

**The Highland Council**  
**Customer Services Board**  
**Consultation Proposal**  
**16<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CSB/4/14

**Customer Services Review: Stakeholder Engagement**  
**Report by Depute Chief Executive and Head of Policy and Reform**

**Summary**

The Customer Service Board is considering the face to face Customer Service delivery for 23 Service Points across Highland. This paper outlines a proposal for further stakeholder engagement.

**1. Background**

1.1 The Customer Service Board is working to:-

- Undertake a rolling consultation of members, staff, partner agencies, and the public on the future of the Service Point network.
- Consider customer service provision in each of the 23 communities with a Service Point not designated a Community Hub.
- Agree a future service delivery model in each such community.

1.2 The Board agreed the following principles to guide its work:

1. One solution will not suit all communities and we need to look at each community to understand usage and opportunities for local service delivery;
2. It is about providing services not keeping buildings, not assuming that the current Service Points are in the right location;
3. Need to offer a face to face point of contact for those who do not want to or can't use technology or for more complex enquiries;
4. Consider potential for moving work out to support staff working from home or local locations;
5. Adopting an appointment based Registration Service to enable a peripatetic service to replace a dedicated Registrar; and
6. Proposals for dealing with complex enquiries and confidential issues in an environment where there is not a dedicated SP e.g. library, thinking about use of technology such as desktop VC to link to officers in other locations.

1.3 To date the Board has considered evidence and information as follows:

- An overview of Customer Service including a tour of Service Centre and "listen in" to live calls.
- A presentation from our Chief Registrar on the delivery of the registration service
- A presentation from Ian Murray HLH which demonstrated the HLH delivery model, current partnership working and their continued commitment to work with Customer Service.
- A presentation from Police Scotland which also demonstrated Police

Scotland commitment to continued partnership working.

- An overview of the Web site and the capabilities of enhancing a self-service model through our web site. (Channel shift).

1.4 During the August meeting it was agreed that officers would present a consultation proposal. The Board identified key stakeholders who should be included in the consultation proposal. They are:

- Communities
- Service Point Users
- Highland Council Tenants
- Community Councils
- Members
- Staff

This report sets out proposals for consulting with these groups.

1.5 The approach proposed will help meet commitments in the Council's Programme relating to empowering communities, particularly around engaging with the third sector, working with community councils, complying with community planning duties and public sector equality duties, listening to communities and improving public engagement and consultation.

## **2. Proposals for consultation and stakeholder engagement**

2.1 Good practice in consultation means<sup>1</sup>:

- Ensuring the scope of the consultation is properly defined;
- Using methods which are suitable to stakeholders involved in the process; and
- Allowing sufficient time for proper engagement and feedback.

Community planning duties mean we should consult the people affected by any proposed service change. Also the Council has a duty to consider the impact of any service change proposed on people with characteristics protected under the 2010 Equality Act in law. This is to ensure that any service changes are not discriminatory and may help advance equality.

2.2 Therefore in designing the consultation we need to:

1. Demonstrate that we consult with an open mind, listen to the views expressed and show how they have influenced the final decisions made.

Views on Service Points have already been gathered through local budget events and the points fed back so far need to be taken into

<sup>1</sup> Source: The Improvement Service and Consultation Institute (2013) Elected member briefing note no.19; Consultation.

account in constructing consultation questions. See Appendix 1 for the main points raised. In addition it is recommended that as well as consulting on the model(s) being considered by the Board, we should also seek views on whether there are alternative affordable models and explore whether and how some groups may be affected differently. The Board may also find it helpful to gauge the extent to which the principles they have developed are supported.

2. Use the right methods with the right groups and at the right time. Given the range of groups to engage with (at para.1.4), mixed methods will work best.
3. Make use of the planned consultation on budget savings with the Citizens' Panel, Communities Panel and equalities groups (through focus groups) from October onwards.

2.3 Proposals for consulting with the groups identified by the Board are set out below. These include making use of consultation already planned as well as focussing on the geographical areas which members have already agreed. The geographical areas are below.

<b>Service Points Areas</b>	
Inner Moray Firth (North)	Muir of Ord, Fortrose & Invergordon
Inner Moray Firth (South)	Fort Augustus, Hilton & Ardersier
Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey	Grantown & Kingussie
Lochaber	Acharacle, Mallaig & Kinlochleven
Skye & Wester Ross	Broadford, Kyle, Lochcarron & Gairloch
North West Sutherland	Lochinver, Durness & Bettyhill
East Sutherland	Bonar Bridge, Brora, Dornoch, Helmsdale & Lairg

Members may have a preference for the sequencing of the area based consultation across the seven areas.

#### 2.4 **Communities**

Consultation with communities in general will feature:

- Feedback from the budget events from specific locations (Summer 2014) as summarised in Appendix 1; and
- Specific questions in the survey being sent to the Citizens' Panel and the Communities Panel. The results will be more reliable for the Highland community as a whole, but insights can be gleaned from areas within Highland.

