



Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE



Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council

Equality Impact Assessment

LinkPoint Offices

January 2021

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	Customers and Organisational Development – Customer Services
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Budget savings proposal (s) – SAV2167 Closure of three District LinkPoint Offices (Bicester, Banbury Town Centre and Kidlington). Main LinkPoint at Bodicote House to remain open.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	New proposal to change existing function
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	To close the LinkPoint offices located at Exeter Hall, Kidlington, Franklins House, Bicester and The Museum at Castle Quay, Banbury with effect from 01/04/2021. The overall impact of the proposal will provide additional enhanced access channels making it easier for those who found accessing our face to face offering difficult. The protected characteristics of our service users are not recorded at the point of contact with the face to face service. However, there is no customer intelligence suggests that this proposal will bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community given the alternative service options set out below. In addition, closing these offices will reduce equipment, travel and energy consumption helping to meet our Climate Change ambitions.
Completed By	Natasha Barnes

Authorised By	Mark Haynes
Date of Assessment	December 2020

Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p>Context / Background</p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>Cherwell District council is facing significant budget pressures during 2021/22. All services were required to consider all possible savings options in order to ensure delivery of service and a balanced budget.</p> <p>Cherwell District Council provides four public facing sites across the district for customers to access the first point of contact services provided by the Customer Service team. One is at Bodicote House and there are three further “District LinkPoints” in Cherwell’s three main urban areas.</p> <p>The District LinkPoints are situated at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banbury TIC LinkPoint, Banbury Museum Shop, Castle Quay Sopping Centre, Banbury • Bicester LinkPoint, Franklins House, Bicester • Kidlington LinkPoint, Exeter Hall, Kidlington <p>The services provided at each of the LinkPoints are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face appointments (pre-booked by telephone) for services that cannot be provided via any other channel • Payment Kiosk facilities to make self-service payments for Council services • Self-service facilities to access Council services via telephone and online channels <p>Ad-hoc or drop in visits have been actively discouraged for all but essential circumstances since 2009 with the introduction of an appointment system. This became an appointment only system in 2012 along with the implementation of a self-service payment kiosk and self-service telephone and online facilities. These systems were introduced to better manage demand and resource, encourage channel shift to lower cost access channels, reduce unnecessary or repeat contact and improve the overall customer experience.</p>
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Subsequently, face to face footfall has reduced in the last 10 years from 106,903 in 09/10 to just 12,511 in 19/20.

By booking an appointment to transact with the Council, customers were better able to plan their visit, have more privacy during personal transactions, ensure they brought all required information and documentation to their first visit and no longer experience long queues and wait times.

To encourage use of the appointment system and to help customers take advantage of lower cost alternative channels, anyone presenting at a LinkPoint without an appointment is guided to the self-service phone or online facilities. Most ad-hoc visitors using these facilities found that their requests were still dealt with at first point of contact and learned that they could transact easily and effectively without needing to spend time or money travelling to an office. Those who still needed an appointment were able to book one and given detailed instructions to ensure they had the information needed to complete the transaction first time.

Over recent years services have changed the nature of transaction and improved their online capabilities reducing the number of appointments needed. The vast majority of appointments have been to assist with completion of Housing Benefits claims and submission of applications to join the housing register. In the last year Housing have made their application process via online form submission only and Benefits Claims can also be submitted online meaning that these face-to-face services no-longer required.

During lockdown, customer service has tailored its appointments offer, by transferring face to face appointments to a telephone "call back" appointment. This still allows planning and preparation for the customer while completing the transaction from the comfort and safety of their own home.

Use of self-service telephone and online facilities has also reduced year on year. This is due in part to the increased use of smart phones, the Office for National Statistics reported that in 2019 79% of the UK's adult population owned an internet enabled smartphone.

	<p>Closure of these sites would allow a reduction in travel expenditure for mileage of approx. £9k. as staff will not be required to travel to other places of work. In addition, there will be Licensing recharge savings for telephony of approx. £936.</p> <p>Reduction in costs associated with LinkPoints including Service Charges, Insurance, Business Rates, Utilities etc of approx. £23.8k pa as well as possible rental opportunities of approx. £20k pa for Franklins House.</p>
<p align="center">Proposals</p> <p align="center">Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>During the savings proposal process, expenditure was reviewed and reduced wherever possible in order to make up the shortfall in funding.</p> <p>To close the LinkPoint offices located at Exeter Hall, Kidlington, Franklins House, Bicester and The Museum at Castle Quay, Banbury and provide appointment services by phone and online, with face to face appointments at Bodicote House only.</p> <p>The provision of a face to face service at these sites has been suspended since March 2020 due to the pandemic. Customers have sought to contact CDC CSC through other methods including the telephone and email. Previously, most Customers accessing the LinkPoints did so for Benefits and Housing appointments. These appointments will continue but via telephone rather than face to face so minimal impact is expected here.</p> <p>The CSC will be further developing the telephony capability during 2020/21 to include social media and other channels of choice.</p> <p>Consequently, there will be minimal impact on service delivery as officers will continue to deliver high quality effective and efficient service provision via all access channels.</p> <p>Improved call abandonment KPIs due to more efficient transactions. Face to face transactions generally take longer than the same request by phone, thus CSA capacity feed up to handle incoming calls and emails.</p>

