

**The Highland Council**  
**Customer Service Board – Consultation Update**  
**17<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

|             |          |
|-------------|----------|
| Agenda Item | 4        |
| Report No   | CSB/1/15 |

**Report by Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development**

**Summary**

This report provides an update to Members regarding the Customer Services Review consultation.

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| <b>1.</b> | <b>Background</b>  |
| 1.1       | On the 16 <sup>th</sup> September, Board Members reviewed and agreed proposals for the future provision of Service Points and on how future consultation with Service Point users, Community Councils, Ward Members and community organisations should be undertaken.  |
| 1.2       | Based upon the proposals agreed by the Board, a public consultation document was drafted outlining the proposals for each area and key questions for the public. Members agreed the final document for consultation at the Board meeting on the 16 December. The document can be found at Appendix1.   |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>Consultation to Date</b>  |
| 2.1       | It was agreed with members to commence consultation with staff in early January, and then publish the consultation once all staff have been consulted with. As such the Customer Services Review public consultation was officially launched on Thursday 22 January 2015. It will run for 2 months, closing on Thursday 19 March 2015.   |
| 2.2       | The following provides a short summary of the consultation progress to date for each stakeholder group.  |
| 2.2.1     | <i>Ward Members</i><br><br>During November 11Ward Member briefings took place in each of the wards affected by the proposals. Members were provided with an outline of the proposals, an opportunity to ask any questions and feedback any initial comments on the proposals outlined. Members were also asked to provide details of any additional community groups who should be consultation as part of the public consultation phase. In addition, Members have been asked to feedback detailed comments as part of the consultation process, and an email to all members was sent on the 22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2015. |

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| 2.2.2 | <p><i>Trade Unions</i></p> <p>Trade Union representatives has been fully involved in the process to date and were specifically briefed on the consultation process prior to the consultation going live on the 22 January.</p> <p><i>Staff</i></p> <p>Over 100 staff were individually briefed by their line manager prior to the public consultation going live. A communication went out to staff informing them of their role in the consultation process. They were given consultation packs and hard copy forms to offer customers/users of the service. Staff have been provided with information via the Customer Services portal to enable them to respond to any their own personal feedback enquires. Staff were also informed they could seek support from their line manager, Union Representative and or HR. Trade Union representatives have confirmed that they are happy with this process.</p> |
| 2.2.3 | <p><i>Community Councils/Community Groups</i></p> <p>All of the agreed Community Councils and Community Stakeholder Groups were circulated the consultation documentation on 22 January. These Groups also received a separate response form, reflecting that they are being asked to respond as organisations rather than individuals. To date only 1 group has responded. A reminder is due to be circulated week beginning 16 February.</p>  |
| 2.2.4 | <p><i>Service Point Users</i></p> <p>Focus groups have now been scheduled across the 22 proposed affected Service Point locations. Participation consent forms were available in each of the 22 Service Points from 22 January. 20 forms have been received and this, combined with user information from October to December will assist officers in inviting users to participate in these focus groups. The focus groups will be facilitated by UHI with assistance from Policy Team staff.</p>  |
| 2.2.5 | <p><i>Public Consultation</i></p> <p>The consultation was launched on the Council's website on 22 January. The public can view the consultation documentation online and complete an online response form to provide their views. The documentation is also available in each of the affected Service Points and can be returned directly to the Policy Team. 41 response forms have been received to date by the Policy team and an additional 37 have been completed online.</p>  |

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| <b>3.</b> | <b>Review of work undertaken by Customer Services</b>   |
| 3.1       | As requested by members, additional work has been commenced to review any areas of work which could be undertaken by Customer Services staff in the quieter service points. Members will recall that a number of Service Points already take on additional work to support the service centre in terms of payments and telephony. Meetings with Finance and Housing have been scheduled, and a review is ongoing to look for synergies with other services, including contacting Directors to review and discuss what work might be applicable to be undertaken in Service Points. Initial feedback of any identified areas will be presented to the March Board. |
| <b>4.</b> | <b>Next Steps</b>   |
| 4.1       | The consultation closes on the 19 March and the responses received will be analysed along with the feedback from Members, staff and the feedback from the Budget Consultation process which asked in general terms about the principles of the customer services review. A report will then be presented to Members at the Customer Services Board.   |
| 4.2       | Officers are continuing to explore additional options for the 5 offices without firm proposals. This includes Fort Augustus, Durness, Acharacle, Gairloch and Lochinver.  |

### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

1. Note the content of the report and the progress to date on the Customer Services Review consultation.

Designation: Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development

Date: 10-2-15

Author: V.Nairn, Head of Digital Transformation  
A. Clark, Policy Officer  
T. Page, Customer Service Manager

## Highland Council Customer Services Review

### Consultation on Proposals

#### *Consultation Summary*

This consultation seeks views from Service Point users, Community Groups – including Community Councils, Highland Council tenants, Members and any other interested parties on the Council's proposals for delivering face to face customer services across Highland.

