

**The Highland Council**  
**Customer Service Board**  
**15<sup>th</sup> June 2015**

Agenda Item	4
Report No	CSB/7/15

**Customer Service Review**

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

**Summary**

At the Customer Service Board meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2015 Members agreed Alternative Proposal 3 which meant that 18 HC managed Service Points, 2 HLH managed Service Points (Broadford and Bettyhill under full TUPE arrangements) and 2 Service Points with reduced opening hours (Invergordon and Grantown) would be retained and the savings target of £160,000 would be met. Additionally, there were 10 Service Points identified as suitable for the Access Point model.

Members also asked officers to finalise Business Cases, tailored for each of the Service Points and prepare an Equality and Rural Impact Assessment to support the decision making process.

**1. Background**

1.1 The Highland Council, at its meeting on 13 March 2014:-

- i) **NOTED** the work undertaken as part of Customer Service Review 2;
- ii) **AGREED** that the Strategic Change & Development Fund should finance up to £68,500, for 2014-15 the enhancements to:
  - a) the website as detailed in Section 15.1;
  - b) the Service Centre as detailed in Section 15.2; and
  - c) quality and performance improvement as detailed in Section 16.4.
- iii) **AGREED** to establish, for the next 15 months, a cross-group customer Services Board of 10 Members with delegated powers to:
  - a) undertake a rolling consultation of Members, staff, partner agencies and the public on the future of the Service Point Network;
  - b) consider customer service provision in each of the 23 communities with a Service Point not designated a Community Hub; and
  - c) agree a future service delivery model for each such community on the basis of a business case which took into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.
- iv) **AGREED** that a report be submitted to the Resources Committee on

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achieving the saving of £355,200, as detailed in Section 19.1, should the decisions of the Board leave that saving unmet.

- 1.2 The remit of the Customer Services Board was to “agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a Business Case which takes into account the impact on service”. As such, a full Equality and Rural Impact Assessment has been carried out (see Appendix 1).
- 1.3 Once members had fully considered the consultation feedback and made the final decision on AP3 officers were asked to proceed with populating the Business Cases. The Table at Appendix 3 shows the final position agreed on Service Point provision. The format for the Business Case was agreed at the Customer Services Board on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014, and has now been completed.

## **2. Business Cases**

- 2.1 The completed Business Cases (see Appendix 2) contain information about each Service Point including current service delivery provision, staffing levels, volume of transactions, alternative delivery options and consultation outcomes. Information on reallocation of work opportunities is also included.

It is also important to note that the Access Point Model referred to in the Business Cases is not exclusive to the locations in the option Members have chosen and there may be future opportunities that can be explored to accommodate siting Access Points at additional communities within other partnership locations such as the Muir of Ord example offered in the Business Case

The Business Cases also include detail on equality, social, economic and rural impacts; which have been considered in the options assessment and overall recommendation for the Board to consider for each office.

## **3. Equality and Rural Impact Assessment**

- 3.1 This combined impact assessment considers the potential impact of the proposals in Customer Services Review 3 and has been informed by an extensive consultation and engagement exercise. All protected characteristics have been considered in the assessment although the potential for impact is primarily linked to age, disability and other ‘vulnerable’ groups.

Each Business Case also includes a summary of potential impact.

## **4 Next Steps**

- 4.1 Following member approval of the business cases, an implementation plan will be immediately created to deliver the proposals as soon as possible, with all changes made no later than 31.12.2015. Officers will review operational requirements and take the opportunity to migrate Service Points to Access Points/reduced opening hours at the earliest opportunity from the date of this meeting, giving the public 1 months’ notice of the change. Lead officers will

work with HR and the Trade Unions to support staff using redeployment opportunities and targeted voluntary severance options (on a case by case basis) for all staff employed within Service Points. This phased approach allows the Council to deliver the review savings targets, to manage operational cover, to support colleagues through the change process and to train staff in new business processes as required.

## **5. Implications**

### **5.1 Gaelic**

At this time there are no Gaelic implications identified throughout this process

### **5.2 Financial**

At the Customer Service Board meeting on 25th May 2015 Members agreed Alternative Proposal 3 which meant that 18 HC managed Service Points, 2 HLH managed Service Points (Broadford and Bettyhill under full TUPE arrangements) and 2 Service Points with reduced opening hours (Invergordon and Grantown) would be retained and the savings target of £160,000 would be met therefore the Board will not be required to seek full Council Approval.

### **5.3 Risks**

If the Board decide not to proceed as agreed, and in the timescale outlined in Section 4.1 the matter will need to be reported to the Resources Committee in August. Staff remain committed to delivering excellent customer service. At the request of the Board, Staff and Unions have been briefed on the decisions of the Board so far and any move from this position could have a serious impact on the moral of Customer Services staff and could increase uncertainty and anxiety. Currently a number of key posts are being filled under temporary and fixed term contracts to keep as many posts open as possible for redeployment opportunities. The decision on the future of the Service will allow posts to be confirmed and permanent positions offered and will give all staff certainty over their future employment.

### **5.4. Carbon Clever / Climate Change**

The move to more digital and telephone services will reduce the need for many customers to travel to access services and this will have a positive impact on carbon emissions. Similarly the proposed model retains a service in most communities through either a Community Hub or Access Point and so the need to travel should not increase significantly.

### **5.5 Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications identified at this stage.

**6. Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- i) Note the report and the work done to date
- ii) Note the EQIA and Rural Impact Assessment Appendix 1
- iii) Approve the Business Cases Appendix 2
- iv) Agree the timescales and approach outlined in Section 4

Designation: Michelle Morris

Date: 10.06.15

Author: Vicki Nairn, Tina Page

Background Papers:

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**Equality and Rural Impact Assessment**

<b>Name of policy</b>	<b>Customer Services Review 3</b>
<b>Service/ Department</b>	<b>Corporate Development/ Customer Services</b>
<b>Assessment carried out by:</b>	<b>Moira Grant, Customer Service Delivery Manager Rosemary MacKinnon, Equal Opportunities Officer Catriona Coull, Policy Co-ordinator</b>

**Summary**

The Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Specific duties require Scottish public authorities to enable the better performance of the equality duty and to assess the impact of applying a proposed new or revised policy or practice.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) considered the potential equality impacts of the Council's Customer Services Review 3. The ways that people contact the Council are changing, and the Council needs to ensure it continues to deliver quality Customer Service through a wide range of channels including telephone, face to face, via self-service, e-mail and web interaction in an efficient and effective manner that takes account of the needs of all customers.

The review has been wide ranging in its scope and consultation. Concerns have been raised about the impact of proposed changes on certain groups, in particular older people, disabled people and other groups perceived to be vulnerable.

As a result of the review, including the EQIA, the final proposals have taken account of the concerns raised and of mitigating factors that are already available, or to be put in place. As there are common themes identified from the Equality and Rural impact assessment both are addressed in this report.

**The Aims of the Customer Services Review 3**

The Customer Services Review 3 (CSR3) aims to:

- Increase choice for customers in the way they access services
- Provide an improved interactive self-service website
- Increase the number of services available
- Support the drive to become an efficient and effective Council
- Deliver the savings target
- Provide extended supported provision through the Service Centre and an effective website

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The vision for the Council's Customer Engagement Strategy 2012–2017 is to be an efficient and effective Council which delivers quality Customer Service through a wide range of channels including telephone, face to face, via self-service, e-mail and web interaction. The review presents an opportunity to improve the customer experience and to deliver the savings target of £160,000.

The Council's customers are changing the way they choose to contact us and more are demanding access to services on-line, by telephone and outside of normal working hours. Demand for services at some Service Points is declining and at the same time the Council needs to continue to ensure its service delivery is efficient.

The scope of the review considered the nature and volume of customer contact at 35 Service Points spread across the Highlands. In addition, there is a Service Centre in Alness which responds to telephone and email enquiries. A Digital Services Team based in Inverness also supports online services. The review also takes into account the requirements for the delivery of the Registration Service.

### **Benefits of the Review**

- Shifting resources away from face to face to telephone, on-line and mobile provision in line with customer expectation;
- Delivers savings of £160,000 p.a. recurring from 2015/16;
- Creates a sustainable model for the future in line with the Customer Engagement Strategy;
- Enables a managed change to a planned workforce reduction, including redeployment and opportunities for early retirement and voluntary severance;
- Enables a managed change in service delivery including the launch and continued development of the new website and building capacity within partners (High Life Highland) and third sector.

The original intent of the Council was to retain face to face Service Point provision in 12 Community Hub locations (Inverness Church Street, Nairn, Aviemore, Dingwall, Alness, Tain, Golspie, Wick, Thurso, Ullapool, Portree and Fort William). This would have meant we would have had to consider our face to face services in 23 locations across Highland, chosen because of the low number of customers who use the service or where there is another Service Point close by.

As a result of the ongoing consultation, consideration of service provision and informed by the assessment of impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities; a revised proposal is being considered by the Customer Service Board. This revised proposal would now see the retention of 18 Highland Council Service Points (Inverness Church Street, Nairn, Aviemore, Dingwall, Alness, Tain, Golspie, Wick, Thurso, Ullapool, Portree, Fort William, Kyle, Fort Augustus, Gairloch, Dornoch, Kingussie and Lochinver), 2 High Life Highland Partnership Service Points in Bettyhill and Broadford and 2 Service Points on a reduced hours basis in Invergordon and Grantown. This would be supplemented by 10 Access Points based in Libraries and delivered by High Life Highland.

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## **Purpose and Scope of the Equality Impact Assessment:**

The Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010 (S149) came into force in April 2011 – this is often referred to as the general duty – and requires public bodies to give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

The protected characteristics in the Equality Act are: Age, Disability, Gender, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnerships\*, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief and Sexual Orientation. \*The PSED only applies to Marriage and Civil Partnership in relation to employment.

Specific equality duties require the Council to assess the potential for equality impact (both positive and negative) in all areas of its work including proposed changes to key policies and major financial decisions. Assessments should 'consider relevant evidence relating to persons with relevant protected characteristics in relation to such assessments of impact'.

The purpose of an EQIA is to ensure that services or policies do not create unnecessary barriers which prevent people from different groups accessing services and employment opportunities.

This impact assessment considers the potential impact of the proposals in CSR3 and has been informed by an extensive consultation and engagement exercise. All protected characteristics have been considered in the assessment although the potential for impact is primarily linked to age, disability and other 'vulnerable' groups. A detailed business case has been prepared for each Service Point in the scope of the review which includes a summary of potential impact and a local demographic profile.

## **Equality: Key Demographics in Highland**

- 51% of the Highland population is female and 49% is male, compared to 52% and 48% respectively for Scotland.
- Highland has an older population than Scotland as a whole. According to the Census Scotland 2011, 20% of the Highland population is aged 64+ compared to 18% in Scotland as a whole. This rises to 28% of the population in the East Sutherland and Edderton ward.
- The minority ethnic population of Highland is 1.4%, up from 0.8%, compared to 4% for Scotland overall. The majority of people living in Scotland and Highland are White Scottish. In Highland, a larger percentage describes themselves as White-Other British (15% in Highland versus 8% in Scotland). Highland has a slightly higher than average Polish population (1.48% compared to 1.16%). The second biggest ethnic group in Highland is Asian; however, this group only represents 0.8% of the population in Highland

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compared with 2.7% in Scotland. Highland has a higher than average Gypsy/Traveller population (0.13% compared to 0.08%).

- According to the Census Scotland 2011, 19% of people in Highland have a limiting long-term illness (LLTI), health problem or disability compared to 20% in Scotland. In Highland, rates of LLTI range from 11.8% of the population in the Inverness South Ward to 23.1% in the East Sutherland and Edderton Ward. Areas with a higher incidence of LLTI are more likely to also have an aging population. LLTI increases with age, with 59% of men and 66% of women over the age of 75 having a LLTI compared to 8% of men and 7% of women under 30 (Scottish Household Survey).
- 46.1% of people in Highland are married or in a civil partnership (0.12% in civil partnerships). 24% are single compared to 28% of Scotland's population. This might reflect the older population that live in Highland.
- The most common response to the question of faith in the 2011 Census was 'No religion' in Highland and Scotland. The second most popular faith was Church of Scotland, and the percentage is higher in Highland (36.9%) than in Scotland (32.4%).



## Assessment Scope

### Collecting and Considering Available Data and Research

There is evidence that older people and disabled people are less likely to use digital access to services, and that some sections of the population will never fully use technology.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy>

ONS: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access-quarterly-update/2013-q1/stb-ia-q1-2013.html>

However, the reports also make clear that the gap in the digital divide is reducing and that older people and disabled people are not homogenous groups; many are extremely skilled and confident in the use of IT. Indeed, improved digital access improves access to services for many older and disabled people.

### Customer Services Data – Equality Analysis

Understanding the characteristics of our customers and how these vary can help us improve our services, tailor particular responses to their needs and improve our risk management. Responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey are analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

From recent Public Performance Surveys, we have been told:

- Older residents are more likely to prefer personal contact with an officer.
- Older people and disabled people are more likely to contact the Council in person. 39% of those aged 65+ contacted us this way compared to 26% of those aged 25-44 years and 44% of disabled people compared to 34% for the Panel as a whole.
- Generally disabled people tend to have less positive feedback about customer contact, but it is generally still positive..
- Increasing numbers of people are interested in receiving information about Council Services by text, particularly favoured by younger people.
- Younger people and those with school-aged children are more likely to contact the Council on-line than older people. 43% of all people aged 25-44 years compared to 17% of those aged 65 years and over contacted the Council on-line (2013).
- Younger people (25-44 years) are more likely to pay on-line for Council services using their debit/credit card; 20% said they had paid this way compared to only 1% of those aged over 65 years.

Item 17 Citizens' Panel 2014 - Performance and Attitudes Survey – Results

Item 15ii Results from the Citizens' Panel 2013 Performance and Attitudes Survey

Information was also gathered from the consultation exercise described below and local demographic profiles which can be viewed in the individual Service Point Business Cases and Profile Information Sheets.

### **Evidence Gaps**

Data is available through the analysis of customer contact by gender, disability, age and ethnicity through Council's annual survey of the Citizen's Panel. There is limited information and little or no evidence in relation to religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and gender re-assignment.

### **Involvement, Engagement and Consultation**

As the original proposals meant changing customer service provision in 23 locations across Highland a comprehensive consultation process was put in place. In particular, the views of people that lived in these areas and used these Service Points were sought to understand how changes could impact on their community and what alternative options communities wanted to suggest.

