

# **REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Executive Committee**

**12th July 2022**

## **Future Use of the Town Hall and Closure of Cashiers Service**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor – Karen Ashley Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Peter Carpenter
Wards Affected	All Wards
Non-Key Decision	

### **1. SUMMARY**

This report sets the steps and work required to be undertaken with Customers in order to close of the Cashiers Service on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Executive are asked to:**

**2.1 Approve the Closure of the Cashiers Service on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.**

**2.2 Note the alternatives for Customers to make payments and the training and guidance that will take place up to the closure date.**

**2.3 Approve the proposals to sublet parts of the Town Hall**

**2.4 Delegate authority to the Head of Legal Democratic and Property Services and the Section 151 Officer following consultation with the Leader to negotiate terms and enter into the lease arrangements necessary to enable 2.3.**

### **3. KEY ISSUES**

#### **The Cashiers Service - Background**

- 3.1 The Cashiers Service operates out of the Town Hall from Monday to Friday 9am-5pm. Visitor numbers for “in person” payments at the Town Hall have fallen by 90% due to the pandemic and the introduction of allpay for the majority of services.
- 3.2 Housing (50%), Council Tax (40%) and Sundry Debtors (5%) account for the highest service payments from customers. All these services offer allpay as well as many other methods of payment as an alternative to cashiers’ payments, including web, telephone, standing order and Direct Debit.
- 3.3 Cash and card payments at the counter account for fewer than 4% of transactions, compared to allpay (10%), web/telephone (15%) and direct debit (70%). Over a 2 week period in March, only 202 visited cashiers (20 a day).

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- 3.4 The council still relies on its cashing service for in-house transactions despite a range of alternatives being offered. Services such as dial-a-ride have drivers presenting at the Town Hall on a daily basis to deposit as little as £50 for the day. Other services include Leisure, and Housing (washing machine monies etc) and bulky waste customers who choose to pay in cash.
- 3.5 Redditch and Bromsgrove Cash Offices are the sole remaining cash offices in the county, and one of the last remaining cash offices in both the midlands, and the country due to cheaper and more viable alternatives becoming available. Several councils made the decision to not re-open their cash offices during the pandemic.

### **Alternatives to Face to Face Payments**

- 3.6 As an alternative to the “face to face” cashiers service, there are numerous alternative payment arrangements for the customer. This links to the Councils updated Customer and Digital Strategy.
- Direct Debit
  - Allpay (to pay rent, council tax and sundry debtors invoices)
  - Online card payment through council website
  - Automated Telephone Payment (ATP)
  - Bank Standing Order / Bank Transfer
  - Postal Cheque
- 3.7 There are many PayPoint and Post Office locations across the borough who offer longer opening times, including evenings and weekends, enabling customers to make payments at a location and time more convenient to them. Allpay have also recently introduced Payzone as another payment outlet, adding a further 10 premises for customers to pay, including the Tesco Supermarket in Oakenshaw that has much longer opening times than the council.
- 3.8 Those who wish to continue to pay in cash for their essential bills can do so at the Post Office, Payzone and PayPoint whose locations are shown in Appendix A.

### **Transition Arrangements**

- 3.9 It is accepted that there will need to be a comprehensive customer service offensive with officers working with customers to encourage them to switch to alternative payment methods. To an extent this has already been done and our experiences when closing the One Stop Shops at Batchley, Winyates and Woodrow will be informative in this context. It will be necessary for officers to proactively contact tenants during the period of transition to advice and encourage them through the process of change. Furthermore, we can draw on experience and lessons learned as this was done during the Covid pandemic in 2020 when the offices were forced to close

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- 3.10 Customer Service Officers can discuss alternative payment methods with each customer to ensure a smooth transition before the closure of the cash office.
- 3.11 The Council intends to open a main reception at the same time that the cash office closes that will deal with general customer enquiries, and any customers who present for payment related reasons after the closure of cash office can be advised on the alternative options
- 3.12 There will still be free-to-use self-service telephones at the Town Hall for customers who want to pay their bills using the automated telephone payment line, free and unlimited use of the public access PC's to make web payments using their credit or debit card, as well as the free and unlimited use of Wi-Fi for customers to use their own devices (mobile phones/tablets etc)
- 3.13 By working with those customers, and improving their digital skills, we will be able to help customers become more financially independent. In addition, our Financial Independence Teams work with the most vulnerable members of our communities in relation to supporting them in managing their finances. Financial independence goes hand in hand with digital independence. Customers who solely use cash as a payment method will not be getting the best deals and have limited buying power.