Proposals for changing customer service provision in 23 locations across Highland and reducing costs have been developed. In each of these locations it is proposed to change how services are currently provided. Therefore it is important to hear the views of the people that live in these areas and use these Service Points so that we can understand how any changes may impact on communities and what alternative options communities may want to suggest.

#### Section 1 Background

Customer Services has 35 Service Points providing face to face contact along with a dedicated Registration Office based in Inverness. We also operate a Service Centre in Alness that responds to telephone and email enquiries. There is also a Digital Services Team based in Inverness to support online services.

Highland Council has a Customer Engagement Strategy which was approved by Members in November 2012. This means that we look at how we provide services to the public on a regular basis to ensure that they meet customers needs. There has been a change in the way that customers want to contact the Council. As part of that change more customers are choosing to telephone or email us and therefore this means fewer customers visiting our offices.

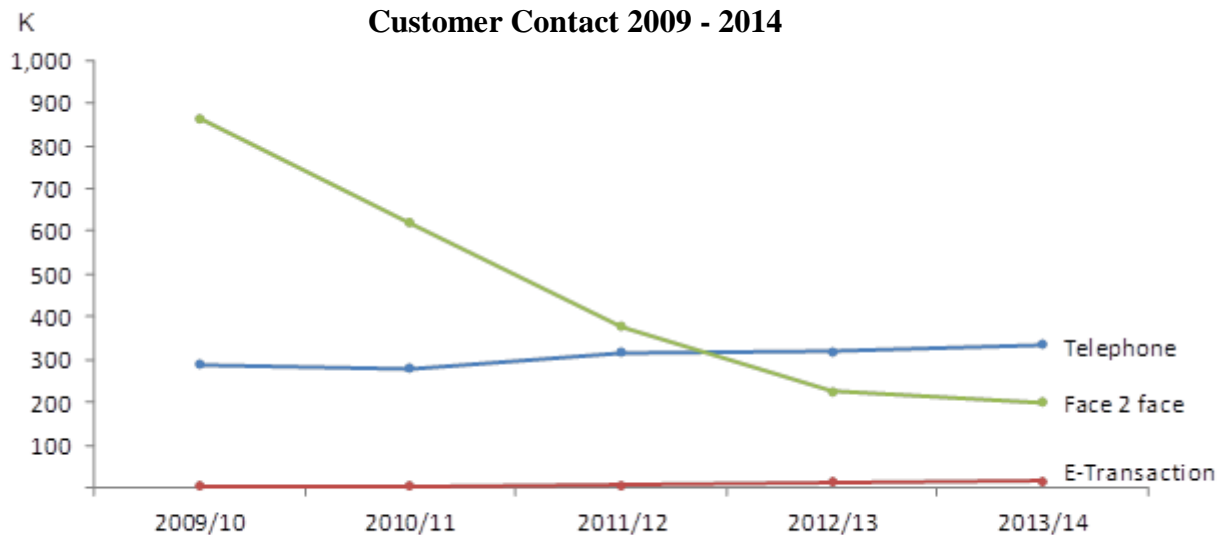
Whilst more and more customers are opting to telephone or e-mail to access the Council services there is still a requirement to offer a face to face service across Highland for complex in-depth enquiries/services such as Registration events. It is the intent of the Council to retain face to face Service Point provision in 12 locations. These Service Points will act as Community Hubs offering the full range of services as per our current Service Point provision, and we will continue to offer dedicated appointments for essential services to ensure our customers get a pre-arranged appointment.

The 12 proposed Community Hubs are as follows:-

Inverness Church Street, Nairn, Aviemore, Dingwall, Alness, Tain, Golspie, Wick, Thurso, Ullapool, Portree and Fort William

On the 13 March 2014 the Council agreed to implement a review of our face to face services in 23 locations across Highland. These 23 locations have been chosen because of the low number of customers who use this service or where there is another Service Point close by.

