

**Equality analysis/impact assessment form**

Please see **Equality analysis/impact assessment guidance** before completing this document. There are additional guidance notes in the boxes which are written in *italics* – please delete these notes.

**Stage 1 – Screening for equality relevance**

<b>Name of service, policy or process</b>	Finance
<b>Responsible officer</b>	Simon Davey
<b>Date</b>	18 October 2013

**Background and description**

A proposal to close the cash office facility at the Knowle, Sidmouth. Currently transactions through this service have declined significantly where the increase of alternative methods of payment have significantly increased. There are 7 other sites within Sidmouth where customers could make payments to the Council at no cost to themselves.

This is the only cash office facility that the Council operates across the District.

**Service users**

Members of the public and businesses paying monies owed to the Council (council tax, business rates, rents, car park fines, car park permits, licensing etc) at the Knowle, Council Offices, Sidmouth. This could take the form of cash, cheque or debit/credit cards.

**Reasons for change and intended aims and benefits**

The work of the cashiers in relation to taking payments is decreasing year on year and has been replaced with other administration duties. The degree that this can be further utilised to the benefit of the Income and Payments Team is hindered by the need to maintain a service in the main reception between 8:30am to 5pm daily.

When the cashiers have leave or sickness the function is covered by senior members of the Income and Payments Team and/or other officers from within finance who have cashiering experience, although the number of individuals available with this experience is declining. It does take officers away from their normal duties as it is felt the desk should be covered to maintain customer service.

The work demands of the Income and Payments have increased through the introduction of E-Procurement and Procurement Cards and the team does struggle with the workload.

It is recommended that the Council closes the cash office, ensuring that appropriate notice and help is given to customers in order for them to make payments either through more convenient and cost effective methods or if they still wish to make over the counter payments then to provide them with details of the 7 alternative sites in Sidmouth available (post office, banks and building societies). No additional costs would fall to the customer by using these alternatives.

Closing the cash office would allow the staff to be absorbed back into the Income and Payments Office to continue with the back office cashiers processes and to give the Senior Income and Payments Officer the flexibility with the team to focus on the increased workload without having to cover a front desk. It is also considered that with the closure of the cash office the FTE numbers can be reduced in the region of 0.5 FTE, giving an annual saving in the order of £9,000 to £13,000. There would be a possible redundancy cost to be taken into account, but this would be no more than one years saving. Consultation on possible redundancy implications has started with the staff involved.

As a side issue the area currently used as the cash office is shared with Revenues and Benefits reception officers, with members of the public currently queuing to either make a payment or receive information and advice from a Revenues and Benefits Officer. To use this space entirely for customers with Revenues and Benefits enquiries will benefit this service. Any general payment enquiries will, if the cash office is closed, be dealt with by the main Customer Service reception staff.

For information a quick survey was undertaken with other like authorities across Devon and including South Somerset DC to determine whether they still retained a cash office service for customers. It was found out of the 8 Councils, that 4 had closed their cash office.

### **Options appraisal**

*You can use this section to explore different delivery models/policy options*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>	<b>Cost/achievability</b>
Other methods of payment available, i.e. direct debit, touchtone, web payments and over the telephone payments.	No additional cost to customer, possible more cost effective (travel, time).  Cost saving to the Council.	One less option available for customer payment.	Cost saving to the Council, no extra cost to the customer.  Planned for 1 <sup>st</sup> April after customer communication.
If customers still wish to pay in person, this will be available via Post Office or Banks/Building	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

Society within Sidmouth and throughout the District.			
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<b>Equality relevance – see guidance document</b>	Low
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**Stage 2 – Reviewing the evidence**

✓ Please indicate existing sources of information available:

Customer feedback/complaints	
Results from consultations	
Information from equality monitoring of service users	
Information about the local community	✓
Comparable information from other departments or other authorities	✓
Recommendations from inspections or audits	

What other information is required and who needs to be involved?