#### **Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

#### **Stage Two – Specific Consultation Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January 2015 to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remained anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals.

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area. This is detailed in the individual Business Cases.

Equality groups, for example all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity. Of 210 individual respondents:

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- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male and 5% chose not to disclose their gender.
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

### **Potential Impact**

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also on the wider community. These concerns were not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues or mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups include:

- **The loss of face to face contact:**  
The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

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It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

- **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

- **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

- **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing jobs in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

- **Transport:**

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

- **Use of Technology:**

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with.

Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

- **Social Isolation:**

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

**Quotes from Survey:**

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

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*“Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?”*

*“It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.”*

### **Rural Impact**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Common themes for potential negative impact include:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:**  
There was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:**  
The consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:**  
There was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:**  
It was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:**  
Some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.

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- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:**

It was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.

- **Loss of 'more than a Service Point':**

It was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. 'distressing'; 'real anxiety').

- **Economic impact:**

It was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:**

This suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.

- **Co-location of services:**

This could be with the Police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.

- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:**

Direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.

- **Local services:**

It was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries.

- **Reduced hours:**

It was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours.

- **Appointment based system:**

A small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

The full consultation documents can be viewed here:

[Customer Services Review - UHI Report on Focus Groups and Telephone Interviews](#)  
[Customer Service Consultation – Individual and Community Group Feedback](#)

Having considered the information gathered (including involvement and consultation) it is possible to assess the likely impact of the review. The following table identifies potentially how groups covered by the protected characteristics may be affected.

<b>Key Findings</b>	
<b>Potential Impacts on groups who share protected characteristics</b>	
<b>Age</b>	<p>From the Consultation and Public Performance Surveys, we have been told that older residents are more likely to prefer personal contact with an officer and are more likely to contact the Council in person.</p> <p>Age could also be a key factor in determining internet use and access to on line services.</p> <p>There is a need to consider communication and change management processes for customers of all age groups. The proposed phased implementation of Service Point closures would provide Customer Services with the opportunity to target support to vulnerable customers.</p> <p>It is recognised that there is a need to hold focus groups with older people and people with disabilities to understand what is needed to assist them to use on line services more and to understand if we need to adapt our self-service points for their needs.</p> <p>There is also evidence that increasing numbers of older people are using on line facilities.  <a href="http://www.nominettrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/NT%20SoA%20-%20Ageing%20and%20the%20use%20of%20the%20internet_0.pdf">http://www.nominettrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/NT%20SoA%20-%20Ageing%20and%20the%20use%20of%20the%20internet_0.pdf</a></p> <p>Whilst use of some applications (such as email) is</p>



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	<p>increasing in uptake and popularity amongst older people, others, such as use of mobile telephones for texting and setting up profiles on social networking sites, still have limited take-up.</p> <p>Older people's reasons for using computers and the internet lie in two main areas: 1) social activity (using features of the technology that enable engagement with others, who can be contacted and how they will be involved); and 2) cultural integration (using features of a technology to support existing needs of specific groups of older people).</p> <p>Increased digital inclusion for older people, people with disabilities and Council tenants will also be supported by the work of Citizens Online with funding by Highland Council and HIE. <a href="http://www.citizensonline.org.uk/">http://www.citizensonline.org.uk/</a></p>
<b>Disability</b>	<p>From the Consultation and Public Performance Surveys, we have been told that disabled customers are more likely to prefer personal contact with an officer and are more likely to contact the Council in person.</p> <p>Disability could also be a key factor in determining internet use and access to on line services.</p> <p>As disabled people may be less likely to own an internet enabled computer or to use a public access terminal it is important that a trusted and confidential support service be available to assist (via an Access Point in the Library or supported via Web Chat facility remotely based in the Service Centre). In all instances staff awareness of the barriers disabled people face in accessing services is vitally important.</p> <p>The transfer of the Web Development team to Customer Services has enabled closer working and understanding around the ongoing design and implementation of an interactive website and Self-Service facilities.</p> <p>The Digital Accessibility Centre tests the Council website to ensure compatibility with adaptation and enablement tools and software such as screen readers and magnification tools with a recent report noting <i>"the quality of the site tested was good and it was obvious that a lot of consideration had gone into making the site accessible."</i></p> <p>It is also important that provision in the form of dedicated</p>

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	<p>appointments in Community Hubs and possible surgery provision at key locations continue to be part of the change management process to provide a vital “safety net” for customers who are unable and/or unwilling to access services online.</p> <p>We will routinely seek advice from Disability Access Panels on accessibility (including signage) and privacy in our Service Points and Access Points (an audit on accessibility and confidential facilities at Access Points has been carried in conjunction with our partners High Life Highland).</p>
<b>Gender re-assignment</b>	No data or evidence was available covering this protected characteristic grouping.
<b>Pregnancy and Maternity</b>	No data or evidence was available covering this protected characteristic grouping.
<b>Race</b>	<p>There should be limited impact. There is a reference in the consultation for face to face preference for people who may not have English as a first language to support understanding. However, interpretation services are available, both face-to-face and by telephone.</p> <p>Our new website also has information in other languages, British Sign Language videos and tools to read our site out loud.</p> <p><a href="#">Read our accessibility statement.</a></p>
<b>Religion or belief</b>	No data or evidence was available covering this protected characteristic grouping.
<b>Sex</b>	No gender distinction was made as part of the review of Customer Services. It is noted that over 90% of Customer Services staff are female. This review is unlikely to change the profile moving forward, although staffing numbers will be reduced overall.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	No data or evidence was available covering this protected characteristic grouping.

## Addressing the potential impact

As part of the rolling consultation process with Members, staff, partner agencies and the public the original proposals for communities have evolved and changed.

Kyle Service Point was retained on the basis of increased customer contact. The suggested options for service delivery highlighted in the consultation and through the EQIA and Rural Impact process were examined and explored. Highland Council “work” was identified that could be decentralised out to Service Point staff to undertake at “quiet times” to sustain offices in local communities. The amount of work identified meant that 5 additional Service Points could be further developed and retained. This meant that the full range of Service Point function could continue at Fort Augustus, Gairloch, Lochinver, Dornoch and Kingussie.

Working with Police Scotland, a further co-location opportunity was also found at Fort Augustus Service Point. This means that the Service Point will move to the local Police Station and therefore enhances its future sustainability.

Further cross agency partnership work also identified the opportunity to have 2 High Life Highland managed Service Points in Bettyhill and Broadford (providing the full range of Service Point function). This arrangement will be mutually beneficial in terms of the sustainability of both Service Points and High Life Highland Libraries in these areas.

Co-location was one of the suggested alternative delivery options suggested in the consultation to mitigate against some of the potential rural implications.

Grantown Service Point was a particular concern, given a combination of demographics, transport and a high volume of Registration events. A Service Point offering a reduced hours service, 2 half days per week was therefore proposed, supplemented by an Access Point provided by the library.

A “reduced hours” Service Point function was also proposed for Invergordon Service Point on the basis of a high volume of Registration events and demographics. Again the full range of Service Point function will be delivered at this location 2 half days per week, supplemented by an Access Point provided by the library.

Again, a reduction in opening hours was a suggested alternative delivery option in the consultation to mitigate against some of the potential rural implications.

## Alternative Service Delivery Options

Groups with distinct needs can be met as Customer Services will continue to meet customer requirements through a range of contact methods including face-to-face, telephony (including text phone) and online. There is a provision to provide surgeries and appointments where required. The opportunity to provide home visits can also be investigated if necessary. The proposals mean that there will be:-

- **22 Service Points** offering a full range of Highland Council face to face services.
- **23 locations delivering Registration** (including the Home Based Registration provision). Supported by the dedicated Registration office in

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Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

- **Service Centre** – telephone and email customer contact. Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

The Service Centre will be the first point of contact for customers contacting the council by telephone. It will also support customers who may wish or need to make an appointment, need help to access or use self-service facilities and provide expertise to Access Points as required.

One of the suggestions for alternative service delivery in the consultation was to make it easier for people to contact the Council by phone. To assist in this, there will be access to free phones in Access Points to prevent costs being passed on to the public.

- **10 Access Points**, providing booking of appointments and a confidential meeting place for critical face to face service delivery, signposting, facilitating free telephone contact, general advice and information and access to public PCs for self-service. These Access Points are located in the following libraries - Ardersier, Bonar Bridge, Brora, Fortrose, Helmsdale, Kinlochleven, Lairg, Lochcarron, Mallaig and Muir of Ord.

There will also be 2 further Access Points in Invergordon and Grantown to supplement their reduced opening hours.

Access Points have been audited to ensure accessibility for disabled people e.g. wheelchair accessible, hearing loops and accessible parking.

- **Payment Provision** – there are in excess of 340 Post Offices and Pay Points where Council payments can be made.
- **Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in 40 (High Life Highland library premises).
- **Third Sector Options** –CAB offices and outreach services.
- **Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with Council services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:
- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding to the CAB network, which complements the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.

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- **Sheltered Housing Support**

Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.

- **Other Housing Support**

Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

### **Supporting Communication – Case Study**

The EQIA has highlighted the difficulty that some customers have when accessing services using the telephone. The following Case Study outlines how the Customer Service Centre in Alness now provides a booking service for communication support and how the experience and specialist training they have received demonstrates that they are now well placed to support vulnerable customers.

#### **Communication Support Case Study**

As a result of feedback and discussions with the local Deaf community, in April 2014 the Council introduced new arrangements to provide communication support for people who are deaf, deaf-blind, deafened and hard of hearing to support access to Council and NHS Highland services.

The new arrangements continued a long-standing partnership approach to providing communications support by the Council and NHSH and support our aims to advance equality and mainstream provision:

- Booking of interpreters is now undertaken in-house by the Council's Customer Services team and a BSL/English interpreter is employed by the Council.
- Additional support is procured from local, skilled freelance LSPs who were known to the Deaf community.
- The Council also arranges bookings on behalf of NHSH

Key objectives for the partners include:

- The provision of sustainable and adaptive services which aim to deliver better value for public funding while maintaining standards of service and identifying future improvement opportunities
- Improved information on the demand for, and use of, services
- Increased engagement with the local Deaf community
- Greater awareness in our organisations of communication support services and the rights of deaf people to access services and information.

[http://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/7594/new\\_support\\_in\\_highland\\_for\\_deaf\\_people\\_to\\_access\\_council\\_and\\_health\\_services](http://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/7594/new_support_in_highland_for_deaf_people_to_access_council_and_health_services)

## Digital Participation and the New Council Website – Case Study

The Consultation and impact assessments also highlighted some concerns around digital participation for communities, older and disabled people. While there is access in local libraries to internet facilities and considerable work underway through the Digital First Programme, the following case study demonstrates some of the work that has been undertaken so far to improve accessibility.

### New Council Website – Case Study

The Council's new website was launched in May 2014 and was designed using "industry best practice" to develop the site's content and improve accessibility. Developments included involving focus groups with local disabled people prior to the launch.

An accessibility audit for Highland Council website was carried out by the Digital Accessibility Centre (DAC) user/technical team in October 2014. The "accessibility" features of the site included:-

- Text to Speech – converting text on a computer to spoken word (Browsealoud)
- Magnification
- Ability to configure your interface – building in the facility to set preferences such as text size, colours, languages etc.

*"The quality of the site tested was good and it was obvious that a lot of consideration had gone into making the site accessible"*

<http://www.sitemorse.com/survey/report.html?rt=978>

[http://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/8315/highland\\_council\\_ranked\\_one\\_of\\_top\\_councils\\_for\\_online\\_presence](http://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/8315/highland_council_ranked_one_of_top_councils_for_online_presence)

Additionally, there is a link to the Highland Council's British Sign Language (BSL) homepage featuring BSL videos explaining our Services and general contact information. <http://www.highland.gov.uk/bsl> and information on interpretation

### **Monitoring, Reviewing and Mitigating Actions**

Key findings from the Citizens Panel and other focus groups will continue to be considered and reviewed carefully as part of the review process.

Our contact with customers is recorded on our Customer Relationship Management system. This provides valuable customer insight on issues that are important to customers. This information is reviewed on a regular basis and provides us with key information around our current service delivery and any demand for change in service provision.

Our new Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) will be adapted over time to enhance our capability to capture and record key customer events and specific information. This will improve our ability to record and report on specifics, for instance customer segmentation. This will enhance our current service delivery and planning for the future of customer services by making more information available on the nature of our customer groups.

Intelligence from business systems owned by other services such as housing can be also be better utilised to assist in building profiles of customer behaviours and requirements.

Customer Services will continue to actively review the Public Performance survey and other information sources for key points that impact upon and influence how Customer Services delivers its services.

Inverness City Committee has supported a national organisation **DisabledGo** to carry out audits of premises in Inverness and the surrounding area which are found on an online guide.

### **See Inverness Service Point**

[http://www.highland.gov.uk/directory\\_record/477949/inverness](http://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/477949/inverness)

- **Has the following link**
- **Disabled access details**

[Disabled access information by DisabledGO.com](#)

While this information is relevant only to the Inverness area at the moment it does demonstrate how this information can be used to help inform customers around accessibility.

### **Customer Excellence and Training**

Customer Services, including the Service Point Network and Service Centre achieved the Customer Excellence award in 2011. This award places emphasis on the customer journey and satisfaction. Our Highlife Highland partners are also currently undertaking this award and have a similar commitment to customer care.

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All Customer Services staff attend relevant training including customer care and equality and diversity training. The creation of a Strategic Quality and Performance Manager post and that of a Training Officer will ensure that the specific training needs of all Customer Services staff are met. This will present Customer Services with an opportunity to put skillsets necessary to support the needs of our vulnerable customers at the centre of our training programmes.

For our disadvantaged groups this will enable us to:-

- To assess our performance
- To understand how our services are being used
- To inform decisions on service delivery
- To highlight issues within key aspects of the service
- To inform our customers of our performance plans

### **Digital Participation**

Success will also require any accompanying process re-design to put the user first. This highlights the need for focus group(s) involvement at an early stage and throughout the development of website and any Self-Service facilities. It is also recognised that digital inclusion presents an opportunity to enhance equality.

Consideration also needs to be given to the types of support that disadvantaged groups may need to access online facilities. While there are standard accessibility guidelines around web design, research does seem to highlight the need to provide wide-ranging support. This could mean assisting customers by signposting to IT/internet courses, facilitating Self-Service in situ in Libraries or Community Hubs or providing assistance remotely using a Live Chat /Web Chat type facility (via Service Centre).

