

Report to Scrutiny Commission

Neighbourhood Services and Community
Involvement Scrutiny Commission

Date of Commission meeting: 20th August 2013

Customer Service Centre Relocation

Assistant City Mayor, Councillor Sarah Russell

Lead Director: Jill Craig



Leicester
City Council

Useful Information:

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Date of Exec meeting N/A

1. Summary

To brief the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission about the move of the Customer Service Centre from New Walk Centre and the Revenue and Benefits front of house service from Wellington House.

It is estimated that there will be around 145,000 customer visits per annum to the new combined centre which will open in December.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny

The report does not contain any recommendations. Officers will attend the meeting to answer any questions the Scrutiny Commission may have.

3. Supporting Information

Background

The council's popular city centre based Customer Service Centre (CSC) opened in 1992 and now handles an average 6,100 enquiries a month. It is designed as the first point of access to all council services and can deal with over 99% of enquiries without the customer needing to have any further contact with the council. The high volume enquiries handled within the centre include:

- **Licensing** – Customers can submit and pay for different types of licences e.g. Taxi Driver, Premises Licence, Personal Licence, Skips & Scaffolding, Street Trading, Free Distribution of Printed Matter, and Temporary Event Notices.
- **Parking Enforcement** – Customers can view photographic details of the incident, can submit a challenge against the fine and pay outstanding fines.
- **Bus Lane Enforcement** – Customers can view CCTV footage of the incident, submit a challenge and the outstanding fine.
- **Concessionary Travel** – Customers can make an application for a Senior, Disabled or Travel Aid pass which is issued at the time of the visit.

- **Parking** – Customers can purchase a range of permits including, Residents, Visitors, Contractors, Business and Maintenance.
- **Blue Badge** - Customers can submit an application and make payment for an automatic or discretionary Blue Badge.
- **Housing Benefits** – Customers can submit an application and have the required supporting documentation verified. They can also obtain advice regarding an existing claim and give details of any change of circumstances.
- **Council Tax** – Customers are able to inform the Council of any changes to occupation/vacation. Receive advice on discounts, exemptions, recovery action.
- **Housing Options** – Customers can make applications to be on the Housing Register, provide and have supporting documentation verified.

There is a requirement to relocate the New Walk Centre based CSC as part of the plan to vacate New Walk Centre as a whole

There has been a long standing ambition to provide a better quality CSC, and in particular to combine this facility with the Revenues and Benefits (R&B) face to face service currently operated at Wellington House.

Last year a number of sites were looked at and a decision was taken to relocate the CSC, and the R&B face-to-face service to a vacant unit within York House on Granby Street (formally Pound Stretcher).

The new facility will span two floors, with Housing Benefit enquiries being handled on the first floor and all other enquires on the ground floor (Copies of the floor plan and visuals of what the interiors will look like are shown at Appendix A.)

Timescales

Work commenced on site in refurbishing the existing unit on the 1st July, and this is scheduled to complete in November. The facility will open to the public in December 2013.

Opening Times

The opening times of the new building are proposed as being;

- Monday 8.30 – 17.00
- Tuesday 8.30 – 17.00
- Wednesday 9.30 – 18.00
- Thursday 8.30 – 17.00
- Friday 8.30 – 16.30

These bring into line the opening times of the existing R&B service and the New Walk Centre Customer Service Centre and include a small, but positive change to

Wednesday opening hours. Currently the service is open 8.30 – 17.00 on a Wednesday. In future the service will open one hour later in the morning and will stay open until 18.00.

Staffing implications

R&B customers are currently signposted to Wellington House although Customer Services can also handle a wide range of R&B enquiries, particularly Council Tax.

Going forward we have agreed that Customer Services staff will be trained to offer the full range of Council Tax enquiries. Housing Benefit enquiries will continue to be handled by Housing Benefits team whose front-of-house staff will be located on the first floor of the new centre.

Funding for four CSC posts have transferred from R&B to customer services to deal with this additional work.

There are no other staffing implications.

Service provision, ICT & Benefits

The new centre will bring together the R&B and Customer Service face-to-face services into one co-located facility.

The location is in a more central location with more passing footfall.

The new CSC has more space than the existing arrangements which has allowed us to review how customer enquiries are handled. The existing arrangements can sometimes bottle neck around the initial enquiry desk. And customers waiting with quick enquiries can find themselves in a queue behind highly complex issues. The new centre will have a separate transaction desk for quick enquiries and include two self-payment kiosks which will allow customers to make payments for a variety of services without the need to queue for an advisor

There will be an automated queuing system which will ensure queuing is handled fairly and will allow additional service points to be easily opened up during peak demand times.

There will be eight self-service PCs provided which will allow customers to carry out certain transactions without the need for the assistance of an advisor (e.g. viewing planning applications)

There will be a free public wifi service provided which will allow customers to use their personal devices to connect to the internet whilst they are at the CSC.

Managing the move

Refurbishment activity started some weeks ago, but as well as building redecoration and fit-out, a project like this involves considerable work to plan how the new arrangements will operate and to manage the transition from the existing arrangements to the new arrangements with minimal downtime.

