

Draft – discussion document

1 Service provision across the district

1.1 This document collates information from our key services in relation to relocation. Using this feedback (attached in Appendix One), the Strategic Management Team are making some initial recommendations for service provision across the district in preparation for our move.

1.2 These recommendations will be tested through Best Value and Equalities consultation. This feedback together with our current 'intelligence' about customer demand will determine initially what service provision we will provide following our move.

1.3 However, we will remain alert as always to customer demand which will continue to shape and determine our service provision across the district. It is important therefore to see this as a dynamic proposal which will change over time so that we continue to make sure we can provide our services when and where our customers want them.

1.4 The council aims to keep abreast of customer demand and meet the rising expectations of its residents and businesses in an accessible, cost effective and joined up way irrespective of where they are or where we are located in the district. East Devon is working hard to transform and modernise the way staff go about their work and the ways in which customers can do business with the council.

1.5 Key to these new ways of working are a number of projects which include the following:

- Mobile device policy rollout – this will ensure that officers will have the right IT equipment to allow them to work from home, flexibly (between home and office) or in a mobile way. Creating a fully ICT equipped mobile workforce will help us improve efficiency and customer service.
- Open for business – web channel – this project will see us totally revamp our website using the principles already established by the successful gov.uk website. As well as fresh content which is easier to find, this project will deliver 230 additional on-line services for our customers. We know from the feedback in from our Viewpoint Survey that 72% of our customers are satisfied with our services but we want to improve this figure by offering our services where and when our customers want them.
- In addition to this East Devon is currently reviewing facilities across the district to understand what existing space we can use for mobile officers to 'touch

down' across the district so that they will not need to make unnecessary journeys back to the office.

- We are also drawing up proposals to firm up what service provision will be available for customers across the district following a move to SkyPark.

2 Recommendations for service provision following relocation from Knowle:

2.1 It should be noted that we have a general arrangement with the following Town and Parish councils for them to act as 'local enquiry offices'. This is so that they can be used particularly for customers to view documentation relating to planning.

- Seaton
- Ottery St Mary
- Honiton
- Budleigh Salterton
- Axminster

The first recommendation is that Sidmouth Town Council will be added to this list following our move to SkyPark. This involves £x expenditure.

2.2 The second recommendations proposes that we find ways to expand the service provision in Exmouth in a way that officers can see customers in a safe environment. This expansion represents 4-6 desks with officers offering the following services:

- Housing Benefits
- Council Tax
- Housing advice and register
- Debt advice (Homemaker)

Expenditure relating to this service provision is largely contingent on the future of Exmouth Town Hall.

2.3 The third recommendation is to provide 2 permanent positions in Honiton that will serve customers seeking the following services:

- Housing Benefits
- Council Tax
- Housing advice and register
- Debt advice (Homemaker)

Costs relating to this are likely to be in the region of £x.

2.4 Finally it is recommended that there is a regular surgery in Sidmouth (depending on demand) particularly for the following services:

- Council Tax
- Debt advice (Homemaker)

2.5 It is anticipated that surgeries are not necessary for development management due to the improvement of internet access but this will be tested during consultation and kept under review. If necessary surgeries will be provided.

2.6 Each of the proposals rely on ICT to provide the relevant connectivity and ICT provision so that officers can deal with customers in real time and do not have to come back to the office to access customer records.

Appendix One

Feedback from Services

1 Revenues and Benefits

A Services which customers access by visiting Knowle:

- Housing Benefits/Council Tax reduction – new or changes, queries, need support
- Homemaker – Independent Money advice. This service is linked with applications for Discretionary Housing Payments Applications for Council Tax Exceptional Hardship and customers in debt over council tax and often in recovery.
- Council Tax – queries, advising changes, applying for discounts, non-payment issues.
- Interviews under cautions for Benefit Fraud are conducted in one of the interview rooms off main reception (approximately 3 per week).
- Business Rates – queries, advising changes, applying for discounts, non-payment issues.

B Demand analysis relating to customers accessing these services by visiting Knowle:

- Demand analysis is being captured from March 2014 and this includes the reason for visit and where people have travelled from. The demand analysis captures service provision in Exmouth Town Hall, Axminster, Seaton, Honiton, Cranbrook and Ottery St Mary.

C Which services can only be dealt with by customers visiting Knowle?