There are also new technologies on the market and recently implemented by other local authorities (e.g. Argyll and Bute) which provide customers with a face to face contact via a video link. This could potentially enhance service delivery for individuals and rural communities and help to mitigate the impact of the review. Customers will still be able to access a full range of council services by telephone throughout the Highland Council area.

### **Managing Change**

There is a need to consider communication and change management process for vulnerable and other customers e.g. homeless to mitigate any negative impact.

Measures can be put in place to support customers that may find change difficult. This includes training staff specifically in the equalities implications of change, effective signposting of customers to alternative offices/channels and the importance of literature provision (to assist all disadvantaged groups) in all Service Points to



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advise customers of changes in service and how they can continue to access Council services.

The proposed phased implementation of Service Point closures is particularly useful here as it will provide Customer Services with the opportunity to consider communication and change management process for vulnerable customers. This phased approach will also present staff with the opportunity to fully explore redeployment and alternative options.

To be fully inclusive we may need to look at on-going survey and involvement of targeted user groups, particularly in local communities where face to face service delivery provision at Service Points is to be withdrawn.

### **Registration Provision**

Additional reinvestment generated by the Review will present Customer Services with the opportunity to introduce "Tell Us Once" which enables multiple agencies to be advised of a death or birth. This excellent service will be welcomed by many families especially the bereaved as they will find that they no longer have to make direct contact with various government departments. At the moment only Highland Council and one other local authority in Scotland do not offer this service.

<https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once>

A recent change in legislation means that couples may marry anywhere in Highland with the agreement of the couple and the Registration Service without the premises being approved. This means even greater choice than ever before.

### **Other practical measures that could be put in place are:-**

To train staff in the equalities implications of the changes to support customers who may find change difficult.

Staff will be able to signpost customers to alternative offices and provide customers with information on e.g. library opening hours etc.

It is important that literature (to assist all disadvantaged groups) is provided in all Service Points to advise customers of changes in service and how they can continue to access Council services. Particular emphasis will need to be placed on suitable "local" information provided at Service Points that will close or move to delivery by Access Point.

For all disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups there is potential to encourage greater participation online, with the right website, the right services offered and the right type and amount of support in place.

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Customer service strategy where possible and where budget permits will continue to look at the technology needed to support service enhancement and delivery e.g. Live Chat\Web Chat.

It is recommended that key findings from the Citizens Panel and other focus groups should continue to be considered and reviewed carefully as part of an ongoing review process.

It is important to note that increased opportunities on internet channels and telephone developments (e.g. automated switchboard and payment facilities that will also provide a balance facility) has the opportunity to further equality of opportunity and to challenge certain stereotypes.

### **Implications for Staff**

Staff consultation will take place in accordance with Council policy and procedures. Staff briefings will take place as per personnel guidance and advice. Both HR and Trade Unions have been briefed and they are available to provide individual support as required.

Common questions arising from consultations will be made available via FAQs on the internet. All customer services staff will have access to this medium.

Measures will need to be put in place to ensure that staff who are absent from work due to ill health or maternity are kept informed on progress.

There should be a considered approach using a combination of face to face meetings (if possible), telephone calls and letters to keep staff informed on progress.

For all staff however, there is a need to ensure that essential support is provided by line management and personnel. The consultation process will be ongoing as per the Council policies with measures put in place to ensure equal access etc. to support, communication and the consultation process.

### **Where will the EQIA be published?**

The EQIA will be available on the Council website and paper copies can be made available on request at the Service Centre or in person within a Service Point.

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# Highland Council Customer Service Board Review 3

## Service Point Business Cases

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**Contents**

Acharacle Service Point Business Case.....	3
Ardersier Service Point Business Case.....	12
Bettyhill Service Point Business Case.....	21
Bonar Bridge Service Point Business Case.....	30
Broadford Service Point Business Case.....	39
Brora Service Point Business Case.....	48
Dornoch Service Point Business Case.....	56
Durness Service point Business Case.....	65
Fort Augustus Service Point Business Case.....	74
Fortrose Service Point Business Case.....	83
Gairloch Service Point Business Case.....	92
Grantown Service Point Business Case.....	101
Helmsdale Service Point Business Case.....	110
Hilton Service Point Business Case.....	119
Invergordon Service Point Business Case.....	128
Kingussie Service Point Business Case.....	137
Kinlochleven Service Point Business Case.....	146
Kyle Service Point Business Case.....	155
Lairg Service Point Business Case.....	162
Lochcarron Service Point Business Case.....	171
Lochinver Service Point Business Case.....	180
Mallaig Service Point Business Case.....	189
Muir of Ord Service Point Business Case.....	198

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Acharacle Service Point</b>
<b>Lochaber Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Lochaber area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Acharacle
- Mallaig
- Kinlochleven

The Fort William Service Point has been designated as the "Community Hub" for this area.

3. Current Service Delivery	Acharacle Service Point
<p><b>Service Provision</b></p> <p>Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.</p> <p><b>Location</b></p> <p>Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acharacle Resource Centre (surgery provision at this location)</li> <li>• Mallaig Library (co-located within High Life Highland premises)</li> <li>• Kinlochleven (located within High Life Highland premises)</li> </ul> <p><b>Opening Hours</b></p> <p>Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acharacle Opening Hours are on a Tuesday from 11.00am to 2.30pm</li> <li>• Mallaig Opening Hours are Thursday and Friday 10.00am to 4.00pm</li> <li>• Kinlochleven Opening Hours are Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.00pm. On a Tuesday and Thursday this office is open 10:00am to 1.00pm, 2.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acharacle – 0.1 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Mallaig – 0.4 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Kinlochleven – High Life Highland Staffing</li> </ul> <p><b>Service Users</b></p> <p>The Lochaber area offices provide access to council services for some of the largest geographical ward areas (Fort William and Ardnamurchan and Caol and Mallaig). These wards also have some of the lowest population densities.</p> <p><b>Acharacle Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions</b></p> <p>Acharacle Service Point has recorded very low weekly customer transactions for Highland Council business. There has been on average 1 transaction per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and less than 1 transaction on average per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.</p> <p><b>Registration function is not provided at Acharacle Service Point.</b></p> <p><b>Partnership Service Delivery</b></p> <p>There is no partnership service at Acharacle Service Point.</p>	

**4. Savings****Acharacle Service Point**

The closure of Acharacle Service Point would realise £2,180 direct savings towards the Customer Service Review and contributes to the realisation of Highland Council management (Team Leader) savings.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Acharacle Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Fort William (an appointment service can be offered as required). Fort William Service Point is open 9:30am to 4.00pm. It is also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions carried out at Acharacle Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 9 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of Acharacle Service Point.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Ardnamurchan, Knoydart and Mallaig (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is in Mallaig 35 miles away, this is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – there is no current Access Point option for Acharacle Service Point.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Acharacle Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals.

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from Community Group Consultation for Acharacle Service Point**

There were no individual responses from Acharacle however 3 Community Councils responded with regards to Acharacle Service Point.

One expressed concern regarding the proposal, noting the already limited service and the travel times involved to access the service. The views on the potential impact of the proposal were mixed with one group reporting that it would make little difference given the reductions already experienced, whilst another that it was difficult to determine at this stage. One Community Council felt that, although difficult for people in Acharacle, it would be positive for Strontian. This view was expressed with the belief that a Service Point would be located within the library in Strontian.



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Acharacle Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

**Transport:**

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

**Use of Technology:**

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

**Social Isolation:**

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

**Quotes from Survey:**

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Acharacle are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

A specific suggestion from Lochaber Access Panel was that an Access Point could be housed within the Community Company’s base or the Acharacle Centre.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Acharacle Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Acharacle Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. No partnership opportunity is in place or has been identified to sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 3.5 hours per week and has no capacity to undertake additional work

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Acharacle Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5. No Access Point Model proposed due to low volume of customer contacts.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Acharacle Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Closure of Acharacle Service Point.

<b>10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery</b>	<b>Acharacle Service Point</b>
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Closure of Acharacle Service Point with customer access supported by alternative service provision as outlined in Section 5.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Fort William Service Point or Ardgour Registration Office (Home Based Registrar).

It is also important to note that Access Point facilities will not be exclusive to the ten locations identified in this review. There will be opportunities to explore the introduction of Access Points across Highland including the far North.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Ardersier Service Point</b>
<b>Inner Moray Firth South</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Inner Moray Firth South area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Point locations

- Ardersier
- Hilton
- **Fort Augustus**

The Inverness, Nairn and Fort William Service Points have been designated as the "Community Hubs" for this area.

**Fort Augustus Service Point is also now retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Ardersier Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Ardersier Library (located within High Life Highland premises)
- Hilton (co-located within the Community Centre)
- Fort Augustus (Located in the Memorial Hall owned by Highland Council)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Ardersier Opening Hours are Monday 12.00pm to 5.00pm, Wednesday 10.00am to 1.00pm, Friday 12.00pm to 5.00pm and Saturday 10.00am to 1.00pm
- Hilton Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm
- Fort Augustus Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm.

**Staffing**

- Ardersier– High Life Highland Staffing
- Hilton – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Fort Augustus – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

Aird and Loch Ness is our fifth largest ward with a population density less than the Highland average.

**Ardersier Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Ardersier has recorded very low weekly customer transactions. There has been an average of 3 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 2 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration function is not provided at Ardersier Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

High Life Highland Staffing.

**4. Savings**

The move to an Access Point Model at Ardersier Service Point would realise no Highland Council staff savings but contribute to the realisation of management (Team Leader) savings.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Ardersier Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Ardersier Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Inverness or Nairn (an appointment service can be offered as required). Inverness Service Point is open 9:30am to 5.00pm. Nairn Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.00pm and offers Registration functions.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions carried out at Ardersier Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 21 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Ardersier, Inverness and 8 other libraries within 20 miles (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office in Nairn is located 6 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) located in Ardersier (current location of Service Point).



**6. Outcome of Consultation****Ardersier Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals.

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**There were no responses in relation to Ardersier from individuals or community groups.**

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Ardersier Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

**Transport:**

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

**Use of Technology:**

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

**Social Isolation:**

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

**Quotes from Survey**

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Ardersier are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Ardersier Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Ardersier Service Point is staffed by High Life Highland so no workload transfer can be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

**Ardersier Service Point**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership Working in place with High Life Highland. No additional partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
The move to an Access Point Model at Ardersier Service Point would realise no Highland Council staff savings but contribute to the realisation of management (Team Leader) savings.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5.  
Access Point Model can be delivered from current location, minimising potential impact on customers.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Ardersier Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Ardersier Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Ardersier Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Point Model from current library location supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Nairn Service Point and Inverness Registration Office.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Bettyhill Service Point</b>
<b>Northwest Sutherland Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

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- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Northwest Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Bettyhill
- Durness
- **Lochinver**

The Thurso Service Point has been designated as the "Community Hub" for this area. There is also the option for customers to utilise the Wick Service Point.

**Lochinver Service Point is also now retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Bettyhill Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Bettyhill ( Naver Teleservice Centre)
- Durness ( Visitor Centre co-located with Visit Scotland)
- Lochinver (co located within the Culag Annex)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Bettyhill Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm
- Durness Opening Hours are Tuesday and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm
- Lochinver Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 11.00am to 2.30pm

**Staffing**

- Bettyhill - 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Durness – Visit Scotland Staff
- Lochinver – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

North, West and Central Sutherland is our second largest ward with the lowest population density in Highland.

**Bettyhill Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Bettyhill has recorded low weekly customer transactions. There has been on average less than 10 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and less than 6 transactions per week on average for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is a function provided at Bettyhill Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is a Police Scotland partnership agreement at Bettyhill Service Point. Library Service is also provided.



**4. Savings****Bettyhill Service Point**

The TUPE transfer of Bettyhill Service Point ensures continuity of Library Service and Police Counter Service provision and contribute to the realisation of Highland Council management (Team Leader) savings.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Bettyhill Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Thurso (an appointment service can be offered as required). Thurso Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4.30pm. It is also delivers Registration

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions carried out at Bettyhill can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided at the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 8 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Bettyhill, Thurso and Wick (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Bettyhill and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Bettyhill (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Bettyhill Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation****Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals.

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Bettyhill Service Point**

Respondents suggested that there would only be small savings made by closing the Service Point, as the Service Point is co-located with the library and shares a member of staff. There were also concerns that closing the Service Point could put the Naver Teleservice Centre at risk.

Concerns about the distance to the Community Hub, unreliable telephone and broadband and residents becoming disengaged were also highlighted.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Bettyhill Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

**Transport:**

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

**Use of Technology:**

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

**Social Isolation:**

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

**Quotes from Survey**

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Bettyhill are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

Other suggested option for service delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

## 8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work

## Bettyhill Service Point

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Bettyhill Service Point will transfer under TUPE arrangements to High Life Highland so no workload transfer can be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

## 9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership Working in place with High Life Highland and Police Scotland. High Life Highland has confirmed 1) the need to maintain the Library function 2) the agreement to TUPE transfer. 3) the agreement to operate full Service Point function.  
  
No additional partnership working opportunities identified.
- Savings Impact  
TUPE arrangements will contribute to the realisation of Highland Council management (Team Leader) savings.
- Service Delivery Options  
Not required as full Service Point function recommended.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation for Bettyhill Service Point as retained under TUPE.
- Overall Recommendation  
TUPE transfer of Bettyhill Service Point – with full Service Point delivery maintained.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Bettyhill Service Point**

Bettyhill Service Point to be retained with budget and management transfer under TUPE arrangements to High Life Highland.

The Registration function would continue to be delivered from Bettyhill Service Point.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Bonar Bridge Service Point</b>
<b>East Sutherland Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council’s commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the East Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Bonar Bridge
- Brora
- **Dornoch**
- Helmsdale
- Lairg

The Alness and Golspie Service Points have been designated as the “Community Hubs” for this area.

**Dornoch Service Point is also now retained.**



**3. Current Service Delivery****Bonar Bridge Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Bonar Bridge (co-located in the Library)
- Brora (co-located within the Library and Cultural Centre)
- Dornoch (the building was owned by Scottish Court Service, new owner identified)
- Helmsdale (co-located within the Community Centre, owned by the Community)
- Lairg (co-located in the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Bonar Bridge Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 2.30pm to 5.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 5.30pm to 8.00pm
- Brora Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 1.30pm to 5.00pm
- Dornoch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm
- Helmsdale Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm
- Lairg Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Bonar Bridge – High Life Highland Staffing
- Brora – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Dornoch – 1.5 FTE (HC4)
- Helmsdale – High Life Highland Staffing
- Lairg – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

East Sutherland and Edderton is a mainly rural ward and has a low population density.

