

Area West Committee – 20th June 2012

9. Services Delivered to the Community from our Front Desks 2011/12

Strategic Director: Rina Singh (Place and Performance)
Assistant Director: Helen Rutter (Communities)
Service Manager: Andrew Gillespie, Area Development Manager (West)
Lead Officer: Paul Brazier, Area Support Team Leader (West)
Contact Details: paul.brazier@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01460 260404

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to update members on the type and volume of services we deliver to the community from our front offices.

Public Interest

The Council has local offices in each of its areas. In Area West, customer enquiry desks are located in each of the main towns, i.e. Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster, which enables the public to access a wide range of Council and related information and assistance. This report gives an update on the type and volume of services delivered to the community from those offices.

Recommendation

Members are recommended to note and comment on the report.

Services Delivered from our Front Desks

We deliver services at three locations within Area West:

- Holyrood Lace Mill, Chard
 - Open 39.75 hours/week
 - 9-5 weekdays (4.45pm Fridays)
- Crewkerne Community Office, Market Square, Crewkerne
 - Open 33 hours/week
 - 9-5 Mon to Weds, 9-1 Thurs, 9-4 Fri, closed 1-1.30 for lunch
- Ilminster Community Office, North Street, Ilminster
 - Open 13.5 hours/week
 - 9.15 – 1.45 Mon, Tues, Thurs

The populations served from each of the offices are in round figures 20,000, 15,000 and 12,000 respectively.

All offices offer help with and advice on the full range of SSDC services. We also help with some County Council services such as reporting highways and street lighting faults and issuing bus pass application forms.

In Chard we offer additional self-help services that are very well used:

- a cash machine that accepts cash and card payments for the range of SSDC services and rent payments for Yarlinton
- JobCentrePlus free phone for access to their services
- Jobpoint offering easy access to the national jobs database
- confidential free phone access to all SSDC services, well used for housing and benefits queries
- confidential free phone access to County Council Adults and Children's services

At Chard and Crewkerne we have a public computer where customers can:

- register and bid for housing on the Homefinder website, with 100 customers per month using this facility.
- access our website for planning and other information
- access the Avon & Somerset Police website for information and reporting, with 6 to 8 people per month using this website (Crewkerne office is an official Police Point as their station no longer takes public enquiries).

The following table shows the average monthly number of customers for each of the services we deliver for the period April 2011 to March 2012. The SSDC Core Services are shown in bold print – Housing Benefits, Housing, Council Tax and Refuse & Recycling. Core Services account for 40% of our counter services (Chard 43%, Crewkerne 34%, Ilminster 55%).

In these times of economic downturn we have seen an increase in demand for Housing services, and customers for the Benefits service have remained at a high level. JobcentrePlus services continue to be in high demand, with over 750 customers per month proving the usefulness of hosting this service at a local venue.

Area West Customer Statistics April 2011 to March 2012

Counter Services	Monthly Average		
	Chard	Crewkerne	Ilminster
Core services in bold			
Benefits	268	97	44
Housing & Homeless	119	71	8
Council Tax	88	41	15
Refuse & recycling	50	33	10
Reception Services	259	128	24
Building Control	17	1	0
Bus Pass	23	18	9
Car Parks	11	11	2
Licensing	3	2	0
Elections & Democratic services	9	11	1
Environmental Health	8	5	1
Planning	28	6	2
Tourism, Heritage, Countryside	2	2	1
Local Information Centre (Tourism)	N/A	73	N/A
Horticulture & Streetscene	5	10	3
Registrar	76	N/A	N/A
Town Council	6	27	7
County Council (Social Services)	99	1	2
County Council Issue (e.g. roads, lighting)	50	74	5
Payments (assist at Cash Machine)	61	N/A	N/A
JobCentre Plus (assist customer)	18	N/A	N/A
Other	35	104	8
TOTAL at Counter	1235	715	142
Continued over/...			

Area West Customer Statistics April 2011 to March 2012

	Monthly Average		
Self-service customers	Chard	Crewkerne	Ilminster
Payments at cash machine	988	N/A	N/A
Jobpoint customers	553	N/A	N/A
Jobphone customers	206	N/A	N/A
Freephone SSDC services	37	N/A	N/A
Freephone Social Services	25	N/A	N/A

We are continually reviewing our service to match customer need, and achieved a 95% Very Good or Good satisfaction level in the March 2012 customer survey.

Financial Implications

None arising from this report.

Council Plan Implications

The services provided from the Council's offices supports the delivery of the actions identified in the Council Plan.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI 188)

The provision of local customer enquiry desks reduces the need to travel.

Equality and Diversity Implications

We aim to make our front desk services accessible to all our residents and visitors where they can talk face to face with a customer adviser. We have long acknowledged that access to our Ilminster Office is inadequate and that this can only be improved when suitable alternative premises are found.

Background Papers: *Customer contact statistics*