	<p>Improved First point of Contact KPIs due to customers' ability to access information when calling from home. Currently some appointments require a follow up interaction due to customer forgetting to bring information required to a LinkPoint appointment.</p> <p>Possible reduction in customer satisfaction KPI for those customers who feel their choice of how they transact with the Council has been reduced, especially those who are used to or prefer to access services face to face however alternative channels are available.</p> <p>It is anticipated that as a result of further digital and self-service uptake along with other savings proposals, we will be able to accommodate the needs of the community within the alternative model.</p>																																										
<p>Evidence / Intelligence</p> <p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.</p>	<p>Data from CSC contact channels to show reducing numbers of visitors to district offices prior to closure due to pandemic:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="674 727 1491 1377"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>APPOINTMENTS</th> <th>ADHOC VISITS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2017-2018</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bicester</td> <td>1814</td> <td>1994</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bodicote</td> <td>1852</td> <td>4831</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kidlington</td> <td>810</td> <td>1251</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Banbury</td> <td>2181</td> <td>1331</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018 2019</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bicester</td> <td>939</td> <td>1304</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bodicote</td> <td>1248</td> <td>3900</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kidlington</td> <td>525</td> <td>944</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Banbury</td> <td>1177</td> <td>948</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019-2020</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bicester</td> <td>680</td> <td>1190</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bodicote</td> <td>648</td> <td>1416</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		APPOINTMENTS	ADHOC VISITS	2017-2018			Bicester	1814	1994	Bodicote	1852	4831	Kidlington	810	1251	Banbury	2181	1331	2018 2019			Bicester	939	1304	Bodicote	1248	3900	Kidlington	525	944	Banbury	1177	948	2019-2020			Bicester	680	1190	Bodicote	648	1416
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	Kidlington	341	668
	Banbury	1119	767
	<p>(NB – many ad hoc visit include those visiting to make payments using self-service payment kiosk, sperate ECIA and savings proposal has been completed to remove these facilities as such payments can now be made using a range of other payment channels including using post offices and local stores, telephone and online payments facilities)</p>		
<p>Alternatives considered / rejected</p> <p>Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.</p>	<p>There were a number of options considered:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. District LinkPoints to close, with any essential public facing activity taking place at Bodicote House. 2. District LinkPoints are partially opened on restricted, set days each week to facilitate essential public facing appointments only. 3. District LinkPoints are fully re-opened as before Lockdown subject to Covid-19 Secure operating. 4. Some or all District LinkPoints are closed with alternative co-habitation options explored given closer working with OCC. For example, a single, CSA staffed access point at a library or County Council building within the urban area. 5. Some or all District LinkPoints are closed with alternative ways of delivering face to face appointments. For example, by installing a video conferencing unit and self-service document scanning unit at a Library or County council building within the urban area. 6. Some or all District LinkPoints are closed with all appointments taking place by phone and essential document checks being carried out by OCC library staff by appointment (A number of OCC libraries have facilities and trained staff to carry out document checking services) <p>The pros and cons of these options were considered, and it was felt that the option 1 with elements of 5 and 6 was the most cost-effective option with minimal impact to the customer. Closure of the District LinkPoints with appointments taking place by phone or video call along with any essential public facing activity taking place at Bodicote House or by arrangement with colleagues at OCC library services.</p>		

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The enhanced provision of alternative contact channels may benefit those with disabilities that made attending face to face appointments difficult.			
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rather than have to travel to the nearest available LinkPoint, the enhanced telephony offer and additional access channels will enable these communities to interact with the Council more easily.			
Armed Forces	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Carers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Areas of deprivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Wider Impacts

Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Other Council Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	More streamlined and efficient interactions at first point of contact require less assistance from the “back office” service.			
Providers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Social Value ¹	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

¹ If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area

Section 3: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	
Person Responsible for Review	
Authorised By	