**Bonar Bridge Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Bonar Bridge has recorded very low weekly customer transactions of an average of 8 for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 9 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is not a function provided at Bonar Bridge Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

High Life Highland Staffing.

**4. Savings****Bonar Bridge Service Point**

The move to an Access Point Model at Bonar Bridge Service Point would realise no Highland Council staff savings but contribute to the realisation of management (Team Leader) savings.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Bonar Bridge Service Point.

**Community Hubs** – Alness and Golspie (an appointment service can be offered as required). Alness Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:00am to 12:30 pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm. Golspie Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:00am to 12.30pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions in Bonar Bridge can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 12 PayPoints within a 15 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Bonar Bridge, Dornoch, Golspie, Tain, Alness, Invergordon and Brora (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Alness 18 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Bonar Bridge (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Bonar Bridge Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation****Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals.

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Bonar Bridge Service Point**

Respondents from Bonar Bridge felt that maintaining face to face services was important for the community, particularly for elderly people. Poor public transport links and poor internet connections will make it challenging for the community to access services in the future.

If the proposal went ahead respondents felt that the Council would become distant and faceless, and communication with the Council would decrease. The proposals would cause difficulties in the community, particularly for people that cannot use technology. There were also concerns that if home visits were introduced then vulnerable people may be targeted by fraudsters.

There was confusion over where savings would be made as the building and staff member is shared with Highlife Highland.

It was suggested that the Council should be trying to improve services in the area rather than removing them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Bonar Bridge Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

**Transport:**

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

**Use of Technology:**

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

**Social Isolation:**

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

**Quotes from Survey**

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Bonar Bridge are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Bonar Bridge Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Bonar Bridge Service Point is staffed by High Life Highland so no workload transfer can be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership Working in place with High Life Highland. No additional partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
The move to an Access Point Model at Bonar Bridge Service Point would realise no Highland Council staff savings but contribute to the realisation of management (Team Leader) savings.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5.  
Access Point Model can be delivered from current location, minimising potential impact on customers.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Bonar Bridge Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Bonar Bridge Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery      Bonar Bridge Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Point Model from current library location supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Dornoch or Golspie Service Points.



<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Broadford Service Point</b>
<b>Skye and Wester Ross Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

## 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

## 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Skye and Wester Ross area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Broadford
- **Gairloch**
- **Kyle** – (it is proposed that this office will now remain open and be viewed as a Community Hub)
- Lochcarron

The **Kyle**, Ullapool and Portree Service Points have been designated as the “Community Hubs” for this area.

**Gairloch Service Point is also now retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Broadford Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Broadford (co-located with High Life Highland and Social Work)
- Gairloch Police Station (Partnership agreement with Police Scotland)
- Lochcarron (co-located in the Library)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Broadford Opening Hours are Tuesday to Friday 10.30am to 2.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm
- Gairloch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm
- Lochcarron Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Broadford – 1.0 FTE (HC4)
- Gairloch – 0.75 FTE (HC4)
- Lochcarron – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh is the largest Ward with the second lowest population density. The total population showed a slight decrease by 2010 despite inward migration.

**Broadford Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Broadford has recorded low weekly customer transactions of an average of 24 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 14 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration function is provided at Broadford Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is a Police Scotland partnership agreement at Broadford Service Point. Library Service is also provided.

**4. Savings****Broadford Service Point**

The TUPE transfer of Broadford Service Point ensures continuity of Library Service and Police Counter Service provision and contributes to the realisation of Highland Council management (Team Leader) savings.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Broadford Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Kyle, Ullapool or Portree (an appointment service can be offered as required). Kyle Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm. Ullapool Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm. Portree Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm. They all deliver Registration functions.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions in Broadford Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 12 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Broadford, Kyle, Plockton, Knoydart, Mallaig and Lochcarron (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is in Broadford and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Broadford (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Broadford Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals.

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Broadford Service Point**

Respondents in Broadford felt that maintaining face to face services is essential particularly for older people who may not have anyone else to talk to. They were also concerned it could deter people from moving to Skye as it will become more difficult to access Council services.

Respondents queried what savings would be made and felt it they would not be proportionate to the impact the change would have on the community.

Community groups highlighted the lack of public transport in the area and noted that the Service Point currently covers a large rural area.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Broadford Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

**Transport:**

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

**Use of Technology:**

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with.

Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

**Social Isolation:**

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

**Quotes from Survey**

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Broadford are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

It was also suggested that in Broadford, the Service Point should remain in the current premises until the three year lease is over and it should then be moved into the school or the new hospital complex.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Broadford Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Broadford Service Point will transfer under TUPE arrangements to High Life Highland so no workload transfer can be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership Working in place with High Life Highland and Police Scotland. High Life Highland has confirmed 1) the need to maintain the Library function 2) the agreement to TUPE transfer. 3) the agreement to operate full Service Point function.  
  
No additional partnership working opportunities identified.
- Savings Impact  
TUPE arrangements will contribute to the realisation of Highland Council management (Team Leader) savings.
- Service Delivery Options  
Not required as full Service Point function recommended.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation for Broadford Service Point as retained under TUPE.
- Overall Recommendation  
TUPE transfer of Broadford Service Point – with full Service Point delivery maintained.



<b>10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery</b>	<b>Broadford Service Point</b>
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Broadford Service Point to be retained with budget and management transfer under TUPE arrangements to High Life Highland.

Registration function would continue to be delivered from Broadford Service Point.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Brora Service Point</b>
<b>East Sutherland Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

## 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

## 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the East Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Bonar Bridge
- Brora
- **Dornoch**
- Helmsdale
- Lairg

The Golspie Service Point has been designated as the "Community Hub" for this area.

**Dornoch Service Point is also now retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Brora Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Bonar Bridge (co-located in the Library)
- Brora (co-located within the Library and Cultural Centre)
- Dornoch (the building was owned by Scottish Court Service, new owner has been identified)
- Helmsdale (co-located within the Community Centre, owned by the Community)
- Lairg (co-located in the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Bonar Bridge Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 2.30pm to 5.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 5.30pm to 8.00pm
- Brora Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 1.30pm to 5.00pm
- Dornoch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm
- Helmsdale Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm
- Lairg Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Bonar Bridge – High Life Highland Staffing
- Brora – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Dornoch – 1.5 FTE (HC4)
- Helmsdale – High Life Highland Staffing
- Lairg – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

East Sutherland and Edderton is a mainly rural ward and has a low population density.

**Brora Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Brora has recorded weekly customer transactions of an average of 35 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 33 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is a function provided at Brora Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is no partnership agreement at Brora Service Point.

**4. Savings****Brora Service Point**

The move to an Access Point Model at Brora Service Point would realise £10,670 savings towards the Customer Services Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Brora Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Golspie (an appointment service can be offered as required). Golspie Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:00am to 12.30pm. It is also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Brora Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 10 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Dornoch, Golspie, Tain, Brora, Helmsdale (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Golspie 5 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Brora (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Brora Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

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The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Brora Service Point**

Respondents in Brora did not like the proposals as they felt that the current provision works well and that it is already a 'community hub'.

Respondents highlighted that it could be difficult for people to travel to Golspie due to the limited availability of public transport and that it can take half a day for a return journey. Respondents felt that this would not be suitable for many people, including older people and people with disabilities. There was also a concern that the proposals would cause difficulties for people who cannot use computers.

The Community Council reported that the consultation was not accessible for vulnerable people within the community.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Brora Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Brora Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impacts:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Brora are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services



**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Brora Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Brora Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with some capacity for additional work load. However, with Golspie Community Hub in close proximity, an Access Point Model available and there being no partnership opportunity identified to sustain this office; it is not suitable for workload transfer.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Brora Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5. An Access Point Model can be applied from the current location.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Brora Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Brora Service Point (current Service Point location).

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

The move to an Access Point Model in current library location at Brora Service Point with customer access supported by alternative service provision as outlined in Section 5.

Registration for this area would be provided from Golspie Service Point.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Dornoch Service Point</b>
<b>East Sutherland Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the East Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Bonar Bridge
- Brora
- Dornoch
- Helmsdale
- Lairg

The Golspie Service Point has been designated as the "Community Hub" for this area.

**3. Current Service Delivery****Dornoch Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Bonar Bridge (co-located in the Library)
- Brora (co-located within the Library and Cultural Centre)
- Dornoch (the building was owned by Scottish Court Service, new owner has been identified)
- Helmsdale (co-located within the Community Centre, owned by the Community)
- Lairg (co-located in the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Bonar Bridge Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 2.30pm to 5.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 5.30pm to 8.00pm
- Brora Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 1.30pm to 5.00pm
- Dornoch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm
- Helmsdale Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm
- Lairg Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Bonar Bridge – High Life Highland Staffing
- Brora – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Dornoch – 1.5 FTE (HC4)
- Helmsdale – High Life Highland Staffing
- Lairg – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

East Sutherland and Edderton is a mainly rural ward and has a low population density.

**Dornoch Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Dornoch has recorded weekly customer transactions of an average of 96 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 122 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is a function provided at Dornoch Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is a Visit Scotland partnership service at Dornoch Service Point.

**4. Savings****Dornoch Service Point**

The closure of Dornoch Service Point would have realised £34,211 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Dornoch Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Golspie (an appointment service can be offered as required). Golspie Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:00am to 12.30pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions in Dornoch can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 16 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Dornoch, Golspie, Tain, Brora, Bonar Bridge, Invergordon, Alness and Cromarty (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Tain 9 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Dornoch.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Dornoch Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation****Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.
- 

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Dornoch Service Point**

Individual responses from Dornoch accounted for almost 40% of all responses to the consultation.

Respondents emphasised that Dornoch should be considered a unique town due to the large number of tourists that visit and the large number of weddings that take place each year. There was concern about the economic impact the proposals could have on the town and also about the sustainability of the building should the Council withdraw.

Respondents were concerned about the removal of face to face services and the impact this could have on Dornoch's large elderly population. It was suggested that elderly people are less likely to be able to travel, less likely to have access to technology but the most likely to need face to face services.

There were mixed views about using the library as an Access Point: some respondents felt this was a suitable alternative but others highlighted that the only private space is upstairs which is not accessible for everyone. It was suggested that the only way to overcome any problems was to keep the Service Point open as it currently is. Some respondents were also concerned about the figures that have been used to determine that Dornoch should be closed. They felt that the Council has used incorrect figures to calculate costs and savings.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Dornoch Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Dornoch Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

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*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Dornoch are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
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- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.



**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Dornoch Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Dornoch Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. While there is an Access Point Model available there is a Partnership with Visit Scotland in place which helps sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 30 hours per week and has sufficient capacity to undertake additional work.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Medium HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
There is a Visit Scotland Partnership in place at Dornoch Service Point.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Dornoch Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5. An Access Point Model can be delivered.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
Business Support workload transfer has been identified for Dornoch Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Retain Dornoch Service Point supported by the transfer of Business Support work load.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Dornoch Service Point**

Dornoch Service Point to be retained with support of the transfer of Business Support workload.  
Registration function would continue to be delivered from this office.

## Customer Services Review

**Business Case – Durness Service Point****Northwest Sutherland Area**

Author:	Customer Service Manager
Owner:	Director of Corporate Development

Revision date	Summary of Changes
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
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**1. Executive Summary**

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

**2. Introduction and Area Profile**

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Northwest Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- **Bettyhill**
- Durness
- **Lochinver**

The Ullapool and Thurso Service Points have been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

**Bettyhill and Lochinver Service Points are also now retained.**

3. Current Service Delivery	Durness Service Point
<p><b>Service Provision</b></p> <p>Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.</p> <p><b>Location</b></p> <p>Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bettyhill ( Naver Teleservice Centre)</li> <li>• Durness ( Visitor Centre co-located with Visit Scotland)</li> <li>• Lochinver (co located within the Culag Annex)</li> </ul> <p><b>Opening Hours</b></p> <p>Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bettyhill Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm</li> <li>• Durness Opening Hours are Tuesday and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm</li> <li>• Lochinver Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 11.00am to 2.30pm</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bettyhill - 0.5 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Durness – Visit Scotland Staff</li> <li>• Lochinver – 0.5 FTE (HC4)</li> </ul> <p><b>Service Users</b></p> <p>North, West and Central Sutherland is our second largest ward with the lowest population density in Highland.</p> <p><b>Durness Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions</b></p> <p>Durness has recorded very low weekly customer transactions of an average of less than 1 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average less than 1 transaction per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.</p> <p>Registration is a function provided at Durness Service Point.</p> <p><b>Partnership Service Delivery</b></p> <p>Visit Scotland staffing &amp; partnership agreement at Durness Service Point.</p>	
<p><b>4. Savings</b></p>	
<p>The closure of Durness Service Point would realise £5,330 savings towards the Customer Service Review.</p>	

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Durness Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Durness Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Ullapool and Thurso (an appointment service can be offered as required). Ullapool Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm. Thurso Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4.30pm. It is also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions in Durness can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 7 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Lairg (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Kinlochbervie 18 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – there is no Access Point Model for Durness Service Point.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Durness Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Durness Service Point**

Respondents highlighted the poor transport links in Durness which would make it difficult to travel to the Community Hub. The potential savings were also queried, especially as any replacement services are likely to be more expensive than the current Service Point.

There was also a concern that people will become disengaged from other services such as the CAB.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Durness Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Durness Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Durness Service Point

### Rural Impact:

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Durness are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

### Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Durness Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Durness Service Point is staffed by Visit Scotland so no workload transfer can be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership Working in place with Visit Scotland. No additional partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
The closure of Durness Service Point would realise savings and contribute to the realisation of Highland Council management (Team Leader) savings.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Durness Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Closure of Durness Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Durness Service Point**

Closure of Durness Service Point with customer access supported by alternative service provision as outlined in Section 5.

Registration for this area will be provided from Kinlochbervie Registration Office (North West of Scotland Advice and Information Centre).

It is also important to note that Access Point facilities will not be exclusive to the ten locations identified in this review. There will be opportunities to explore the introduction of Access Points across Highland including the far North of Scotland.

**Customer Services Review****Business Case – Fort Augustus Service Point****Inner Moray Firth South**

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

**1. Executive Summary**

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

**2. Introduction and Area Profile**

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Inner Moray Firth South area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Ardersier
- Hilton
- Fort Augustus

The Inverness and Fort William Service Points have been designated as the "Community Hubs" for this area.

