nesters” and comfortably-off pensioners. Most own their own home. In Cherwell as a whole this group makes up 37% compared with just 27% nationally.



3.4 In terms of CDC’s own priority groups, Kidlington is broadly representative, although there are twice as many people in black and minority ethnic groups as elsewhere in the District. When it comes to customers using our office, however, the over-55 group favour this route much more than do other groups.



3.5 44 per cent of our Kidlington customers live less than a mile away and a further 41% within 2 miles. Even so, 48% came to the office by car, with just a third walking. Kidlington had the highest proportion of cyclists recorded by the survey with 9% of customers arriving by that means.

3.6 Of the three local centres, Kidlington has the highest proportion of customers making a special visit to the office (42%), but 100% of visitors said it was very or fairly easy to get to the office.

Current service provision and unmet demand

3.7 Well over 90% of the customers are seen within 5 minutes and the Kidlington office has the highest satisfaction levels – 90% saying they were very satisfied and a further 5% saying fairly satisfied.

3.8 Far and away the most used service at Kidlington is the ability to pay Council Tax bills; 39% of our customers do that, despite having many other options for payment (Direct Debit, cash at the post office, cash at either of the Co-ops or Threshers, or at the Garage in Yarnton). Unsurprisingly, given the age profile of our customers (although not of the village population as a whole) applying for a bus pass is the second most popular service.

3.9 The exit survey of customers revealed debt counselling and benefits advice surgeries at the top of the list of other services customers would like to access at the office. This has already been addressed by establishing surgeries from the Citizens' Advice Bureau. However, Education and Schools, and the Pensions Service were also mentioned, and current facilities, though improved, limit the number and frequency of these surgeries.

Options

4.1 The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward:

- Option One** Partner with Kidlington Parish Council to develop a multi-agency service point within Exeter Hall.
This would support the existing Exeter Close project for which the Parish Council has an approved grant from SEEDA of £100,000, capital investment from CDC of £45,000 in respect of the Pavilion and a further investment (pending Council meeting 23 Feb) during 2009/1.
- Parish Council's aspirations include the eventual refurbishment or redevelopment of the health centre, the refurbishment and improvement of the children's centre, and possible improvements to Exeter Hall itself to include a better one-stop-shop. The option being proposed here supports this last and proposes improvements that result in a "food court" model where service delivery partners co-locate – either full time or on a published session-basis – in one service delivery area.
- Taking CDC customers to another location would go against the key objective of the Exeter Close project and reduce the value of CDC's capital investment made to date.
- If the council vacated the offices at Exeter Hall, it might also be difficult to find a purchaser for our lease, and realise the asset.
- Option Two** Partner with Oxfordshire County Council to develop a shared service delivery point within the Library at Ron Groves House. A site visit and discussion with Katharine Spackman, Principal Librarian Information Services, and Karen Batchelor, Customer Services Manager for the City Library Group show that there is insufficient space within the library area at Ron Groves House to introduce an extended counter and private meeting space necessary for the delivery of a full range of both councils' services. However, there are many opportunities for shared customer contact on a programmed basis, around key times for customers such as when enrolling in further education or turning 65.
- Option Three** Do nothing for the present. The works done within our existing space in Exeter Hall do not have a long life however, and a long-term decision will be required.

Consultations

- Exeter Hall Customers** Findings of the exit survey of customers at all offices has informed this report
- Trish Redpath, Clerk, Kidlington Parish Council** The recommendations outlined in the report conform closely with the aspiration of the Parish Council i.e. for a single point of contact within Exeter Hall – not just for Council services but to include other relevant information

points such as Citizen's Advice etc.

The Parish Council will wish to be in close consultation with the District Council regarding the planning of the new facility. It is reasonably flexible in consideration of the exact location of the office within Exeter Hall, although an entrance opening to the planned civic square and pedestrian path/cycleway would be preferable.

It will also be important for the Parish and District Councils to work together and in cooperation with the County Council to resolve parking issues relating to the site.

Jim Flux, CVS

There is little in the way of coordinated volunteer services in Kidlington; no volunteer bureau or car service for example. Any shared facility could have benefits in terms of providing a focal point for coordinating or delivering such services.