### **Alternative uses of the Space on the Ground Floor and throughout the Town Hall**

- 3.14 The Council is presently in conversation with a number of public sector organisations on the use of town hall space and turning the building into a "public sector hub". These discussions are at an advanced stage and will require the Council to enter into leasehold agreements with third parties to enable the Council to work towards the provision of a Public Sector Hub which in turn enable the Council to bring together various services for the benefit of residents.
- 3.15 Members are advised that by enabling the shared use of space at the Town Hall the Council will not only bring services into one location but it will also enable security of tenure and cost for the Council and much needed public services.

#### **4. Legal Implications**

- 4.1 No Legal implications have been identified.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The direct costs of closing the cash office as small for the Council made up of the following nominal savings to the council
- Cancellation of cash in transit deliveries: £500pa
  - Consumables: £250pa
  - Subscriptions / Alarms £500pa

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5.2 Closing the cash office will release valuable, prime ground floor space in the Town Hall. It is currently estimated that this space has a market rental value of approximately £150,000 per annum. It would also unlock much broader development opportunities noted above with regard to the Council's 'community hub' and partnership working vision.

5.3 In leasing space at the Town Hall, charges for utilities and servicing of that space will transfer from the Council to the leasee. This will be proportional to the space being used and significantly reduce our operating costs.

## **6. Strategic Purpose Implications**

### **Relevant Strategic Purpose**

6.1 The Strategic purposes are included in the Council's Customer and Digital Strategy to enable Customers to become more financially independent, giving them the ability to manage their finances in different, cheaper ways. The Councils Budgetary and Property strategies look to optimise the use of Council resources – having the location as a "public sector hub" realises this.

### **Climate Change Implications**

6.2 The green thread runs through the Council plan. The use of the facilities by multiple public sector delivery agents will reduce their footprint within the Borough.

## **7. Other Implications**

### **Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications**

7.1 An Equalities Impact assessment has been completed, much like the ones undertaken for the closure of the "one stop shops" referred to earlier in this report (Appendix B).

### **Operational Implications**

7.2 The closure of the cash hall will lead to operational changes for service managers and also lead to opportunities to better use space at the Town Hall.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