**3. Current Service Delivery****Fort Augustus Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Ardersier Library (located within High Life Highland premises)
- Hilton (co-located within the Community Centre)
- Fort Augustus (Located in the Memorial Hall owned by Highland Council)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Ardersier Opening Hours are Monday 12.00pm to 5.00pm, Wednesday 10.00am to 1.00pm, Friday 12.00pm to 5.00pm and Saturday 10.00am to 1.00pm
- Hilton Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm
- Fort Augustus Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm.

**Staffing**

- Ardersier– High Life Highland Staffing
- Hilton – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Fort Augustus – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

Aird and Loch Ness is our fifth largest ward with a population density less than the Highland average.

**Fort Augustus Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Fort Augustus has recorded very low weekly customer transactions of an average of 15 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 10 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration function is provided at Fort Augustus Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is no partnership service at Fort Augustus Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The closure of Fort Augustus Service Point would have realised £12,132 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Fort Augustus Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Fort Augustus Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Inverness or Fort William (an appointment service can be offered as required). Inverness Service Point is open 9:30am to 5.00pm. Fort William Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. Both Service Point's offer Registration functions

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Fort Augustus can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 10 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Beauly, Kingussie, Caol, Fort William and 12 further libraries all between 20 and 40 miles away (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office in Fort William is located 31.5 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – there is no Access Point Model for Fort Augustus Service Point.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Fort Augustus Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

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Customer Services Consultation 2015**

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Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
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*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Fort Augustus Service Point**

Respondents were concerned about how the proposals would impact on the community. There was concern that community spirit would be affected and also about what would happen to the historically significant Memorial Hall.

Community groups were concerned about the distances people would have to travel as the Fort Augustus Service Point covers a wide geographical area and public transport in the area is limited. It was also queried if any replacement services would be as cost effective as the current Service Point.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Fort Augustus Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Fort Augustus Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with.

Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Fort Augustus are:

- Potential deterioration of fragile communities: there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services: the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- Council becoming more distant: there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- Transfer of costs to the public: it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- Poor internet coverage: some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same: it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’: it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- Economic impact: it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- Develop Service Points instead of closing them: this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- Co-location of services: this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- Make it easier to contact the Council by phone: direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- Local services: it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- Reduced hours: it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- Appointment based system: a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services

A meeting set up locally to explore alternative options for providing customer services in the area was held in October 2014 with Council officers, community representatives and Police Scotland. There was support for work being allocated to the Service Point and a preference for a full time solution (Mon – Fri 9-5pm) for the office to be found. Alternative delivery options were discussed with potential opportunities highlighted with Police Scotland and perhaps Job Centre Plus. It was agreed these would be explored. Other alternatives were deemed not suitable for a range of reasons.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Fort Augustus Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability
- 

Fort Augustus Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. With no Access Point Model in place and a partnership opportunity identified to co-locate with Police Scotland; this office is now sustainable and suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 17.5 hours per week and has sufficient capacity to undertake additional work.

**Recommendation** – transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
There is no Partnership agreement in place at Fort Augustus Service Point. However a partnership opportunity with Police Scotland has been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Fort Augustus Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5. No Access Point Model had been identified.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
Customer Service workload transfer has been identified for Fort Augustus Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Retain Fort Augustus Service Point with the support of Customer Services workload transfer.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery Fort Augustus Service Point**

Retention of Fort Augustus Service Point provision supported by the transfer of Customer Services workload and the relocation to the local Police Station.

Registration function continues to be delivered from Fort Augustus Service Point.

**Customer Services Review****Business Case – Fortrose Service Point****Inner Moray Firth North**

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

**1. Executive Summary**

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

**2. Introduction and Area Profile**

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Inner Moray Firth North area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Fortrose
- **Invergordon**
- Muir Of Ord

The Dingwall Service Point has been designated as the "Community Hub" for this area.

**Invergordon Service Point will also now provide Service Point delivery 2 half days per week.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Fortrose Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Fortrose (located within the Leisure Centre)
- Invergordon (co-located within the Library)
- Muir Of Ord (located within the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Fortrose opening hours are Monday to Friday 10.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 4.00pm
- Invergordon opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30 pm to 4.30pm
- Muir of Ord opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Fortrose – 1.0 FTE (HC4)
- Invergordon – 2.31 FTE (HC4)
- Muir Of Ord – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

The Black Isle Ward is a rural ward with a large number of individual settlements and an overall population density above the Highland average.

**Fortrose Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Fortrose has recorded weekly customer transactions of an average of 32 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 44 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is a function provided at Fortrose Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is no partnership service at Fortrose Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The move to an Access Point Model at Fortrose Service Point would realise £21,028 towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Fortrose Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Fortrose Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Dingwall (an appointment service can be offered as required). Dingwall Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4.30pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions in Fortrose Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 22 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Fortrose, Cromarty, Ardersier, Inverness and 8 other libraries within 20 miles (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Dingwall 15 miles away

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Fortrose.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Fortrose Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation****Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Fortrose Service Point**

Respondents in Fortrose wanted more information about what an Access Point would offer. It was acknowledged that a full-time office may not be required but there was concern at the complete loss of the facility.

Respondents were most concerned about the impact the proposals could have on elderly people as they are less likely to be able to use online or telephone services.



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Fortrose Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Fortrose Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Fortrose are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Fortrose Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Fortrose Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub within close proximity. While there is sufficient capacity to undertake extra work, there is no partnership opportunity in place to sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. There is also an Access Point Model available.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Fortrose Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model proposed.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Fortrose Service Point
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Fortrose Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Fortrose Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Point Model supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

Registration for this area is provided from Dingwall Service Point.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Gairloch Service Point</b>
<b>East Sutherland Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
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### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council’s commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Skye and Wester Ross area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- **Broadford**
- Gairloch
- **Kyle** – (it is proposed that this office will now remain open and be viewed as a Community Hub)
- Lochcarron

The Kyle, Ullapool and Portree Service Points have been designated as the “Community Hubs” for this area.

**Broadford Service Point is also now retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Gairloch Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Broadford (co-located with High Life Highland and Social Work)
- Gairloch Police Station (Partnership agreement with Police Scotland)
- Lochcarron (co-located in the Library)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Broadford Opening Hours are Tuesday to Friday 10.30am to 2.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm
- Gairloch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm
- Lochcarron Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Broadford – 1.0 FTE (HC4)
- Gairloch – 0.75 FTE (HC4)
- Lochcarron – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh is the largest Ward with the second lowest population density. The total population showed a slight decrease by 2010 despite inward migration.

**Gairloch Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Gairloch has recorded weekly customer transactions of an average of 44 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 31 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration function is provided at Gairloch Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is a partnership agreement with Police Scotland at Gairloch Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The move to an Access Point Model at Gairloch Service Point would have realised £18,757 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Gairloch Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Gairloch Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Kyle, Ullapool and Portree (an appointment service can be offered as required). Kyle Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm. Ullapool Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 1.00pm. Portree Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm. They both deliver Registration functions.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Gairloch Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 7 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Gairloch, Ullapool, Portree, Broadford, Lochcarron and Kyle of Lochalsh (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office in Dingwall is located 58.7 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Gairloch.



**6. Outcome of Consultation****Gairloch Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation****Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

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*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Gairloch Service Point**

Respondents were concerned about losing face to face services in Gairloch and felt that it was inappropriate to ask people to travel to Ullapool for services due to the long, often closed road and inadequate public transport. They noted that older and vulnerable people will be affected most.

Respondents were particularly concerned about the loss of their local member of staff. They highlighted that many people in the area like to talk to someone they know, especially for something as distressing as registering a death, but respondents were also concerned about a loss of a job in the area. There was also a concern that a mobile service could delay registering deaths.

There was a lack of support for an Access Point in the library as this is located in the school and a lack of support for a mobile service due to the large area it would need to cover.

Community Councils did not believe there would be any major savings as there has already been a reduction in service.

Some respondents were concerned about how the focus group in Gairloch was conducted and feel there should have been a public meeting instead.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Gairloch Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Gairloch Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Gairloch are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

Gairloch and Loch Ewe Action Forum suggested the use of the GALE Centre in Gairloch as a possible Access Point. The premises is a community owned hub containing office accommodation, classrooms for West Highland Collage, a tourist information centre, café, exhibition centre and community shop. The centre is open 6 days per week and is fully staffed.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Gairloch Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Gairloch Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. With no suitable Access Point Model available and a Police Scotland partnership in place to sustain this office it was suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 17.5 hours per week and also has the capacity to undertake additional workload.

**Recommendation** – transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership working in place with Police Scotland. No additional partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Gairloch Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
Customer Service workload relocation options have been identified for Gairloch Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Retain Gairloch Service Point support by Customer Service workload transfer.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Gairloch Service Point**

Retain Gairloch Service Point provision with Customer Service workload transfer.

Registration function would continue to be delivered from this office.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Grantown Service Point</b>
<b>Nairn Badenoch and Strathspey Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

## 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

## 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Nairn Badenoch and Strathspey area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Grantown
- **Kingussie**

The Aviemore Service Point has been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

**Kingussie Service Point is also now retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Grantown Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Grantown Town House (owned by Highland Council and shared with other services)
- Kingussie (Located in Council Offices owned by Highland Council)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Grantown Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.00pm
- Kingussie Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 1.30pm to 5.00pm

**Staffing**

- Grantown – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Kingussie – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

Badenoch and Strathspey has the third highest population but its large geographical size means that the population density is below the Highland average.

**Grantown Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Grantown has recorded weekly customer transactions of an average of 30 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 37 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration function is provided at Grantown Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is no partnership service at Grantown Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The reduction in hours at Grantown Service Point would realise £10,238 savings towards the Customer Service Review.



**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Grantown Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Grantown Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Aviemore (an appointment service can be offered as required). Aviemore Service Point is open 10:30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Grantown Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 15 PayPoints within a 15 miles radius of Grantown Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Badenoch, Aviemore, Grantown On Spey Tomintoul and Inverness (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Grantown and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) located in Grantown.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Grantown Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Grantown Service Point**

Respondents were concerned about the impact the proposals would have on elderly and disabled people, and a potential increase in isolation. The importance of face to face was underlined, especially for those unable to utilise technology. It was suggested that people should not have to travel far to register a death and that a mobile Registrar would not be appropriate here.

It was felt that the library was not a suitable location for the Access Point as it is too small and does not have a private space.

It was highlighted that the community would feel abandoned and like the Council does not care about it if the Service Point is removed.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Grantown Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Grantown Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Grantown Service Point

### Rural Impact:

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Grantown are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

### Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Grantown Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Grantown Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. There is no partnership opportunity in place or has been identified to sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. With an Access Point Model available and a limited capacity to undertake extra work this office is not recommended for workload transfer.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Grantown Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model proposed.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Grantown Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to reduced hour's provision for Grantown Service Point due to high volume of Registration events (per Service Point Profile sheets).

<b>10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery</b>	<b>Grantown Service Point</b>
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Retain Grantown Service Point provision on reduced hours supplemented by Access Point Model and alternative service delivery as outlined in Section 5.

Registration function to be delivered on reduced hours from this office or from Aviemore or Nairn Service Points.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Helmsdale Service Point</b>
<b>East Sutherland Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
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- consider customer service provision in each of the 23 communities with a Service Point not designated a Community Hub; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

## 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the East Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Bonar Bridge
- Brora
- **Dornoch**
- Helmsdale
- Lairg

The Golspie Service Point has been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

**Dornoch Service Point is also now retained.**



**3. Current Service Delivery****Helmsdale Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Bonar Bridge (co-located in the Library)
- Brora (co-located within the Library and Cultural Centre)
- Dornoch (the building was owned by Scottish Court Service, new owner has been identified)
- Helmsdale (co-located within the Community Centre, owned by the Community)
- Lairg (co-located in the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Bonar Bridge Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 2.30pm to 5.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 5.30pm to 8.00pm
- Brora Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 1.30pm to 5.00pm
- Dornoch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm
- Helmsdale Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm
- Lairg Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Bonar Bridge – High Life Highland Staffing
- Brora – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Dornoch – 1.5 FTE (HC4)
- Helmsdale – High Life Highland Staffing
- Lairg – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

East Sutherland and Edderton is a mainly rural ward and has a low population density.

**Helmsdale Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Helmsdale has recorded very low weekly customer transactions of an average of less than 5 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 4 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is not a function provided at Helmsdale Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

High Life Highland staffing.

**4. Savings****Helmsdale Service Point**

The move to an Access Point Model at Helmsdale Service Point would realise no Highland Council staff savings but contribute to the realisation of management (Team Leader) savings.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Helmsdale Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Golspie (an appointment service can be offered as required). Golspie Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:00am to 12.30pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Helmsdale Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 9 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of Helmsdale Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Golspie, Brora and Helmsdale (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Golspie 17 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Helmsdale (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Helmsdale Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Helmsdale Service Point**

Respondents showed some support for the principles guiding this review but were unsure how they would work in practice. They suggested that many people in the community cannot use technology and the community needs to maintain this local service.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Helmsdale Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Helmsdale Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Helmsdale Service Point

### Rural Impacts

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Helmsdale are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

### Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Helmsdale Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Helmsdale Service Point is staffed by High Life Highland so no workload transfer can be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership Working in place with High Life Highland. No additional partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
The move to an Access Point Model at Helmsdale Service Point would realise no Highland Council staff savings but contribute to the realisation of management (Team Leader) savings..
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5.  
Access Point Model can be delivered from current location, minimising potential impact on customers.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Helmsdale Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Helmsdale Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Helmsdale Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Model from current library location supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Golspie or Wick Service Points.



<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Hilton Service Point</b>
<b>Inner Moray Firth South</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Inner Moray Firth South area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Ardersier
- Hilton
- **Fort Augustus**

The Inverness, Nairn and Fort William Service Points have been designated as the “Community Hubs” for this area.