This review could make savings of up to £355,220. £160,000 will need to be used to meet budget savings with the rest re-invested in order to support improved services via telephone, email and online. A Customer Services Board of 10 elected Members was set up in April 2014 to undertake the review and to make a decision about future service 'provision' at 23 locations



We have used customer contact volumes for telephone, face to face and e-transactions (email etc.) from 2009 to the end of March 2014 to look at how we have historically delivered our services. This information is taken from actual data in our customer contact, payment and registration business systems. It is expected that e-transactions will substantially increase over the period due to the work that the Council is undertaking to offer more services on line. It is expected that the increase in telephone transactions will level out over the period and face to face transactions will continue to decline.

## Section 2 What has been done so far

The Board has been listening to information from partner agencies, such as High Life Highland and Police Scotland in order to better understand how we currently provide services and how we could potentially work in partnership with others to provide this in the future. They have also looked at how Service Points are currently used and for what purpose. The Board has agreed 6 principles to guide its work when considering how best to provide customer services in the future. These principles are:

1. One solution will not suit all communities and we need to look at each community to understand how Service Points are used and opportunities for local service delivery;
2. It is about providing services not keeping buildings where appropriate, 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 cannot 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 mobile service to replace a

dedicated Registrar in certain locations;

6. Proposals for dealing with complex enquiries and confidential issues in an environment where there is not a dedicated Service Point e.g. library, thinking about use of technology to link to officers in other locations;

Following consideration of this information, the Board has considered proposals for customer service provision in 23 locations across Highland and for reducing costs. In each location it is proposed to change how services are currently provided. However before a decision is made, it is important to hear the views of the people that live in these areas and use these Service Points so that we can understand how any changes may impact on communities and what alternative options communities may want to suggest.

## Section 3 The Proposals

In each of the 23 locations the Board has been considering current Customer Service provision. This has helped to identify alternative ways for delivering face to face customer services, including moving work to remote and rural locations.

The Board is proposing to retain Kyle of Lochalsh as a Community Hub which will reduce the number of Service Points requiring alternative service provision to 22.

In 17 of the 22 remaining locations, an Access Point solution is proposed. An Access Point would mean that at some local libraries you could:

- Book appointments for face to face services, such as Registration and other complex service requests;
- Access a confidential meeting place for discussing sensitive issues;
- Receiving signposting to other services. This may include printing out information and application forms;
- Be provided with general advice and information;
- Gain access to computers to support self-service activities;

The 17 proposed Access Points are:-

Muir of Ord, Fortrose, Invergordon, Hilton, Ardersier, Grantown, Mallaig, Kinlochleven, Broadford, Lochcarron, Bettyhill, Bonar Bridge, Brora, Dornoch, Helmsdale Lairg and Kingussie

A drive time analysis was carried out which demonstrated 96.3% of Highland Households are within a 30 minute drive of either a Library (Access Point) or a Community Hub with 86.9% of the Households within a 30 minute drive time of a Community Hub.

A variety of other options are being looked at for the remaining 5 locations:-

Fort Augustus, Durness, Acharacle, Gairloch and Lochinver

These include:

- Surgeries to be delivered locally
- Opportunities via mobile libraries and local partners e.g. Police Scotland, CAB
- Customers being directed to the nearest alternative

The proposals for each of the remaining 22 locations are listed below

## Section 4 Individual Proposals

The proposals for each of the 22 Service Points are grouped across 7 geographical areas. The detailed proposals for each Service Point are outlined below:

| Mid and Easter Ross |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Location            | Proposal   |
| Muir of Ord         | Access Point service delivery from Muir of Ord Library.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Dingwall)</i> |
| Fortrose            | Access Point service delivery from Fortrose Library.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Inverness)</i>   |
| Invergordon         | Access Point service delivery from Invergordon Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Alness).</i>   |

| Inverness Area |  |
|----------------|--|
| Location       | Proposal   |
| Fort Augustus  | Work in progress to explore other options with other partners.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Inverness)</i>               |
| Hilton         | Access Point service delivery from Inverness Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Inverness Church Street.</i>           |
| Ardersier      | Access Point service delivery from Ardersier Library.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Inverness Church Street or Naim )</i> |