Operational issues that need to be considered include: how the new accommodation arrangements will operate, particularly over two floors, security; uniform colour; cash handling arrangements; new IT including a new queuing system and self-service kiosks, and how the centre will communicate with back offices located on other sites. Work on all these issues is well in hand.

The project plan allows three weeks to move into the building after the refurbishment work is complete and to introduce the new arrangements to staff. The current working assumption is that the final moves will take place over a weekend and the new centre will open on a Monday without any loss of service.

Threat and opportunities

It is not perceived that there are any significant threats of moving. The transition will be carefully orchestrated and there will be publicity and signage to redirect customers to the new building.

There is an opportunity to use the CSC to promote other facilities (e.g, the Richard III exhibition, Visit Leicester) through using the extensive shop front glazed area, and this is already being discussed with Corporate Communications and Marketing.

4. Financial, legal and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

There is provision within the approved Accommodation Strategy capital budget of £800,000 for the Customer Services Centre and £1,341,000 for 10 York Road making a combined total of £2,141,000. It is expected that these works will be completed in the current financial year.

4.2 Legal implications

Legal Services are involved with the transactional contracts and property agreements to implement the new arrangements

4.3 Other Implications

None

Appendices: Visuals of the new centre (including floor plans)

APPENDIX A – VISUALS

(Please note that some minor detail in these pictures may be different to what is ultimately built, as these pictures were produced in the early stages of the design process)

1) Ground floor on entry to the building



2) Ground floor - counter positions towards rear of the building

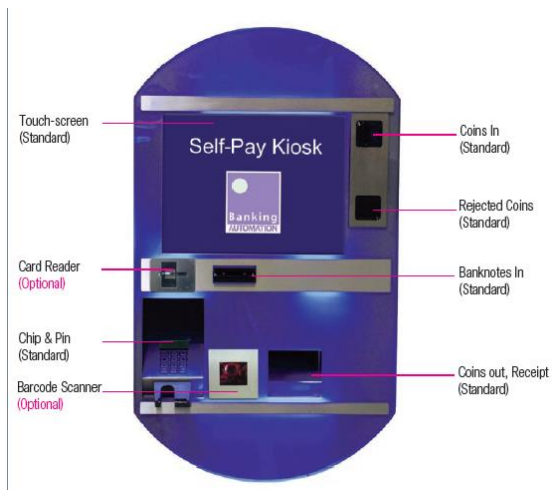


3) First floor counter positions

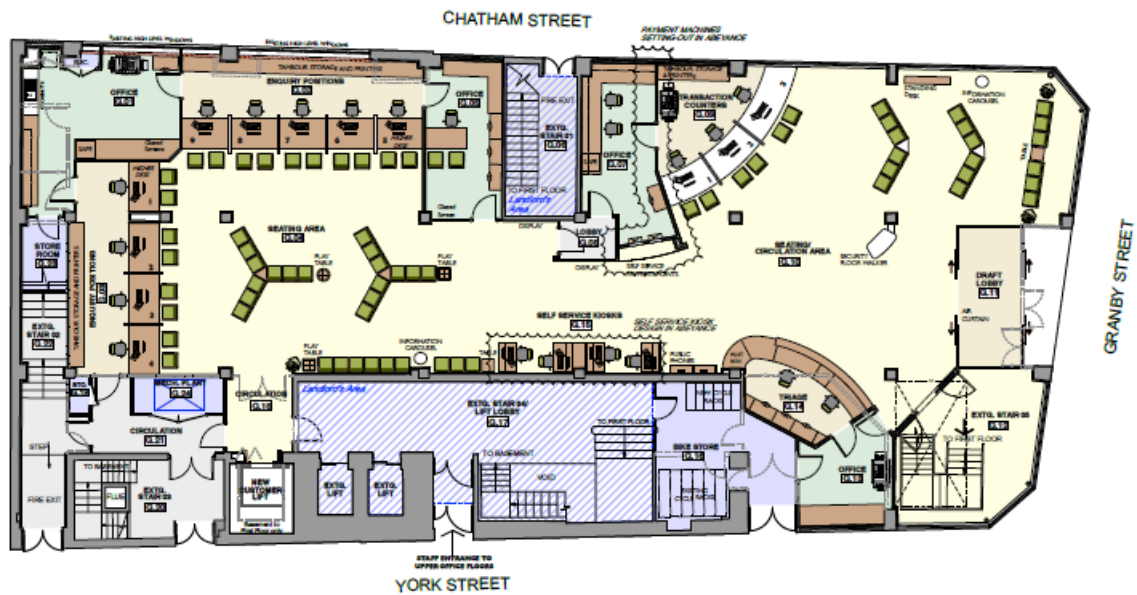


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4) An Image of a Self-Payment machine, plus an example of two such machines in-situ – our machines will not be this colour, but will be set in a similar fashion, with one at a lower height for wheelchair users



5) Ground floor layout



6) First floor layout (Note: some minor changes to the back office arrangements are being discussed. These changes have not been agreed at the time of writing this report).