**Fort Augustus Service Point is also now retained.**

3. Current Service Delivery	Hilton Service Point
<p><b>Service Provision</b></p> <p>Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.</p> <p><b>Location</b></p> <p>Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ardersier Library (located within High Life Highland premises)</li> <li>• Hilton (co-located within the Community Centre)</li> <li>• Fort Augustus (Located in the Memorial Hall owned by Highland Council)</li> </ul> <p><b>Opening Hours</b></p> <p>Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ardersier Opening Hours are Monday 12.00pm to 5.00pm, Wednesday 10.00am to 1.00pm, Friday 12.00pm to 5.00pm and Saturday 10.00am to 1.00pm</li> <li>• Hilton Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm</li> <li>• Fort Augustus Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm.</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ardersier– High Life Highland Staffing</li> <li>• Hilton – 0.5 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Fort Augustus – 0.5 FTE (HC4)</li> </ul> <p><b>Service Users</b></p> <p>Aird and Loch Ness is our fifth largest ward with a population density less than the Highland average.</p> <p><b>Hilton Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions</b></p> <p>Hilton has recorded weekly customer transactions of an average of 54 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 71 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.</p> <p><b>Registration function is not provided at Hilton Service Point.</b></p> <p><b>Partnership Service Delivery</b></p> <p>There is no partnership service at Hilton Service Point.</p>	
<p><b>4. Savings</b></p>	
<p>The closure of Hilton Service Point would realise -£9,479 savings. This would reduce budget pressures for Customer Services and realise management savings.</p>	

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Hilton Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Hilton Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Inverness (an appointment service can be offered as required). Inverness Service Point is open 9:30am to 5.00pm.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Hilton Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 14 PayPoints within a 5 miles radius of the Hilton Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Ardersier, Inverness and 8 other libraries within 20 miles (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Hilton.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) located in Inverness.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Hilton Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

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**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Hilton Service Point**

The main concern from respondents in relation to Hilton was that the Church Street Community Hub would be too busy. Some respondents highlighted that it can be difficult for elderly people to get into the town centre and also that there is a lack of parking near the Community Hub.

One community group, which supports individuals with brain injuries, noted their client group may struggle if all face to face appointments need to be booked in advance. However they did feel that if the right support is provided then it would be achievable.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Hilton Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

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A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

**Transport:**

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

**Use of Technology:**

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

**Social Isolation:**

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

**Quotes from Survey**

"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."

"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."

"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."

"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"

It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Hilton are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Option for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Hilton Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Hilton Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with a Community Hub in close proximity. No partnership opportunity is in place or has been identified to sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 17.5 hours per week and has no capacity to undertake additional work

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
The closure of Hilton Service Point would reduce budget pressures for Customer Services and realise management savings.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Hilton Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Closure of Hilton Service Point.



**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Hilton Service Point**

Closure of Hilton Service Point with customer access supported by alternative service provision as outlined in Section 5. Note close proximity to Inverness Service Point Community Hub for face to face service delivery.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Inverness Registration Office.

It is also important to note that Access Point facilities will not be exclusive to the ten locations identified in this review. There will be opportunities to explore the introduction of Access Points across Highland.

## Business Case – Invergordon Service Point

### Inner Moray Firth North

Author:	Customer Service Manager
Owner:	Director of Corporate Development

Revision date	Summary of Changes
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Inner Moray Firth North area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Fortrose
- Invergordon
- Muir Of Ord

The Alness Service Point has been designated as the "Community Hub" for this area.

**3. Current Service Delivery****Invergordon Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Fortrose (located within the Leisure Centre)
- Invergordon (co-located within the Library)
- Muir Of Ord (located within the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Fortrose opening hours are Monday to Friday 10.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 4.00pm
- Invergordon opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30 pm to 4.30pm
- Muir of Ord opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Fortrose – 1.0 FTE (HC4)
- Invergordon – 2.31 FTE (HC4)
- Muir Of Ord – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

The Black Isle Ward is a rural ward with a large number of individual settlements and an overall population density above the Highland average.

**Invergordon Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Invergordon has recorded weekly customer transactions of an average of 175 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and an average of 199 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is a function provided at Invergordon Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is no partnership service at Invergordon Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The reduction in hours at Invergordon Service Point would realise £52,280 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Invergordon Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Invergordon Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Alness (an appointment service can be offered as required). Dingwall Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Invergordon can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 15 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of Invergordon Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Fortrose, Cromarty, Alness, Invergordon and 8 other libraries within 20 miles (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Alness 3 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Invergordon (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Invergordon Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Invergordon Service Point**

Respondents were concerned with maintaining face to face service provision, especially for people who cannot use technology. Respondents were also concerned about the mobile service, feeling that there were unanswered questions and that it would not work in practice. Some respondents felt the current Service Point is in the wrong location, but did not want to see another service being removed from the town.

Respondents stated that the proposal would impact on their ability to make rent and Council Tax payments as they currently do this weekly at the Service Point. It was highlighted that even though Alness is relatively nearby, not everyone can travel there easily.

The Community Council noted the lack of clarity around what provision would be put in place to support any emergency situations within Invergordon. It was noted that at times there would be a need to ensure an immediate response was provided and provision therefore needed to be in place to support this.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Invergordon Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Invergordon Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

## Rural Impacts

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Invergordon are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

### Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.



**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Invergordon Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Invergordon Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with a Community Hub in close proximity. There is an Access Point Model in place, however there is no partnership opportunity in place or has been identified to further sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 32.5 hours per week and has limited capacity to undertake additional work.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Invergordon Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model proposed.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Invergordon Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to reduced hour's provision for Invergordon Service Point due to high volume of Registration events (per Service Point Profile sheets).

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery      Invergordon Service Point**

Retain Invergordon Service Point provision on reduced hours supplemented by Access Point Model and alternative service delivery as outlined in Section 5

Registration for this office to transfer to Alness Service Point. Some Registration function will still be provided on a reduced hour's basis from Invergordon Service Point.

**Customer Services Review**

**Business Case – Kingussie Service Point**

**Nairn Badenoch and Strathspey**

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
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**1. Executive Summary**

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council’s commitment to remote and rural communities.

**2. Introduction and Area Profile**

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Nairn Badenoch and Strathspey area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- **Grantown**
- Kingussie

The Aviemore Service Point has been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

**Grantown Service Point will also now provide Service Point delivery 2 half days per week.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Kingussie Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Grantown Town House (owned by Highland Council and shared with other services)
- Kingussie (Located in Council Offices owned by Highland Council)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Grantown Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.00pm
- Kingussie Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 1.30pm to 5.00pm

**Staffing**

- Grantown – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Kingussie – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

Badenoch and Strathspey has the third highest population but its large geographical size means that the population density is below the Highland average.

**Kingussie Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Kingussie has recorded low weekly customer transactions of on average less than 25 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average 27 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration function is provided at Kingussie Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is no partnership service at Kingussie Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The move to an Access Point Model at Kingussie Service Point would have realised £12,028 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Kingussie Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Kingussie Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Aviemore (an appointment service can be offered as required). Aviemore Service Point is open 10:30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Kingussie Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 13 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the Kingussie Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Badenoch, Aviemore, Grantown On Spey and Inverness (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Kingussie and is 0.16 miles away from the current Service Point and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) located in Kingussie and Aviemore.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Kingussie Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

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Customer Services Consultation 2015**

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- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
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*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Kingussie Service Point**

Respondents felt it was important to retain face to face services, particularly for the older people in the area as they are less likely to be able to use technology or be able to travel to Aviemore.

Another main concern was the further centralisation of services in to Aviemore. It was suggested that the communities served by the Kingussie office are wide spread and the travel distances involved for people to access a service in the future will be even greater. It was suggested that there was a lack of public transport and that the cost of the increased travel would need to be met by already vulnerable individuals. There was also a concern about the potential economic impact the proposals may have on the village of Kingussie because in the future people may travel direct to Aviemore and do their shopping there.

It was also suggested that it would become more difficult to interact with the Council, and the Council will become more distant to people living in and around Kingussie.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Kingussie Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Kingussie Service Point

### Transport:

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### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

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The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Kingussie Service Point

### Rural Impact:

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Kingussie are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

### Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

It was suggested that given the refurbishment of Kingussie Court House, there was an opportunity to create a community hub there given that all Council services are going to be on site.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Kingussie Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Kingussie Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. While there is an Access Point Model available, there is a proposed partnership opportunity being progressed which will help to sustain this office for work load transfer. This office is open for 17.5 hours per week and has sufficient capacity to undertake additional work.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. However a potential opportunity is being progressed.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Kingussie Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model proposed.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
Business Support workload transfer has been identified for Kingussie Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Retain Kingussie Service Point supported by Business Support workload transfer.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Kingussie Service Point**

Retain Kingussie Service Point with Business Support workload transfer.

Registration function will continue to be delivered from this office.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Kinlochleven Service Point</b>
<b>Lochaber Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

## 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council’s commitment to remote and rural communities.

## 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Lochaber area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Kinlochleven
- Mallaig
- Acharacle

The Fort William Service Point has been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

**3. Current Service Delivery****Kinlochleven Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Acharacle Resource Centre (surgery provision at this location)
- Mallaig Library (co-located within High Life Highland premises)
- Kinlochleven (located within High Life Highland premises)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Acharacle Opening Hours are on a Tuesday from 11.00am to 2.30pm
- Mallaig Opening Hours are Thursday and Friday 10.00am to 4pm
- Kinlochleven Opening Hours are Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.00pm. On a Tuesday and Thursday this office is open 10:00am to 1.00pm, 2.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm

**Staffing**

- Acharacle – 0.1 FTE (HC4)
- Mallaig – 0.4 FTE (HC4)
- Kinlochleven – High Life Highland Staffing

**Service Users**

The Lochaber area offices provide access to council services for some of the largest geographical ward areas (Fort William and Ardnamurchan and Caol and Mallaig). These wards also have some of the lowest population densities.

In both Kinlochleven and Mallaig the primary users of the service are library customers.

**Kinlochleven Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Kinlochleven has recorded low weekly customer transactions of on average less than 25 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average 28 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**There is no Registration function provided at Kinlochleven Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

High Life Highland staffing.

**4. Savings****Kinlochleven Service Point**

The move to an Access Point Model at Kinlochleven Service Point would realise £2,281 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Kinlochleven Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Fort William (an appointment service can be offered as required). Fort William Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4.00pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Kinlochleven Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 8 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the Kinlochleven Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Mallaig, Knoydart, Broadford, Ardnamurchan, Fort William, Kinlochleven, Caol and Kyle of Lochalsh (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Kinlochleven and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Kinlochleven (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Kinlochleven Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from community group consultation for Kinlochleven Service Point**

There were no individual responses from Kinlochleven however there was one response from the Lochaber Access Panel regarding all the Service Points in the Lochaber area. It was suggested that an Access Point be considered either at Kilchoan or Acharacle, otherwise disabled members of the communities of Ardnamurchan, Morven and Knoydart will become isolated, or the journey time to the alternative Service Point in Fort William is 1.5 hours.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Kinlochleven Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Kinlochleven Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Kinlochleven are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Kinlochleven Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Kinlochleven Service Point is staffed by High Life Highland so no workload transfer can be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

Recommendation – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
Partnership Working in place with High Life Highland. No additional partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
The move to an Access Point Model at Kinlochleven Service Point would realise no staff savings but contributes to the realisation of Highland Council management (Team Leader) savings.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5.  
Access Point Model can be delivered from current location, minimising potential impact on customers.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Kinlochleven Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Kinlochleven Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery      Kinlochleven Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Model from current library location supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Fort William Service Point.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Kyle Service Point</b>
<b>Skye and Wester Ross Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
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- consider customer service provision in each of the 23 communities with a Service Point not designated a Community Hub; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

## 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Skye and Wester Ross area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- **Broadford**
- **Gairloch**
- Kyle – (it is proposed this office will now remain open and be viewed as a Community Hub)
- Lochcarron

The Kyle, Ullapool and Portree Service Points have been designated as the “Community Hubs” for this area.

**Broadford and Gairloch Service Points are also now retained.**

3. Current Service Delivery	Kyle Service Point
<p><b>Service Provision</b></p> <p>Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.</p> <p><b>Location</b></p> <p>Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadford (co-located with High Life Highland and Social Work)</li> <li>• Gairloch Police Station (Partnership agreement with Police Scotland)</li> <li>• Kyle (Kyle Service Point located on the High Street)</li> <li>• Lochcarron (co-located in the Library)</li> </ul> <p><b>Opening Hours</b></p> <p>Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadford Opening Hours are Tuesday to Friday 10.30am to 2.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm</li> <li>• Gairloch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm</li> <li>• Kyle Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm.</li> <li>• Lochcarron Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadford – 1.0 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Gairloch – 0.75 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Kyle – 1.5 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Lochcarron – 0.5 FTE (HC4)</li> </ul> <p><b>Service Users</b></p> <p>Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh is the largest Ward with the second lowest population density. The total population showed a slight decrease by 2010 despite inward migration.</p> <p><b>Kyle Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions</b></p> <p>Kyle has recorded weekly customer transactions on average of 100 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and 114 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.</p> <p><b>Registration function is provided at Kyle Service Point.</b></p> <p><b>Partnership Service Delivery (e.g. Police Scotland, Passport office)</b></p> <p>Library Service is provided.</p>	

4. Savings
<p>No savings to be made as Kyle Service Point to be retained as Community Hub.</p>

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Kyle Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Kyle Service Point.

**Community Hubs** – Portree and Ullapool (an appointment service can be offered as required). Ullapool Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm and delivers Registration functions. Portree Service point is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm and delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions in this location can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

**Payment Provision** – there are 12 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the service point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Broadford, Kyle, Plockton, Knoydart, Mallaig and Lochcarron (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Kyle Service Point and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Kyle (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Kyle Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. No focus group was held in Kyle as it had already been re-assigned as a Community Hub. However there were some paper consultation responses regarding the Kyle Service Point.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Kyle Service Point**

Respondents were pleased that the decision has been taken to retain the Kyle office. Should the office be retained there would be no negative impact upon the community.

However respondents did take the opportunity to note how a closure would have an effect. They thought it would negatively impact on elderly and disabled residents, and there would be no other way to deliver services, apart from a full Service Point. Respondents also highlighted that rural areas need to be considered differently as technology is not as reliable especially in bad weather.



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Kyle Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Kyle Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

Not applicable – Kyle Service Point retained as Community Hub.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work**

**Kyle Service Point**

Not applicable – Kyle Service Point retained as Community Hub due to increased customer volumes.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

Not applicable – Kyle Service Point retained as Community Hub.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

Kyle Service Point to be retained as Community Hub due to increase in customer contact volumes.

Registration function would continue to be delivered from this office.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Lairg Service Point</b>
<b>East Sutherland Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

### 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council’s commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the East Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Bonar Bridge
- Brora
- **Dornoch**
- Helmsdale
- Lairg

The Golspie Service Point has been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

**Dornoch Service Point is also now retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Lairg Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Bonar Bridge (co-located in the Library)
- Brora (co-located within the Library and Cultural Centre)
- Dornoch (the building was owned by Scottish Court Service, new owner has been identified)
- Helmsdale (co-located within the Community Centre, owned by the Community)
- Lairg (co-located in the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Bonar Bridge Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 2.30pm to 5.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm and 5.30pm to 8.00pm
- Brora Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 1.30pm to 5.00pm
- Dornoch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm
- Helmsdale Opening Hours are on a Monday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 12.30pm and Thursday 10.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm
- Lairg Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Bonar Bridge – High Life Highland Staffing
- Brora – 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Dornoch – 1.5 FTE (HC4)
- Helmsdale – High Life Highland Staffing
- Lairg – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

East Sutherland and Edderton is a mainly rural ward and has a low population density.

