

Iminster Community Office Impact Assessment and future provision for Customer Access

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Purpose of the Report

To update Committee on the impact following the withdrawal of face to face contact at Iminster Community Office and the future provision for customer access and locality working.

Public Interest

With an increase in digital access there is a continuing need to support customers to access services online and raise awareness of alternative methods to access information and services to ensure that the service provided by SSDC best meets the needs of the customer. SSDC also need to actively manage assets and resources to ensure the best financial or community return. This reports shows the impact relating to the closure of Iminster Community Office.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note this report.

Background

Iminster Community Office provided a face to face service and enabled customers to receive advice and assistance to many SSDC services, as well as referral or signposting to other agencies where necessary.

Due to increasingly low footfall within the office a report was taken to Area West Committee and members agreed to withdraw from the Community Office and provide services in an alternative way. Over a lead in period Customer Advisors would focus on encouraging and supporting customers to access services online and to raise awareness of all alternative methods. There would also be an appointment based offer to customers who required further assistance in a location suitable to them.

The proposal was also endorsed by Senior Leadership Team as a good way of testing various aspects of service delivery through transformation.

Lead up to office closure

Iminster Community Office was based with the Town Council and closed at the end of January 2018. During the 2 month lead up to the closure customers were assisted and encouraged to move, where possible, to alternative methods.

29 customers were seen during this period. 19 moved to digital, phone or post access. 6 said they would visit another office and 3 were returning equipment or one off visits.

Of the 29 customers who visited the offices, 27 lived in Iminster and 2 locations were not recorded.

SSDC services were advised of the office closure and provided with guidance on how to assist customer access with an appointment based visit.

Signs and leaflets were provided within the Community Office to advise customers and offer support. Information and leaflets were also supplied to Ilminster Town Council to support any future enquiries.

SSDC released a press statement highlighting the closure.

Impact of closures

Following the closure Ilminster Town Council unfortunately didn't receive sufficient leaflets, which was highlighted by the Town Council and rectified.

Ilminster Town Council continues to receive 2-3 face to face SSDC enquiries per week. These enquiries are generally for benefits, Homefinder and waste and recycling services. Assistance is given mainly via signposting, although the Town Council has also provided some online assistance to the customer by reporting incidents via the SSDC website.

There was concern around access to public computers (PC) as some customers could not afford to call the council and some would require assistance in using a computer. Current PC access provision in Ilminster is provided within the Library.

The Town Council also noted an increase in telephone enquiries (around 4-6 per week). However, it was felt that some of these calls may have been due to customers being unable to get through to the main SSDC switchboard and were therefore contacting the Town Council instead. Calls generally related to Waste and Recycling issues (missed bin collections etc). They have also received email enquiries or have replied to enquiries via email and have been very proactive in including the SSDC website link, so that customers can go directly to our website. It was felt that these calls and email enquiries were beginning to reduce in volume.

There has been 1 occasion to date where an appointment was provided to a customer and this was held at Ilminster Library.

The Town Council continue to give out leaflets and information and felt the impact on the Town Council was manageable. We will continue to liaise with the Town Council to provide assistance and leaflets where required.

Impact regarding additional phone calls where considered to be minimal by the Customer Focus team.

Below is some data regarding the proportion of people who have completed online forms themselves and also forms which have been completed with the help of an SSDC officer either by phone or face to face. There have been a number of initiatives over the last 9 months to help customers to self-serve.

	Feb-18	Sept-18 (to date)
% of forms completed by self-serve	37.8%	50.8%
% of forms completed by SSDC officer	62.2%	49.2%

Future provision

As part of the Council's Access Strategy, Area + report and channel shift initiative, provision throughout the district is being made to provide Customer Access Points (CAP) within our existing buildings and other appropriate locations within market towns. A new CAP is due to be trialled within Crewkerne Community Office and there will be a staff presence to help customers self-serve.

CAP's will consist of slim line touch screen computers. They will include scanning and skype facilities and customers will be able to book appointments if further assistance is required.

We are also looking into the possibility of providing access and support to SSDC services within the County's network of Libraries but this will be dependent on the outcome of the current Library consultation.

Touchdown spaces for the Locality team will be available within existing council buildings and market town premises from January 2018.

There will be a number of channel shift campaigns and marketing materials produced between now and the launch of SSDC's new website. This will inform customers, businesses and residents about the opportunity to create personal accounts and how to interact with the council digitally – for simpler, faster and more efficient 24/7 access to service requests and reporting.

Financial Implications

None from this report.

Council Plan Implications (2016-21)

Transform customer services through technology

Provide access to services to suit out customers' needs

Actively manage assets and resources to ensure the best financial or community return

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

Reduce carbon emissions by increasing awareness of local offices and use of alternative methods of contact i.e. online transactions, phones.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Equality Analysis Assessments were completed for original report.

Background Papers: *Ilminster Community Office November 2017*
