

SATURDAY MORNING OPENING ARRANGEMENTS

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor John Fisher
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Amanda Singleton, Head of Customer Access and Financial Support
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	N/A
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision	Non Key Decision

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Opening hours on Saturday mornings were reduced in September 2016. This report details the outcome of this decision. In light of the current customer numbers Members are asked to consider further reducing the opening hours in order to enable the best use of resources at the times when customer demand is highest.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is asked to RESOLVE that:

- 2.1 The Town Hall cease to open on Saturday morning for cashiering and basic enquiries with effect from September 2017.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 There would be no further saving in the Customer Services budget, but this move would help to ensure that we can maintain appropriate staff resources in the week, when demand is substantially higher.

Legal Implications

- 3.2 As Saturday opening arrangements form part of the staff contracts, formal staff consultation will be required before any changes could be implemented. However informal consultation indicates that staff are in favour of the proposal.

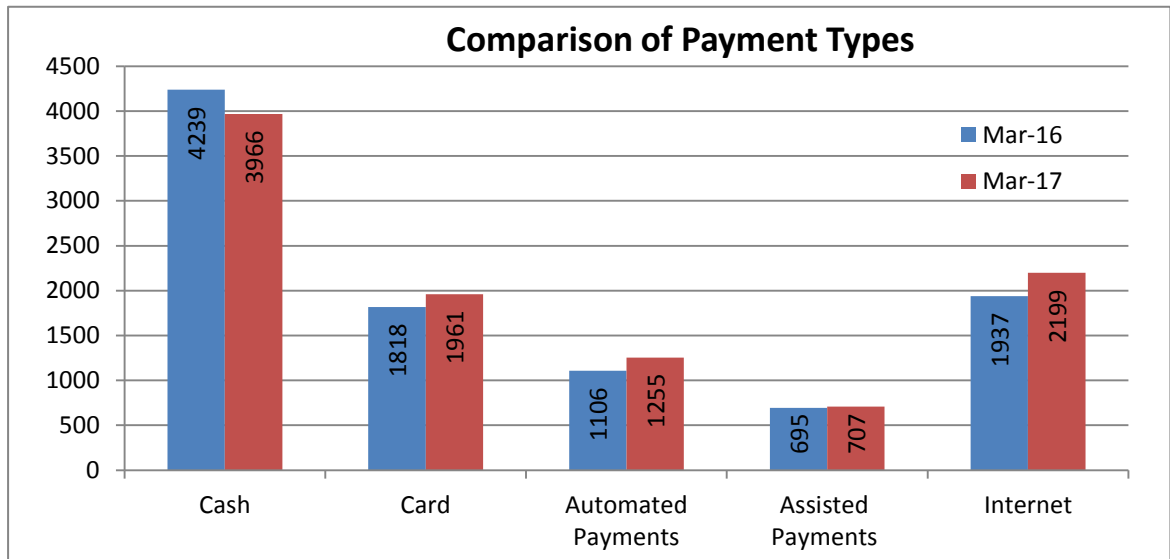
Service / Operational Implications

- 3.3 The Customer Service Centre is currently open Monday to Friday from 9am until 5pm, and provides a basic cash collection and enquiries service on the first Saturday mornings of each month, from 9am until 12 noon. On Saturdays the centre is open for face to face customers only and a limited service is provided, with the majority of customer making enquiries having to come back during the week to see a specialist.

- 3.4 When the decision was made to reduce the opening hours staff worked with customers on Saturdays morning to establish alternative ways to do business with us. The vast majority of these customers were 'regulars' and whilst coming in on a Saturday morning was preferable there was no established need.
- 3.5 Since changing the opening hours in September 2017, data shows us that rather than their being an increase in customers on the first Saturday of each month as might have been expected, there has been a gradual reduction. On 1st April 2017 – the busiest Saturday of the year – there was a 33% reduction in customer numbers compared with 2nd April 2016.
- 3.6 Data for the period November 2016 to April 2017 compared to the 1st Saturdays in 15/16 shows that customer numbers on a Saturday are continuing to reduce as previously reported.

Nov 15	157	Nov 16	95
Dec 15	166	Dec 16	80
Jan 16	140	Jan 17	69
Feb 16	123	Feb 17	47
Mar 16	73	Mar 17	38
Apr 16	153	Apr 17	103

- 3.7 Analysis of our data shows that our customer base on Saturdays is made up of regular customers, who generally come in monthly. The data for April 2017 includes customers who pay annually and who may not have been aware that we have reduced our Saturday opening hours.
- 3.8 Throughout the trial period customers were offered help to move to a different payment method. Officers carried out a simple survey each month to understand the reasons why those customers were coming in on a Saturday. 153 people responded to this and the results are attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.9 The customers tend to be of working age and 58% were in full time employment.
- 3.10 When asked the overwhelming reason for paying on a Saturday was personal preference. Customers told us that it was convenient for them to come in on a Saturday morning as they were coming into town anyway. There were no barriers identified for moving to another payment method, other than personal preference. 69% said that they had not considered changing their payment methods and 92% did not want any help to change their payment method.
- 3.11 Comparing data to March 2017 with data to March 2016, we can see that there has been a decrease overall in cash and card payments and an increase in internet and automated payment line payments. Although 64% of customers paying on a Saturday morning chose to pay in cash.



- 3.12 Customers have been encouraged to set up direct debits which has been further improved with the increased functionality of our eforms to set up direct debits.
- 3.13 Customers may be disadvantaged by not being able to make payments on a Saturday but there is no evidence to suggest that they cannot make other arrangements and assistance would be provided to ensure a smooth transition to alternative payment methods, if the decision was made to cease Saturday opening entirely. Encouraging a move away from cash payments is a positive move both for the Council to reduce costs, and for the customers to increase security.
- 3.14 For security purposes we have maintained 2 staff on duty regardless of customer numbers. Those staff who work on Saturdays take the commensurate time off in the week reducing the resources available at busier times, and thus reducing the level of service that can be provide when it is most needed. Caretaking staff are also required for the duration of the morning and there will be a reduction in overtime that could lead to a small saving moving forward.
- 3.15 We have a wide range of payment options for customer to pay their bills, including a face to face cashiering function at 4 locations during the week and 24/7 telephone and online payment facilities. Whilst we want to make it as easy as possible for customers to pay the Saturday morning facility is being used by a very small number of residents.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.16 Closing the face to face service on a Saturday may disadvantage a relatively small number of customers in the short term. However it would enable us to make better use of our resources at the times needed by the majority of our customers.

3.17 There is no evidence to suggest that any group of customers would be unfairly disadvantaged. Monitoring of the customers using the service suggests no specific vulnerable group is more likely to use the service on a Saturday. Furthermore, we have a wide range of options available to customers to ensure that they can still do their business with us in a timely fashion, ensuing fair access to services.

3.18 Appropriate out of hours cover is place in the event of any emergencies.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 In order to ensure customers have time to make other arrangements an implementation date of the end of August is proposed.

4.2 Appropriate publicity of any change would be put in place giving alternative methods of payments and contact arrangements, and regular customers would be talked through their options for making payments in future.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Survey results

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Held by Customer Services

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Customer Survey Results