- It is considered that we will need to have a presence in Sidmouth so that we can deal with customers who are on a low income and/or vulnerable. After Exmouth and Honiton, Sidmouth represents the third highest area of people on benefits.
- It would be sensible if any provision is joined with Housing and Debt advice (Homemaker) as often customers need to access these services as well.
- Homemaker is currently based from Knowle on a 5 day per week basis and 1 day per week at Exmouth Town Hall providing independent money/debt advice to our customers. Homemaker is used as part of the requirement for considering cases for additional financial support. This is a face to face service and is best located local to demand. It would therefore be preferable to continue to deliver this from Sidmouth and Honiton and to increase the provision from Exmouth.
- Interviews under caution would need to be considered as there is a requirement for a secure office environment because of the nature of the work. These are currently carried out at Exmouth and Sidmouth. Ideally a

secure interview room in Sidmouth or Honiton would be necessary where other staff are present.

D Can our existing face to face service delivery at Knowle be met through online transactions or mobile working?

- There will always be certain customers who require face to face support and we know that having experts at the front end of our processes is key to cutting out waste and delivering an efficient service and 'what matters' to our customers.

E What other service provision would be required and in which towns if we relocate to SkyPark?

- Looking ahead if we moved to Skypark we would need some service provision located in Sidmouth. Ideally, we would want to be co-located with Housing and Money advice due to the close links we have with these services.
- Increase and enhance provision within Exmouth (including a self service computer).
- Increase our provision within Honiton.
- We have wanted for some years now to increase our service provision at Exmouth Town Hall due to the level of demand that we receive from there (nearly 40% of our benefit caseload is from the Exmouth area). This would enable us to deliver a more efficient service as we would be able to process much more at first point of contact. Currently, we only have 1 reception point with access to a computer. We are waiting on the second reception area to be set up with the appropriate IT so that we can process more of the benefit work at first point of contact.

F Do you have existing plans for increasing service provision across the district due to increased demand, irrespective of the office accommodation project?

Benefits surgeries now include Cranbrook and Ottery St Mary and are as follows:

Axminster (Guildhall, West St) – now every Thursday (was fortnightly) 9am – 11.30am. Ties in with when CAB are in Axminster and when the Job Club is open.

Cranbrook (Younghayes Community Centre) every Tuesday 9.30 am – 11.30am

Honiton (Senior Citizens Centre, New Street) every Thursday 1.30pm – 4.30pm . From 27 March this will relocate to the Beehive Centre.

Ottery St Mary (Town Council Offices, The Square) every Wednesday 1.30 – 3.15 pm

Seaton (Town Hall, For St) every Wednesday 9.30 – 11.30 am – this session ties in with when CAB are in Seaton.

Exmouth Town Hall – now open 5 days a week (used to only be 4 days)

All our surgeries are drop-in sessions whereas they used to be by appointment only.

Staff are trained in all aspects of welfare benefits so we can do other referrals, such as; food banks, dementia clinics, providing the holistic service.

2 Customer Services Centre

A Services which customers access by visiting Knowle:

- Customers Service Centre carried out analysis in 2012 identifying the reason for visits, a copy has been circulated.
- This was a mix of services as would be expected but in the main Housing, Benefits & Council Tax and now more recently homemaker (financial advice service) are the main reason for visitors. These services do fit together as good mix to support customers that are more likely to need face to face advice.
- Other areas are low visitor numbers or recorded as general reception enquires (further analysis is required to determine reason for visit on these). The exception is planning with high visitor numbers but I assume visitors are in the main professionals who would equally travel elsewhere (Ed to advise).

B Demand analysis relating to customers accessing these services by visiting Knowle:

- Recent quick survey (last week) carried out in Rev's & Ben's and analysis undertaken previously by CSC. Further details and data is required and this can easily be collected.
- For Finance, excluding Rev's & Ben's and those visiting CSC, the remainder of visitors are predominately businesses who would find Skypark as easy, if not easier, to access.

C Which services can only be dealt with by customers visiting Knowle?

I think there are two strands:

- Strand 1 = Housing, Benefits & Council Tax and Homemaker (financial advice service) where customers will need face to face assistance by those services direct – one officer from each service supporting each other and the customer.
- Strand 2 = CSC officer to deal with all other enquiries by either doing or signposting. Initial Important role would be to direct customers to self service,

giving access to private use of internet available. This could be a temporary need until customer numbers diminish and switch to self help transactions.

D Can our existing face to face service delivery at Knowle be met through online transactions or mobile working?

- Yes more and more but would like to explore delivery model above.

E What other service provision would be required and in which towns if we relocate to SkyPark?

- Exmouth does need to be improved and we do need a presence in Sidmouth, or Seaton, or Axminster that is more than a weekly drop in service along the lines outlined in 3 above.

F Do you have existing plans for increasing service provision across the district due to increased demand, irrespective of the office accommodation project?

- Expanded Rev's & Ben's but no other areas.