8.1 The closure of the cashiers functions will be included in the corporate risk register for the authority.

## **9. APPENDENCES**

Appendix A – Post Office, Payzone and PayPoint Locations in Redditch

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**AUTHOR OF REPORT**

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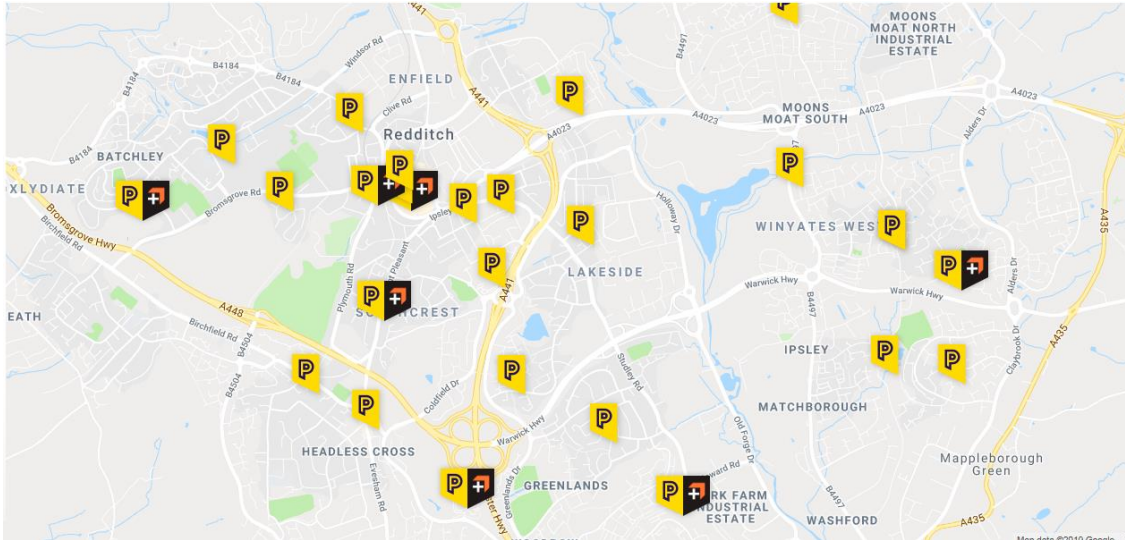
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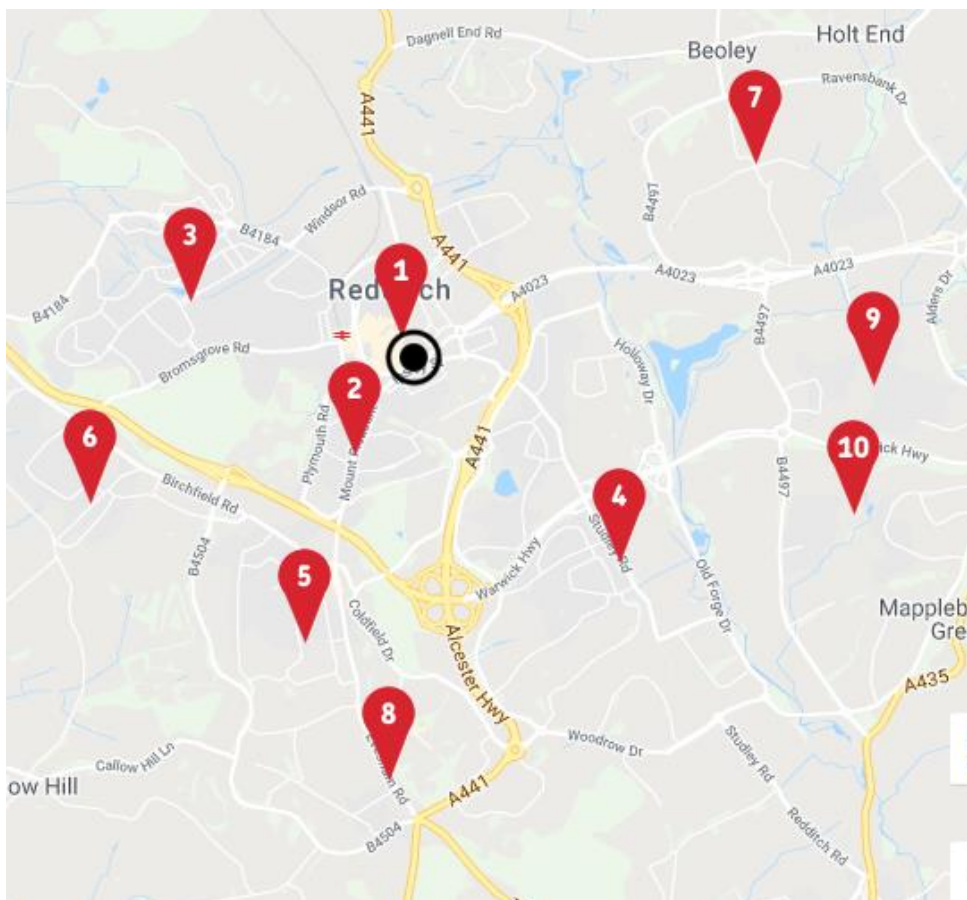
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## Appendix A - Post Office, Payzone and PayPoint Locations in Redditch

### Paypoint Locations



### Post Office Locations



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## Payzone Locations

or use your current location

**Payzone Store**

**Tesco Extra**  
Coldfield Drive, Oakenshaw, B98 7RU

Monday	00:01-23:59
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>00:01-23:59</b>
Wednesday	00:01-23:59
Thursday	00:01-23:59
Friday	00:01-23:59
Saturday	00:01-23:59
Sunday	10:00-16:00

03456779569      1.2 Miles

Directions

**SuperAgent**

**Churchill North News**  
10 Parkfield Close, B98 8TA

Open today 07:00-20:30

01527585692      1.3 Miles

Directions

SuperAgent Services

Legend:  
● B98 8AE  
★ Payzone Store  
📍 Post Office  
★ SuperAgent ?