**Lairg Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Lairg has recorded low weekly customer transactions on average of 21 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average 26 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is a function provided at Lairg Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is a Police Scotland partnership service at Lairg Service Point.

**4. Savings****Lairg Service Point**

The move to an Access Point Model at Lairg Service Point would realise £11,520 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Lairg Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Golspie (an appointment service can be offered as required). Golspie Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:00am to 12.30pm. It is also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Lairg Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 11 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the Lairg Service Point office.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Dornoch, Golspie, Tain, Brora, Bonar Bridge, Invergordon, Alness and Cromarty (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Golspie 15 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Lairg.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Lairg Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
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**Summary of Key Findings from individual consultation for Lairg Service Point**

Respondents were concerned about the removal of local services and having to travel to Golspie or Tain for the Community Hub.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lairg Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

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#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

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## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lairg Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

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The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

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The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

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*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lairg Service Point

### Rural Impact:

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Lairg are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

### Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Lairg Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Lairg Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. This office is open for 17.5 hours per week and has capacity to undertake additional work due to very low customer volumes. There is however insufficient underlying business to ensure the sustainability of this office with workload transfer. There is also an Access Point Model in place and Police Scotland have been consulted on the proposals for this location.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
There is a Police Scotland partnership currently in place.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Lairg Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Lairg Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model at Lairg Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Lairg Service Point**

The move to an Access Point Model at Lairg Service Point with customer access supported by alternative service provision as outlined in Section 5.

Registration function has been delivered on a “by appointment only” in this office.

Registration for this area to be provided from Dornoch Service Point.

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Lochcarron Service Point</b>
<b>Skye and Wester Ross Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
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- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

### 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Skye and Wester Ross area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- **Broadford**
- **Gairloch**
- **Kyle** – (it is proposed this office will now remain open and be viewed as a Community Hub)
- **Lohcarron**

The Kyle, Ullapool and Portree Service Points have been designated as the “Community Hubs” for this area.

**Broadford and Gairloch Service Points are now also retained.**

<b>3. Current Service Delivery</b>	<b>Lohcarron Service Point</b>
<p><b>Service Provision</b></p> <p>Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.</p> <p><b>Location</b></p> <p>Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadford (co-located with High Life Highland and Social Work)</li> <li>• Gairloch Police Station (Partnership agreement with Police Scotland)</li> <li>• Lohcarron (co-located in the Library)</li> </ul> <p><b>Opening Hours</b></p> <p>Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadford Opening Hours are Tuesday to Friday 10.30am to 2.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm</li> <li>• Gairloch Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm</li> <li>• Lohcarron Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadford – 1.0 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Gairloch – 0.75 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Lohcarron – 0.5 FTE (HC4)</li> </ul> <p><b>Service Users</b></p> <p>Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh is the largest Ward with the second lowest population density. The total population showed a slight decrease by 2010 despite inward migration.</p> <p><b>Lohcarron Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions</b></p> <p>Lohcarron has recorded weekly customer transactions of on average 36 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average 24 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.</p> <p><b>Registration function is provided at Lohcarron Service Point.</b></p> <p><b>Partnership Service Delivery</b></p> <p>There is no partnership service at Lohcarron Service Point.</p>	
<p><b>4. Savings</b></p> <p>The move to an Access Point Model at Lohcarron Service Point would realise £12,104 savings towards the Customer Service Review.</p>	

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Lochcarron Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Lochcarron Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Kyle and Ullapool (an appointment service can be offered as required). Ullapool Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm. Kyle Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm. Both Service Points deliver Registration functions.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Lochcarron Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 9 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of the Lochcarron Service Point.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Broadford, Kyle, Plockton, and Lochcarron (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Kyle and is 23 miles away and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Lochcarron (current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Lochcarron Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Lochcarron Service Point**

The main concern in relation to Lochcarron was the distance to the nearest Community Hub in Kyle, as this route is not well served by public transport and can be dangerous in winter. It was also noted that people travel from surrounding villages to use the Lochcarron Service Point and so they will have even further to travel to reach Kyle.

It was felt that those in the community who do not have transport or are not able to access services online will be most disadvantaged by the proposal. Respondents were also unhappy at having to rely on a call centre. It was suggested that there would be more ill-feeling towards the Council if the proposals were to go ahead.

The Community Council also queried how the librarian was going to cope with the additional work. The group noted how there had already been a reduction of service at the existing office and how that had already had a negative impact locally.



## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lochcarron Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lochcarron Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Lochcarron are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Lochcarron Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Lochcarron Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. There is an Access Point Model in place and no partnership opportunity is in place or has been identified to sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 17.5 hours per week and has no capacity to undertake additional work.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Lochcarron Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model available.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Lochcarron Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model at Lochcarron Service Point (from current Service Point location).

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery      Lochcarron Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Point Model (from current location of Service Point) supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

Registration for this area to be provided from Dingwall, Kyle and Gairloch Service Points.

**Customer Services Review****Business Case – Lochinver Service Point****Northwest Sutherland Area**

Author:	Customer Service Manager
Owner:	Director of Corporate Development

Revision date	Summary of Changes
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

**1. Executive Summary**

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

**2. Introduction and Area Profile**

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Northwest Sutherland area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- **Bettyhill**
- Durness
- Lochinver

The Ullapool Service Point has been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

**Bettyhill Service Point is now also retained.**

**3. Current Service Delivery****Lochinver Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Bettyhill ( Naver Teleservice Centre)
- Durness ( Visitor Centre co-located with Visit Scotland)
- Lochinver (co located within the Culag Annex)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Bettyhill Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm
- Durness Opening Hours are Tuesday and Thursday 10.00am to 12.30pm
- Lochinver Opening Hours are Monday to Friday 11.00am to 2.30pm

**Staffing**

- Bettyhill - 0.5 FTE (HC4)
- Durness – Visit Scotland Staff
- Lochinver – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

North, West and Central Sutherland is our second largest ward with the lowest population density in Highland.

**Lochinver Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Lochinver has recorded low weekly customer transactions of on average 22 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average 9 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration is not a function at Lochinver Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is no partnership service at Lochinver Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The closure of Lochinver Service Point would have realised £10,478 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Lochinver Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Lochinver Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Ullapool (an appointment service can be offered as required). Ullapool Service Point is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 1.00pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Lochinver Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 6 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of Lochinver Service Point.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Ullapool (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located in Kinlochbervie 42 miles away.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – there is no access point option at Lochinver Service Point.



**6. Outcome of Consultation****Lochinver Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation****Customer Services Consultation 2015**

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Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Lochinver Service Point**

Respondents felt that Ullapool is too far away to expect people in Lochinver to travel to. They would like to see the Service Point remain in Lochinver to provide friendly, face to face services but do acknowledge that the Service Point could be improved.

The CAB queried if there would be savings from the Lochinver office, as any replacement services are likely to be more expensive. They were also concerned that people would become more disengaged.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lochinver Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

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Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lochinver Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

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The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

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### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

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*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Lochinver Service Point

### Rural Impact:

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Lochinver are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
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- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
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### Other Suggested Options for Service Delivery were:

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- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Lochinver Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Lochinver Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity or Access Point Model available. While there is no partnership opportunity in place, this office is open 17.5 hours per week and there is sufficient capacity available for workload transfer ensuring sustainability of this office.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Lochinver Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5. No customer Access Point Model identified.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
Workload transfer has been identified for Lochinver Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Retain Lochinver Service Point with Business Support workload transfer.

<b>10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery</b>	<b>Lochinver Service Point</b>
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Retain Lochinver Service Point with the transfer of Business Support workload.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Assynt Registration Office in Lochinver (Home Based).

<b>Customer Services Review</b>
<b>Business Case – Mallaig Service Point</b>
<b>Lochaber Area</b>

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
14.05.15	Customer Contact Volumes & Consultation Update (MG) Version 0.2
02.06.15	Workload Relocation, EQIA & Recommendation (MG) Version 0.3

## 1. Executive Summary

The remit for the Customer Services Board was confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014 as outlined below. It will :-

- 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; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council’s commitment to remote and rural communities.

## 2. Introduction and Area Profile

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Lochaber area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Kinlochleven
- Mallaig
- Acharacle

The Fort William Service Point has been designated as the “Community Hub” for this area.

<b>3. Current Service Delivery</b>	<b>Mallaig Service Point</b>
<p><b>Service Provision</b></p> <p>Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.</p> <p><b>Location</b></p> <p>Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acharacle Resource Centre (surgery provision at this location)</li> <li>• Mallaig Library (co-located within High Life Highland premises)</li> <li>• Kinlochleven (located within High Life Highland premises)</li> </ul> <p><b>Opening Hours</b></p> <p>Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acharacle Opening Hours are on a Tuesday from 11.00am to 2.30pm</li> <li>• Mallaig Opening Hours are Thursday and Friday 10.00am to 2pm</li> <li>• Kinlochleven Opening Hours are Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10.00am to 1pm and 2.00pm to 5.00pm. On a Tuesday and Thursday this office is open 10:00am, 2.00pm to 5.00pm and 6.00pm to 8.00pm</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acharacle – 0.1 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Mallaig – 0.4 FTE (HC4)</li> <li>• Kinlochleven – High Life Highland Staffing</li> </ul> <p><b>Service Users</b></p> <p>The Lochaber area offices provide access to council services for some of the largest geographical ward areas (Fort William and Ardnamurchan and Caol and Mallaig). These wards also have some of the lowest population densities.</p> <p>In both Kinlochleven and Mallaig the primary users of the service are library customers.</p> <p><b>Mallaig Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions</b></p> <p>Mallaig has recorded very low weekly customer transactions of on average less than 7 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average 1 transaction per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.</p> <p><b>Registration function is not provided at Mallaig Service Point.</b></p> <p><b>Partnership Service Delivery</b></p> <p>There is no partnership service at Mallaig Service point.</p>	

#### **4. Savings**

The move to an Access Point Model at Mallaig Service Point would realise £7,176 savings towards the Customer Service Review.



**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Mallaig Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Mallaig Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Fort William (an appointment service can be offered as required). Fort William Service Point is open 9:30am to 4.00pm. It is also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Mallaig Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 8 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of Mallaig Service Point.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Mallaig, Knoydart, Broadford, Ardnamurchan, Fort William, Kinlochleven, Caol and Kyle of Lochalsh (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – Mallaig has a CAB office less than 1 mile away from the Service Point and is an outreach service.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Mallaig (the current location of Service Point).

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Mallaig Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation  
Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from community group consultation for Mallaig Service Point**

There were no individual responses from Mallaig however there was one response from the Lochaber Access Panel regarding all the Service Points in the Lochaber area. It was suggested that an Access Point be considered either at Kilchoan or Acharacle, otherwise disabled members of the communities of Ardnamurchan, Morven and Knoydart will become isolated, or the journey time to the alternative Service Point in Fort William is 1.5 hours.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Mallaig Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Mallaig Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

**Rural Impact:**

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Mallaig are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

**Other Suggested Option for Service Delivery were:**

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Mallaig Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Mallaig Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity; however, there is an Access Point Model available. No partnership opportunity is in place or has been identified to sustain this office and make it suitable for workload transfer. This office is open for 8 hours per week and there is limited capacity to undertake additional work there is insufficient underlying business to ensure sustainability.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
No current partnership working in place. No partnership working opportunities have been identified.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Mallaig Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model available from current Service point location in library.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Mallaig Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Mallaig Service Point (from current location).

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Mallaig Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Model (from current location) supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Fort William Service Point. (Small Isles Registration Office on Eigg is available depending on location).

**Customer Services Review****Business Case – Muir Of Ord Service Point****Inner Moray Firth North Area**

<b>Author:</b>	Customer Service Manager
<b>Owner:</b>	Director of Corporate Development

<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
30.03.15	Draft Outline Submitted (TP) Version 0.1
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- consider customer service provision in each of the 23 communities with a Service Point not designated a Community Hub; and
- agree a future service delivery model for each community on the basis of a business case which will take into account the impact on service users and the Council's commitment to remote and rural communities.

**2. Introduction and Area Profile**

The business case for face-to-face Customer Services in the Inner Moray Firth North area reviews Service Point provision at the following Service Points locations

- Fortrose
- **Invergordon**
- Muir Of Ord

The Dingwall Service Point has been designated as the "Community Hub" for this area.

**Invergordon Service Point will also now provide Service Point delivery 2 half days per week.**



**3. Current Service Delivery****Muir Of Ord Service Point****Service Provision**

Customers use these facilities for a range of enquiries that are detailed on the individual Service Point profile sheets.

**Location**

Service Point delivery is from a variety of locations:-

- Fortrose (located within the Leisure Centre)
- Invergordon (co-located within the Library)
- Muir Of Ord (located within the Police Station)

**Opening Hours**

Opening hours reflect both service demand and other business use (e.g. Library opening hours)

- Fortrose opening hours are Monday to Friday 10.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 4.00pm
- Invergordon opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30 pm to 4.30pm
- Muir of Ord opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1.00pm

**Staffing**

- Fortrose – 1.0 FTE (HC4)
- Invergordon – 2.31 FTE (HC4)
- Muir Of Ord – 0.5 FTE (HC4)

**Service Users**

The Black Isle Ward is a rural ward with a large number of individual settlements and an overall population density above the Highland average.

**Muir Of Ord Service Point - Demand and Customer Transactions**

Muir Of Ord has recorded weekly customer transactions on average of 29 per week for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and on average 24 transactions per week for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

**Registration function is not provided from Muir Of Ord Service Point.**

**Partnership Service Delivery**

There is a partnership agreement with Police Scotland at Muir Of Ord Service Point.

**4. Savings**

The move to an Access point Model at Muir Of Ord Service Point would realise £13,171 savings towards the Customer Service Review.

**5. Alternative Service Delivery Options****Muir Of Ord Service Point**

There are a range of alternative delivery options for Muir Of Ord Service Point.

**Community Hub** – Dingwall (an appointment service can be offered as required). Dingwall SP is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4.30pm. It also delivers Registration.