3 Housing and Environment

A Services which customers access by visiting Knowle:

- We have customers visiting Housing; Environmental Health; Countryside and Streetscene. We have a mix of customers, residents (including our own tenants), partners, contractors, other local authority officers, representatives of other public sector organisations (e.g. the Environment Agency) and business contacts visiting. Many of our services are geared up to visiting customers or delivering a service on site rather than customers visiting Knowle.

B Demand analysis relating to customers accessing these services by visiting Knowle:

- Housing has the greatest number of visitors mainly relating to housing options interviews, housing register applications, tenancy sign ups and interviews for the Local Welfare Support scheme. We operate a duty officer system and use two of the interview rooms in reception on a constant basis.
- The visitor book on reception and other demand analysis indicates that we typically have 10 pre-arranged or drop-in housing interviews a day. In addition we have typically 12 tenancy check/sign up visitors plus 25 Local Welfare Support scheme enquirers visiting.
- We currently have more housing needs/options visitors attending Exmouth Town Hall than Knowle.

- Streetscene operate a small reception in the Knowle depot and typically receive visitors for sandbags and deliveries/collections.
- The visitor numbers for Environment services are much smaller and in most cases we are of the opinion that these can be redirected to the Councils new headquarters without any major inconvenience. Visitors tend to be more commonly business contacts and partner agencies, but occasionally they are also complainants and people seeking advice and information or perhaps to purchase parking permits or even to pay fines.

C Which services can only be dealt with by customers visiting Knowle?

- There are no services that can only be dealt with at Knowle, but there would be some disruption to service for some of our housing customers if we ceased service delivery from Sidmouth.
- Many Housing customers are low income and/or vulnerable and find it difficult to travel around the district. Only having a presence in the west of the district (Exmouth and Skypark) could present accessibility problems for some customers so some presence in Sidmouth needs to be considered. This could be in the form of a drop-in surgery, co-location arrangement with a partner agency, Lymebourne office, community centre etc.

D Can our existing face to face service delivery at Knowle be met through online transactions or mobile working?

- Some of our face to face transactions can be undertaken online.
- In terms of Housing tenancy sign ups this was the subject of a Systems Thinking review and we like to do this face to face to convey certain messages. We check documents, take photographs to prevent tenancy fraud, take signatures, explain the terms of the tenancy etc.
- We believe that the provision of both Environmental Health and Parking Services currently delivered face-to-face at Knowle can be adequately met through a switch to either an arranged personal visit by a mobile worker or an on-line transaction.

E What other service provision would be required and in which towns if we relocate to SkyPark?

- We want to retain or enhance our successful Housing office in Exmouth Town Hall and we anticipate an increase in visitors when Knowle is closed.
- Our presence, accessibility and visibility in the east of the district are a concern and a Housing presence in Axminster/or Honiton could usefully be enhanced.
- For both Environmental Health and Parking Services, co-location arrangements in coastal and market towns for a prearranged surgery or drop in session, if these can be achieved would add a further customer choice option that we might take advantage of from time to time or on-request.

Mid/East of the district would benefit from suitable accommodation for mobile working/touch down space. We have a lot of demand/work coming to us from Honiton, Seaton and Axminster so a presence in these areas would be beneficial.

F Do you have existing plans for increasing service provision across the district due to increased demand, irrespective of the office accommodation project?

- The Streetscene new depot proposal in Honiton would provide a central location and improved facilities. Some limited office and meeting space will be available.
- Housing district offices for Mobile Support staff based in the community (Lymebourne, Sidmouth; Dunning Court, Honiton; Popular Mount, Axminster; Palmer House and Burnside, Exmouth) have been successful and could be enhanced as a landing pad for mobile staff. We do not encourage public access at present. We also have facilities for our community development activities at Clayton House, Exmouth and Millway Rise, Axminster with potential for expansion.

4 Property and Estates and Regeneration
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A Services which customers access by visiting Knowle:

- Customers may pick up tender packs, get leases signed/pick up keys.
- Meetings with professional advisors, developers, project team members.
- Customers who wish to hire the civic suites.

B Demand analysis relating to customers accessing these services by visiting Knowle:

- None available.
- The numbers of customers wishing to hire the civic suites is very small and this is likely to cease following a move to SkyPark.

C Which services can only be dealt with by customers visiting Knowle?

- None

D Can our existing face to face service delivery at Knowle be met through online transactions or mobile working?

- Yes
- The council is now using web forms to tenants to report repairs.

E What other service provision would be required and in which towns if we relocate to SkyPark?

- Meeting facilities – these can be held off site and touch down facilities in Honiton, Axminster, Seaton and Exmouth would be helpful.
- For Property and Estates, there are 3 technicians who will need a workshop or store room. It would make sense for this to be at the Streetscene depot – this is currently provided through Manstone Depot.

F Do you have existing plans for increasing service provision across the district due to increased demand, irrespective of the office accommodation project?