- 2.5 Consultation with communities of interest is planned as part of the budget savings consultation through focus groups made up of representative equalities groups. The purpose of these is to find out what the impact of proposals might be for people with protected characteristics and how any negative impacts might be mitigated. The focus groups involved are listed in Appendix 2. They will be independently facilitated by the UHI. We know from previous surveys that older people and people with disabilities are relatively high users of Service Points so focus groups with these groups in particular can probe deeper on questions about Service Point proposals.
- 2.6 In addition to the Highland wide consultation already planned it is proposed to undertake specific consultation with those 23 communities directly affected by the Service Point proposals. This will include Service Point users, Community Councils, Ward Members and where appropriate community organisations registered as part of the Communities Panel locally.
- 2.7 ***Service Point Users***  
People using the Service Points in the 23 communities affected are key stakeholders. Given the Board's principle to understand each community individually, it is proposed that focus groups are run in each of the 23 communities affected, organised by the seven areas agreed by the Board. We propose to commission the independent facilitation of the focus groups. This would require up to 8 weeks. Participants would be invited by Service Point staff to take part when attending the Service Point, filling in a form confirming their interest and availability. Focus group topics would include: their reasons for using the Service Point; what they value about it; options on alternative models (e.g. digital self-service or community hubs, appointment arrangements, Access Points via library provision and potential community surgery options); the impact of those options on them; the supports they might need for using any of the options; and any other ideas they might have. The findings from the focus groups would be presented to the Board.
- 2.8 ***Highland Council Tenants***  
Our Citizens' Panel feedback shows that Council house tenants are also relatively high users of Service Points and work is underway to identify how many tenants live in, and currently use Service Points for housing services, in the 23 communities affected by the review. It is proposed to engage with tenants in these areas with particular arrangements in place where tenant numbers are high (e.g. Invergordon). The methods to use are likely to include tenant group meetings and possibly interviews or surveys.
- 2.9 ***Community Councils and other community groups***  
Some Community Councils will have contributed to the local budget events already. To avoid asking them the same questions again, it is proposed to present them with the revised written proposals and ask for their written feedback electronically. The Community Councils affected are listed in Appendix 3. With the establishment of the Communities Panel, there is scope to identify any local interest groups to consult with as well. They could be sent the same information as Community Councils and asked to respond. Local

Ward Members could identify any groups from the panel they feel should be consulted.

### 2.10 **Members**

Prior to any local consultation, Members will be consulted in ward business meetings affected. This would outline the proposals, advise of the focus group process and seek views on which community groups to consult with from the Communities Panel in addition to relevant Community Councils. Once the consultation process is complete the feedback can be shared with local members. This along with any revised proposals will be presented to the Customer Service Review Board.

### 2.11 **Staff**

HR advice on engaging with staff is to introduce mixed channels of communication with staff. Proposals are:

1. Face to face sessions with line managers;
2. Encouraging on line comments facilitated via a feedback pro forma within the Customer Service portal where staff can provide their feedback direct to senior managers in confidence. Staff will be encouraged to take part and share their thoughts on the review.
3. The Customer Services Board has agreed to invite Trade Union officials to the next meeting. This will form part one of the consultation with staff. It is proposed that advice from the Trade Unions is taken on how they would like us to engage with the staff affected by the review.

## 3. **Phasing and Timescale**

3.1 It is anticipated that the proposed consultation and consultation review period will take place between October and March 2015. Below is an indicative outline of the proposed dates, which are subject to final confirmation following member review.

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Timing 2014/15</b>
Communities	Local budget events	Completed June
	Citizens' Panel Survey	October
	Communities Panel Survey	October
	Focus Groups - Equalities	October
Service Point users	Focus Groups x 23	Phased from November
Highland Council Tenants	Tenant Participation methods	Phased from November
Community Councils and Community Groups	Circulate written proposal to receive feedback. Community groups to be identified in ward business meetings below.	Phased from November
Members	Revised proposal to ward business meetings along with information on the consultation process	Phased from November in advance of local consultations

	locally.	
	Report on findings from consultation and any revised proposals at the Customer Services Review Board initially (may be interim findings)	From January onwards
Staff	We will take guidance from the Trade Unions with regards to consulting with staff	

Feedback to those providing views on how the consultation influenced the decisions made will have to be scheduled as well.

#### 4. **Implications**

Legal: the legal requirements to consult and consider impacts on equalities groups are set out in paragraph 2.1.

Risk: Following good practice guidance and using mixed methods to capture views from a range of stakeholders will minimise the risk to achieving Council commitments and duties on consultation. By engaging well members will have reliable evidence from stakeholders to inform their decisions on the review of service.

Resources: Most costs associated with the proposals are part of normal business and accommodated in core budgets in Corporate Development, Community Services and Chief Executive's Office. The facilitation of focus groups and analysis of results will be funded from existing budgets within the Chief Executive's Office.

Equalities: The proposals include methods to understand the impacts of proposed service changes on particular groups in the community. Current evidence shows this is important for older people and people with disabilities in particular. The duty to give due regard to advancing equality of opportunity means removing or minimising disadvantages and meeting different needs which can involve taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities.