| Lochaber     |  |
|--------------|--|
| Location     | Proposal   |
| Acharacle    | Work in progress to explore options/other alternatives. Access Point service delivery from Ardnamurchan Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Fort William)</i> |
| Mallaig      | Access Point service delivery from Mallaig Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Fort William)</i>  |
| Kinlochleven | Access Point service delivery from Kinlochleven Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Fort William)</i>   |

| Badenoch and Strathspey |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Location                | Proposal   |
| Grantown                | Access Point service delivery from Grantown Library.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Aviemore)</i>                    |
| Kingussie               | Access Point service delivery from Kingussie Court House, new location.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Aviemore)</i> |

| Skye and Wester Ross |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Location             | Proposal   |
| Broadford            | Access Point service delivery from Broadford Library.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Kyle)</i>   |
| Lochcarron           | Access Point service delivery from Lochcarron Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Kyle)</i>   |
| Gairloch             | Work in progress to explore options/other alternatives Access Point service delivery from Gairloch Library.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Ullapool)</i> |

| North West and Central Sutherland |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Location                          | Proposal  |
| Lochinver                         | Work in progress to explore options for locally based surgeries, opportunities with mobile libraries and potential partnership model for Registration with North West Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Ullapool)</i> |
| Durness                           | Work in progress to explore options through current partnership model for Registration delivery with North West Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau.<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Thurso or Golspie)</i>  |
| Bettyhill                         | Access Point service delivery from Bettyhill Library<br><i>(nearest Community Hub Thurso)</i>   |
| Bonar Bridge                      | Access Point service delivery from Bonar Bridge Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hubs Tain or Golspie)</i>  |
| Lairg                             | Access Point service delivery from Lairg Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Golspie or Tain)</i>  |
|                                   | Please note the cross over geographical ward boundaries for Bonar Bridge and Lairg  |



|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| East Sutherland |   |
| Location        | Proposal  |
| Brora           | Access Point service delivery from Brora Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Golspie)</i>            |
| Dornoch         | Access Point service delivery from Dornoch Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hubs Tain or Golspie)</i> |
| Helmsdale       | Access Point service delivery from Helmsdale Library<br><i>(Nearest Community Hub Golspie)</i>        |
|                 | <i>Please note the cross over geographical ward boundaries for Dornoch</i>                            |

## Section 5 Hearing what you think

We want to know what you think to help us understand the impact of these proposals on the people who use the service and the impact on the wider community.

You can respond by completing this form and posting it to:

The Policy Team  
Chief Executive's Office  
Glenurquhart Road  
Inverness  
IV3 5NX

Alternatively, you can request an electronic copy of the form from: [policy6@highland.gov.uk](mailto:policy6@highland.gov.uk)

OR

Complete the form online at: [www.highland.gov.uk/customerservicesreview](http://www.highland.gov.uk/customerservicesreview)

**PLEASE RETURN THIS BY THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2015**

Should you have any queries, please contact [customer.service@highland.gov.uk](mailto:customer.service@highland.gov.uk)

### Question 1

*What do you think about the 6 principles listed in Section 2?*

**Question 2**

*What do you like/dislike about the proposals for your local area?*

*(For the detailed proposals please see section 4 of the consultation document)*

**Question 3**

*How would the proposal for your area impact upon you/your community?*

**Question 4**

*How will it change the way you/your community interact with the Council?*

**Question 5**

*Do you think it will improve customer services or cause difficulties to any people or groups of people and if so how could these be overcome?*

**Question 6**

*If your local Service Point was removed, what other ways might there be to deliver customer service locally?*

*The survey is anonymous however please complete the following questions as this will help us to better understand your comments.*

**Which service point are you completing the survey about?**

**Gender:** Male  Female

**Age:** 16-34  35-55  55-64  64+

**Do you consider yourself to have a disability** Yes  No

**What do you use the Service Point for:**

|   |   |                                     |   |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| To make a payment for rent, council tax or other bill           | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> | Request a bulky uplift              | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| To get assistance with a Housing Benefit or Council Tax enquiry | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> | Request Free School Meals           | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| Register an event (birth, death or marriage)                    | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> | Apply for a Concessionary Fare Pass | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| Report a change in circumstances                                | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> | I do not use the Service Point      | <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> |

Other – please detail below

**Thank you for responding to our Customer Services Review.**