<b>Who</b>	<b>How are they going to be involved?</b>
Staff	Through consultation
Service users/customers	Will be advised of alternative methods
General public	Will be advised of alternative methods
Equality organisations	
Trade unions	Through consultation
Other	

**Stage 3 – Giving due regard to Equality and Human Rights**

*The local authority must consider how people will be affected by the service, policy or practice. In doing so, we must give due regard to the need to:*

- *Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation*
- *Advance equality of opportunity and*
- *Foster good relations*

*The Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation does not prevent the Council from taking difficult decisions which result in service reductions or closures for example, it does however require the Council to ensure that such decisions are:*

- *Informed and properly considered with a rigorous, conscious approach and open mind, taking due regard of the effects on the protected characteristics and the general duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations.*

- *Proportionate (negative impacts are proportionate to the aims of the policy decision.*
- *Fair.*
- *Necessary.*
- *Reasonable and that those affected have been adequately consulted.*

	<i>In what way is this characteristic relevant or not relevant to the service, policy or practice?</i>
Age	Neutral
Disability	Neutral
Gender/Sex (men and women)	Neutral
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral
Race/ethnicity	Neutral
Religion and belief	Neutral
Sexual orientation	Neutral
Trans-gender/gender identity	Neutral
Community considerations such as socio-economic factors, criminal convictions, rural living or Human Rights	Neutral
Children	Neutral

**Positive impacts**

None

**Negative impacts and mitigations or justification**

Although this option is being denied, there are many alternatives that do not inconvenience the customer.

There is however, an impact on cash office staff in that a reduction of 0.5 FTE post will need to be made.

**Neutral impacts**

None

**Stage 4 – Outcome of this Equality analysis/impact assessment?**

The outcomes should be evaluated against the following framework from the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s guidance on ‘Making fair financial decisions’.

**Outcome 1:** No major change required. The assessment has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to advance equality have been taken.

**Outcome 2:** Adjustments to remove barriers identified by the assessment or to better advance equality.

**Outcome 3:** Continue despite having identified some potential adverse impacts or missed opportunities to advance equality. In this case, the justification will be included in the assessment and will be in line with the duty to have ‘due regard’. This will include sufficient detail on how the impacts are being reduced and how this will be monitored.

**Outcome 4:** Stop and rethink. If you have concluded that there is an adverse impact and discrimination which could be illegal, seek further advice from your Head of Service, Legal team or Corporate Organisational Development Manager. Please outline the action that you will be taking and include it in your improvement plan.

If you have identified that the service/function is having or might have an adverse impact, is it justifiable or legitimate? Please give details of this.

**Outcome 1 - No impact**

	Justifiable/legitimate Yes/No	Comments
N/A		

If you have concluded that the adverse impact or the discrimination is justifiable or legitimate, you will need to explain your actions and reasons to people. This is because we have a statutory duty to promote equality of access, opportunity and treatment of people. You will need to think what action could be taken to mitigate the adverse impact on people and detail this in the Action/Improvement Plan.

Action/Improvement Plan (include actions for unmet needs)	Implementation date	Owner	Review date
1. Communicate to customers, in advance of closure, who use the existing facility to advise of alternative methods of payment,	1/4/14	Senior Income & Payments Officer	Ongoing

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

providing 4 months notice of change.			
2. There will still be an opportunity to take cash payments at the Council in exceptional circumstances.	In operation		
3. We will still continue to take cheque payments	In operation		
4. We will raise awareness and provide alternative options on the website, face to face and in writing.	1/4/14	Senior Income & Payments Officer	Senior Income & Payments Officer
5. Implementation of an automated pay line in Council reception area.	1/4/14	Senior Income & Payments Officer	Ongoing
6. Use of computer in reception and assistance provided for customers to make on line payments.	1/4/14	Senior Income & Payments Officer	Ongoing

<b>Assessor</b>		<b>Signature:</b>
<b>Line Manager</b>		<b>Signature:</b>