Chris Rothwell, Head of Urban and rural Services

A key objective of the Exeter Close project is to more closely link Exeter Hall and the public buildings around it with the village centre, it makes sense to keep customers coming to Exeter Hall by further developing the services available there. This approach would compliment the investment this Council has made in Watts Way, and the work taking place on the street furniture replacement. It would also link to a high priority project for the Parish council in pedestrianisation of the High Street.

Kidlington Information Centre

Certain changes to the services we offer have recently led us to diversify into other areas; these include opportunities to work with other local voluntary organisations. In light of this we would like to expand our services within the community, perhaps by establishing a volunteer bureau service or by increasing our current Tourist Information Point status.

KADIC currently run on a part time basis, with a self employed Manager who works alongside a rota of volunteers. We would like to increase our opening hours by having another part time self employed person to job share with the existing Manager to cover the office with volunteers.

To ensure our level of confidentiality we offer KADIC would still need a separate office for the use of clients who have private issues to discuss. There are numerous leaflets in the corridor which would need to be relocated in a central position to be easily accessed; we would still be willing to maintain these.

Oxfordshire County Council: Katharine Spackman, Principal Librarian Information Services, and Karen Batchelor, Customer Services Manager for the City Library Group

While Ron Groves House is too small to provide a permanent shared service point the proximity of Exeter Hall would make it convenient for sessions of pro-active signposting and collaborative information provision and support sessions targeted at particular groups either by age or by the "life event". The provision of CDC rural access points in libraries is part of this. We've already agreed to work in partnership and provide a Rural Access LinkPoint in Deddington Library.

Vickie Zeilinski, CDC

This would provide a focus for community groups in

Community Development Manager Kidlington and the opportunity to develop partnership working with Kidlington and District Information Centre (KADIC).

Implications

(Financial, Legal and Risk and other implications e.g. Equalities, Human Resources, Data Quality and Environmental where relevant)

Financial: There are no immediate direct financial implications associated with this report, subject to the next stage of the evaluation being met from within existing resource, however should the Executive invite a full proposal to be brought forward, there are likely to be financial implications in relation to capital investment, A full analyses of the associated cost implications will be included in any proposal.

Comments checked by Denise Westlake, Service Accountant 01295 221559

Legal: The Council has the legal power to enter arrangements of this sort. If there are to be shared facilities it would be helpful to have an agreement setting out clearly who is responsible for what.

Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer 01295 221686

Risk Management: This proposal in this report carried no risk in itself, being simply to invite a detailed proposal to be prepared which should carry a full risk assessment.

However, given that the Executive approved in June 2002 “an interim upgrade to the existing customer facilities at Kidlington, pending the completion of the consultation and options appraisal” there is a risk of being seen not to deliver on commitments, and a risk of not equipping ourselves to meet current and changing customer need in Kidlington.

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management and Insurance Officer 01295 225566

Equalities Implications Reference the Equalities Impact Assessment of our one stop shops http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/media/pdf/t/8/EIA_CSIS_One_Stop_Shop.pdf

The one stop shop Equality Impact Assessment identifies that a one stop shop approach can bring these equalities improvements:

- Improved Customer satisfaction and service by one person taking ownership
- Make the whole process clearer to customers and staff
- To reduce double handling and checking
- There will be an increased choice for Cherwell residents on how they choose to access the services
- Equal access to all services to all residents regardless of where they live or ability
- Having a team of multi-skilled staff that are able to deal with the customers needs.

It also identifies the availability of parking at Exeter Hall. Our customer research shows the location is already favoured by our most significant customer group – older people - who find it very easy to get to
Bringing customer service staff into a shared service environment means

their knowledge and skills in relation to, for example, use of Language Line interpretation services will be available to partners sharing the customer service point.

Comments checked by Grahame Helm, Head of Safer Communities and Community Development 01295 221615

Wards Affected

All Kidlington wards

Corporate Plan Themes

An accessible, value for money council

Executive Portfolio

Councillor Nicholas Turner
Portfolio Holder for Customer Service and IT

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
	None
Background Papers	
Kidlington Village Healthcheck Exeter Close proposal summary (Kidlington PC) Access to services exit survey of customers at Cherwell District Council's local offices 2008	
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