All Service Points which deliver Registration are supported by the dedicated Registration office in Inverness where the Chief Registrar is based. This office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm (Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm).

**Service Centre** – telephone (the majority of transactions at Muir Of Ord Service Point can be delivered via telephone). Opening Hours 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Highland Council and are provided via the Service Centre.

**Payment Provision** – there are 26 PayPoints within a 20 miles radius of Muir Of Ord Service Point.

**Highland Council Website** – self-service at home or via public internet access in Muir Of Ord, Dingwall, Beaully and 6 other libraries within 20 miles (High Life Highland library premises).

**Third Sector Options** – The nearest CAB office is located 6 miles away in Dingwall.

**Outreach Provision** – There are multiple options for those requiring support, with services and programmes varying widely in terms of aims, content and format. Some examples of this are highlighted below:

- **CAB Network, Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation**  
This is an established practice as the Council provides annual funding of £1.1 million to the CAB network, who complement the work of the Council's in-house Money Advice and Customer Income Maximisation teams in providing key services to the public.
- **Sheltered Housing Support**  
Services such as Housing already provide support through different mechanisms that could be utilized e.g. Sheltered housing (mainly for older people) with a housing support service from a sheltered housing warden.
- **Other Housing Support**  
Another type of support that is available is where a support worker visits a customer in their own home, this is known as 'floating support'. This support can be offered, regardless of where a customer lives. For example, this could be for a young person who has just got their first council tenancy, an older person with mental health problems, living in the family home, or for a person who is moving on from living in supported accommodation.

**Access Point** – supported self service delivery via High Life Highland library (public internet access points) in Muir Of Ord.

**6. Outcome of Consultation****Muir Of Ord Service Point****Stage One – Community Consultation**

Phase 2 of the budget consultation (2014) focused on detailed proposals and was survey based. 9 focus groups were also held with hard to reach/ equalities groups and analysis of responses was undertaken by gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

**Stage Two – Specific Consultation****Customer Services Consultation 2015**

The Customer Services Consultation ran from January to March 2015. Researchers from University of Highlands and Islands held focus groups and telephone interviews in affected areas. A consultation document on the proposals was sent to community groups in affected areas and was also available online and in Service Points for the general public to complete.

UHI researchers compiled a report outlining the main points from the focus groups and telephone interviews. To ensure participants remain anonymous, this report did not organise comments by Service Point. Therefore it provides an overview of opinions about the proposals

The individual and community group responses were analysed and compiled into a separate report by the Policy Team. This report did highlight the main concerns for each affected area.

Equality groups for example, all Disability Access Panels in Highland, were invited to participate either directly or through the Communities Panel, in focus groups. Individual responses to an online survey were analysed by gender, age, disability and ethnicity - of 210 individual respondents:

- Over half the respondents were female (56%), 39% were male (39%) and 5% chose not to disclose their gender (5%).
- Most respondents (54%) were aged over 64; 20% were aged 55-64; 18% were aged 35-55; 4% were aged 16-34 and 3% did not disclose their age.
- Most respondents (70%) did not have a disability, while 22% did report they have some form of disability and 7% did not disclose whether or not they have a disability.

*The survey analysis noted that the number of people responding and reporting that they have a disability is high at just over a fifth. Over half of all respondents also noted that they were over 64. However, this is not far removed from the 2011 Census which identifies 19% of the Highland population as having a long term limiting illness or disability, and the incidence of disability is known to increase with age. It is anecdotally reported that the user group of Service Points is traditionally older individuals and people with a disability and this also reflects responses to the Council's annual Public Performance Survey carried out with the Citizen's Panel which regularly reports higher contact levels by older people and disabled people.*

**Summary of Key Findings from individual and community group consultation for Muir of Ord Service Point**

Respondents were concerned about the impact of removing face to face services in the area, as there are people in the community who may struggle to use alternatives.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Muir of Ord Service Point

### POTENTIAL IMPACT

Concerns were expressed during the consultation process at the potential impact the proposals would have on individuals but also the wider community. This was not specific to any particular Service Point area. Almost all respondents reported that the proposed changes would cause difficulties to particular groups within the community. In the main, the groups considered to face difficulties would be for disabled people, older people, and other 'vulnerable' groups.

Specific concerns were raised most often in relation to older people in communities, and also for disabled people. Many respondents additionally used the terms 'vulnerable people' or 'other vulnerable people' regarding their concerns. From examples, these terms refer in the main to older people who may be also be affected by age-acquired impairment, or younger disabled people including those with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues, mobility problems. However, vulnerability was also used to describe people on low incomes, young families and the homeless, carers and people in isolated communities with no transport.

A number of respondents in different locations voiced the opinion that with a growing ageing population in many areas the loss of Service Points will make life harder for what will be an increasing number of older and more vulnerable people.

Common themes for potential negative impact on equality groups Include:

#### **The loss of face-to-face contact:**

The consultation highlighted the importance of face-to-face contact for many people. Much was said about the benefits of personal relationships and face to face services for a number of people either because they do not have access to technology or are unable to use it, and those who may not have access to transport.

It was frequently noted that face to face services are important for those who do not want to or cannot use technology, or for more complex enquiries, and this was regarded as particularly important for people who struggle to use both online technology but also the telephone

Older people were specifically mentioned as being vulnerable but also individuals with sight or hearing difficulties, individuals with learning disabilities and people who may have literacy or numeracy difficulties, people on low incomes and people without access to technology or transport.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Respondents reported that speaking with someone face to face can offer reassurance and give confidence that their problem is being dealt with. These difficulties range from a lack of confidence in form filling, for example due to literacy issues or dyslexia, communication problems due to hearing loss or learning difficulties. In some instances, the importance of face-to-face contact was highlighted for customers for whom English is not a first language.

#### **Premises: accessibility, privacy and confidentiality:**

Some respondents felt that alternative options, such as libraries, were unacceptable either because the building is not accessible for disabled people, or is simply too small or too busy to accommodate an Access Point. Some specifically mentioned there is no private room available in their local library or that the private space is upstairs so is not accessible to all, and others said they would feel uncomfortable talking about their query over the library desk.

#### **Economic impact:**

Reference was made to the potential wider impact of reducing job in local areas and whether this would affect young people in particular. Comment was also made about costs were being transferred to often vulnerable people in remote communities who would either need to travel to a Community Hub to sort things out and/or experience a delay while they wait for people to travel to them.

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Muir of Ord Service Point

### Transport:

Concerns were raised about the availability of adequate and accessible public transport. It was highlighted that some people, particularly older people and disabled people, cannot use public transport at all so these people will have fewer services available to them. Reference was made to the difficulties people with mobility problems may face using public transport, and incurring long journeys, and experiencing long waiting periods for return journeys.

### Use of Technology:

The challenges of using technology were noted, not just online facilities but also the use of the telephone which anyone with hearing loss can at times struggle with. Respondents felt that older people in particular would struggle with the move to online and telephone services, as this group was viewed to be less able to use these methods.

It was noted that many older people are not computer literate. Even amongst some who were computer literate there were reports of the Council website being confusing and not always easy to find the right information on-line. It was therefore easier to go to the Service Point and get the right information straightaway.

Other respondents noted that they find it difficult to use telephone services. Some are hard of hearing, and some find it hard to explain things or to understand things properly over the phone.

### Social Isolation:

The Service Points were seen by some as a social place for communities enabling people to connect with one another, to avoid isolation, to obtain general information and to be signposted to other services. Many argued that the removal of the Service Points would weaken their communities, making already vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

Concerns were noted for individuals who may not seek the assistance they need if face-to-face contact is unavailable, thus removing a 'safety net' and are expressed in the quotes below (not Service Point specific).

### Quotes from Survey

*"I am disabled and I have no transport. It would be very awkward to get to [another place]. You know when you go there you'll get what you need. It takes a load off your mind."*

*"It's valuable for the elderly and those who lack a bit of confidence in completing forms, for example people with dyslexia."*

*"Both respondents in one group found telephone contact challenging for different hearing reasons due to background noises – all noise can be at the same level – so can pick up 'noise' of other calls or even paper rustling. One participant mentioned that with phone calls they sometimes have to call back to check they have understood – face-to-face includes body language and lip reading, and it's easier to ask someone to repeat themselves."*

*"Confidentiality is an issue. You assume Service Point staff are trained and have a deep understanding of confidentiality. You can expect a closed door and confidential space if you need it. The library is for everybody. Do you trust that librarians will be confidential? Will elderly people want to go into a public place and even voice what they need to find out?"*

*It (Service Centre) must be an equivalent service to what is currently offered in the Service Point. One aspect of this was ensuring that Service Centre staff members are as well trained and as helpful as the Service Point staff members currently are. The staff must recognise the needs of the people who are calling: they need to speak clearly, slowly and use simple language.*

## 7. Equality, Social, Economic and Rural Impact Assessment Muir of Ord Service Point

### Rural Impact:

A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. Potential negative impacts of the proposal in Muir of Ord are:

- **Potential deterioration of fragile communities:** there was concern that removal of Service Points would negatively impact on already fragile communities. Participants highlighted that many services have left communities over the years and removal of the Service Point would further weaken the community. These proposals were seen to be a downgrading of communities, as if the Council was trying to “dismantle” or “kill off” villages.
- **Lack of public transport leading to reduced accessibility of services:** the consultation highlighted that many people feel there is inadequate public transport to allow them to access the nearest Community Hub. It is also noted that if someone is able to travel by public transport they often have to wait long periods of time for a return trip.
- **Council becoming more distant:** there was some concern that removing Service Points would make the Council distant, remote and even “faceless”. Participants in the consultation suggested that this would result in ill-feeling towards the Council.
- **Transfer of costs to the public:** it was suggested that costs are being transferred to people who live in rural communities, mainly due to the cost of transport to Community Hubs as well as the time spent travelling and waiting for a return journey.
- **Poor internet coverage:** some participants highlighted that broadband coverage is not as reliable in rural areas which limits people’s ability to use online services.
- **Concern that all rural areas are being treated the same:** it was highlighted that each community needs to be looked at individually as each will have different needs. There is a need to consider the geography of the area, public transport, demographic profile and outlying communities.
- **Loss of ‘more than a Service Point’:** it was suggested that for some rural communities, the Service Point is more than a place to go for Council business. There is a level of trust and a relationship between residents of small communities and the Service Point staff. The words a significant number of people chose to use in describing the prospective loss of these facilities were dramatic (e.g. ‘distressing’; ‘real anxiety’).
- **Economic impact:** it was stated that there could be economic impacts on rural communities, for example the loss of a job in the Service Point. It could also deter people from moving to the area, if there are poor local services.

### Other Suggested Option for Service Delivery were:

- **Develop Service Points instead of closing them:** this suggestion focussed on decentralising work out to Service Point staff so that staff are kept busy when there are no customers.
- **Co-location of services:** this could be with the police, the Post Office, museums, libraries, sports centres, schools and health centres.
- **Make it easier to contact the Council by phone:** direct phone numbers could be provided rather than routing calls through the Service Centre. It was also suggested that free phones are provided in Access Points to call the Service Centre.
- **Local services:** it was suggested by some that it was important to focus on providing services in the local area. Suggestions included a mobile service, home visits and local surgeries
- **Reduced hours:** it was suggested that the current Service Points are maintained but on reduced hours
- **Appointment based system:** a small number of participants felt that having an appointment based system could help overcome difficulties, especially knowing when and where to access specialist services.

Muir of Ord Hall and Facilities Company requested that the Council considers placing an Access Point in the planned community hub in the Muir of Ord village square. One of the key elements of the new hub is intended to be an information point.

**8. Re-allocation and Relocation of Work****Muir Of Ord Service Point**

The following evaluation criteria have been applied to each of the Service Points that are deemed at risk.

- Highland Council Staffing
- Close Proximity to a Community Hub
- Availability of Alternative Service Delivery
- Partnership Working
- Workload Capacity
- Sustainability

Muir of Ord Service Point is a Highland Council staffed office with no Community Hub in close proximity. This office is open for 17.5 hours per week and has capacity to undertake additional work due to very low customer volumes. There is however insufficient underlying business to ensure the sustainability of this office with workload transfer. There is an Access Point Model in place and Police Scotland have been consulted on the proposals for this location.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Customer Service work to be applied.

**Recommendation** – no transfer of Business Support Work to be applied.

**9. Options Assessment (against agreed criteria)**

It is recommended that the following criteria need to be taken into account when assessing the service delivery options at this location.

- Customer Service Volumes  
Low HC volumes (2 years data analysed).
- Partnership Working  
There is currently a Police Scotland partnership in place.
- Savings Impact  
There would be an impact on deliverable savings if Muir of Ord Service Point was retained.
- Alternative Service Delivery Options  
Range of options as outlined in Section 5 with an Access Point Model available.
- EQIA\Rural Impact Assessment\Social\Economic Factors  
Considered, reviewed and reflected in overall recommendation.
- Potential for Workload Relocation  
No workload relocation options have been identified for Muir of Ord Service Point.
- Overall Recommendation  
Move to Access Point Model for Muir of Ord Service Point.

**10. Recommendations for Future Service Delivery**

**Muir Of Ord Service Point**

Customer Service delivery by Access Point Model supplemented by alternative service delivery provision as outlined in Section 5.

Consideration will also be given to the placing of Access Point in the planned community hub in the Muir of Ord village square. One of the key elements of the new hub is intended to be an information point.

The Registration function is not delivered from this office.

Registration for this area is provided from Dingwall Service Point and Inverness Registration Office.



## Appendix 3

<b>SUMMARY TABLE – AGREED CUSTOMER SERVICES DELIVERY MODEL (Alternative Proposal 3)</b>				
<b>Service Points (Community Hubs) (13)</b>	<b>Service Points supported by workload transfer (5)</b>	<b>Service Points managed by HLH (2)</b>	<b>Service Points with reduced opening hours (2) (2 x half days per week)</b>	<b>Access Points in Libraries (10)</b>
Alness	Fort Augusts	Bettyhill	Grantown	Ardersiar
Aviemore	Gairloch	Broadford	Invergordon	Bonar Bridge
Dingwall	Dornoch			Brora
Fort William	Kingussie			Fortrose
Golspie	Lochinver			Helmsdale
Inverness				Kinlochleven
Kyle				Lairg
Nairn				Lochcarron
Portree				Mallaig
Tain				Muir of Ord
Thurso				
Ullapool				
Wick				

NOTE - No Access Point provided for Acharacle, Durness, and Hilton at this time.