Carbon CLEVER: Some consultation will require travel, e.g. to meet community councils and run focus groups locally. For these car sharing and public transport will be encouraged. Other methods such as surveys will be conducted mostly electronically to avoid unnecessary travel and associated emissions.

Rural: The 23 locations affected by the review are mostly rural and local views from rural communities will be gathered as part of the proposed methods.

Gaelic: While the review includes some areas where Gaelic is more likely to be spoken by more people, there are no new implications for Gaelic arising from

the consultation proposals.

## **5. Recommendation**

5.1 The Board is invited to note the good practice and legal requirements for consulting on proposals for service changes.

5.2 The Board is asked to agree:

1. That mixed methods are used to engage the stakeholder groups including in the geographical areas which members have already agreed as detailed in Section 2.3.
2. Agree in which order Members wish the community based consultation to be undertaken.
3. Best use is made of consultation already conducted and planned to inform the review.
4. That the scope of the review includes: questions building on the earlier feedback from local budget events; views on model(s) under consideration by the Board; whether there are any other affordable models to explore; whether and how some groups may be affected by proposals differently and how any negative impacts might be mitigated.
5. The methods and phasing as set out in the table at paragraph 3.1, based on the descriptions in Section 2 of the report
6. That those involved in the consultation receive feedback on how their views were taken into account in the final decisions made.

Author: Carron McDiarmid, Tina Page, Vicki Nairn

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**Themes emerging from the Budget Consultation Events 2014 on the following question:**

**How can we organise our customer service provision (Service Points) in the future to deliver efficiency savings? We need to save £355,220.**

- Face to face interaction is highly valued for particular groups and so generally people do not want to lose this service. In the main the concern centres on the impact the closure would have on the elderly and disabled. *“The majority of people don’t use the Service Point but those who do really need them.”* However, there was a view that people are already willing to travel to have a face to face interaction with someone.
- Strong support for alternatives to closure, in particular making Service Points more viable. There was a feeling from some that a reduced service was acceptable if a face to face service was retained:
  - Reduction in hours
  - Sharing of buildings with other providers
  - Sharing of staff in shared buildings e.g. library/service point, same staff for both.
  - Making the service point more efficient by taking on work from other Council services.
- Many people are open to changes to customer service provision. Retaining some form of face to face provision is regarded as important:
  - Other agencies taking on the Service Point function e.g. Post Office, CAB, Library;
  - Mobile Service Points in the same way mobile libraries and banks currently operate. Could lead to an increased level of service of certain communities.
  - A community hub model in village halls either through a weekly session of by an outreach appointment based system.
  - A general appointment system

However there is concern over privacy- need for a privacy booth for more sensitive discussions and the importance of ensuring the quality of service is maintained if through another provider. The support for alternatives was not as strong in areas that could potentially lose their service point.

- If Service Points were to close there would need to be appropriate transport options for vulnerable people to access services.
- Local knowledge is important, and this is lost with a centralised phone service. The importance of a professional person providing the support was also noted and that there could be reluctance to be assisted by a ‘volunteer’.
- Concerns about the impact of any closures on rural communities, in terms of the impact on employment and sustainability. Also concerns about lack of Council



presence and public face of the Council within communities. Some rural communities reported that the impact of closure would be greater within their rural areas than in Inverness/Inner Moray Firth due to the availability of alternative employment.

- Online services are supported as long as these are not the only way to access services. There needs to be adequate rural broadband provision and training for people who are inexperienced in using computers. Again, concerns expressed for those who, even with support, would find this challenging.

**10 Focus groups being run as part of the consultation on budget savings:  
groups will be for the following groups in the community**

1. Individuals with Visual Impairments
2. Older People
3. Individuals with Mental Ill Health
4. Ethnic and Faith Groups
5. Multi-cultural Women's Group
6. Individuals with Learning Disabilities
7. Individuals with Hearing Impairments
- Areas with high levels of deprivation:
8. Wick
9. Seaboard
10. Merkinch

## Appendix 3

### Service Points in the review and associated Community Councils

Service Point Affected	Primary Community Council to be Consulted
Muir of Ord	Muir of Ord
Fortrose	Fortrose and Rosemarkie
Invergordon	Invergordon Saltburn and Westwood <i>Recommend consulting with both as Saltburn covers part of Invergordon.</i>
Fort Augustus	Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston
Hilton	Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather
Ardersier	Ardersier and Petty
Grantown	Grantown on Spey
Kingussie	Kingussie
Acharacle	Acharacle
Mallaig	Mallaig
Kinlochleven	Kinlochleven
Broadford	Broadford and Strath
Kyle	Kyle
Lochcarron	Lochcarron
Gairloch	Gairloch
Lochinver	Assynt
Durness	Durness
Bettyhill	Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra
Bonar Bridge	Creich Ardgay and District <i>Bonar Bridge is in Creich but is right on the border of both so recommend consulting with both.</i>
Brora	Brora
Dornoch	Dornoch
Helmsdale	Helmsdale
Lairg	Lairg

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