- No

4 Development management

A Services which customers access by visiting Knowle:

- Customers regularly visit the front desk at the Knowle to view planning applications and to get advice on planning issues from our Technical Officers.
- The nature of the service means that we regularly have meetings with developers and architects and so they often come to the offices for meetings.

B Demand analysis relating to customers accessing these services by visiting Knowle:

- We have not done any detailed analysis since our Systems Thinking Review back in 2008, however at that time the main queries were:
 - Is this application complete/are the plans OK?
 - Do I need planning permission?
 - Can I see the Duty Planning Officer?
 - Can I see the working file for an application?
 - Can I see a copy of an application?
 - Can you give this to?

The numbers coming in were on average only 2-3 people per day.

C Which services can only be dealt with by customers visiting Knowle?

- There are no services that can only be provided at the Knowle. However if someone is viewing a planning file and needs help understanding the

plans then this can be difficult to do other than in person at the reception desk.

D Can our existing face to face service delivery at Knowle be met through online transactions or mobile working?

- The majority of planning queries are dealt with over the phone or via e-mail with only a small number coming in via reception. More up to date demand analysis is needed to assess current levels of demand but my perception is that demand is quite low and that our face to face service can largely be dealt with through other routes.
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E What other service provision would be required and in which towns if we relocate to SkyPark?

- Subject to demand analysis we could offer surgery sessions at the main town halls, however my perception is that there is not sufficient demand anymore with the majority of customers using the website for general advice or contacting us via telephone or e-mail.

F Do you have existing plans for increasing service provision across the district due to increased demand, irrespective of the office accommodation project?

No

5 Legal, Licensing and Democratic Services

A Services which customers access by visiting Knowle:

- To access Council deeds
- Licensing: To collect licensing plates and licences, obtain advice on licensing issues. Pay for licences, requests for officers to check applications before they are submitted. Bring in original documents for examination – often applicants are reluctant to send by post or leave at reception. Collect application forms – applicants often request that forms are left at reception for them to collect rather than having them sent by post or downloaded from website (even some councillors ask for forms to be left out for them rather than downloading from website). Licensing officers also offer 30 minute clinics to provide advice on licensing issues – very popular and does save officer time in the long run. Cemetery and burial enquiries to search registers, view cemetery maps and buy burial plots. Inspection of vehicles by an officer before they are licensed as taxis.

- Public attending meetings of the Council.

B Demand analysis relating to customers accessing these services by visiting Knowle:

- To view deeds in person, estimated once a week
- Licensing: Approximately 25 visits a week – relating to personal licence applications, taxis, cemeteries, street trading, Licensing Act applications, temporary event notices, skin piercing and animal licensing.
- Public meetings – the regularity is set out in the annual timetable of meetings on the website. Numbers attending vary between a handful to 150+. On average for planning meetings there will be 30+. The smaller council meeting room needs a minimum capacity of at least 60 members of the public plus councillors and meeting tables.

C Which services can only be dealt with by customers visiting Knowle?

- Accessing deeds
- Licensing: Viewing applications – legally required by some legislation. Licensing officers also offer 30 minute clinics to provide advice on licensing issues – this would be most inefficient if officers need to travel to see applicants. Checking of original documents for various issues including Disclosure and Barring checks and Personal licence applications. Inspection of vehicles by an officer before they are licensed as taxis - essential.
- Attending council meetings

D Can our existing face to face service delivery at Knowle be met through online transactions or mobile working?

- Deeds: we are currently hoping to scope a digital project with IT
- No – most cannot be. Even where there is the ability for online transactions many clients prefer to attend and see an officer. Whilst some could be done by mobile working this would prove very inefficient as often the visit is of a short duration and it is a much better use of staff time to see them at the office.
- Meetings of the Council – public attend in person to contribute to meetings and speak on planning applications. Theoretically this need could be met by allowing teleconferencing with the public in other parts of the district but the cost may be prohibitive. For legal processes at meetings such as licensing hearings, the public have to attend in person to exercise their rights to speak [speaking remotely would probably need legislation].

E What other service provision would be required and in which towns if we relocate to SkyPark?

- Legal :none
- Dem services: possibly set up councillor surgeries at least in the early days following the move.
- Licensing: would not be required but provision in Exmouth would improve the service. The provision of a 'touch down' office in all the larger East Devon towns would be useful for licensing officers and to a extent would improve the service provided. However such facilities will never remove the need for head office facilities to see and discuss issues with clients. To enable the full use of any 'touch down' facility licensing staff would need access to mobile working, photocopier, colour printer and card printer.

F Do you have existing plans for increasing service provision across the district due to increased demand, irrespective of the office accommodation project?

- Licensing: Develop mobile working once the equipment is made available.

