

## Modernisation of the Cashiers Service in The Council House

### SUMMARY

1. On 18 November 2008 the Scrutiny Management Commission considered Forward Plan item 39/08 and the Director of Resources' report to Council Cabinet on the proposals for modernising the Cashiers Service in the Council House.
2. The Commission made the following recommendations to Council Cabinet:
  - a) to approve a programme of modernisation of the cashiers service (paragraph 2.1 of the Director's report)
  - b) to approve the use of Pay Point outlets and post offices (paragraph 2.2 of the Director's report)
  - c) that the date of final closure of the cashiers service should be reassessed in January 2009 when the extent to which existing users had moved to other forms of payment should be readily apparent
3. The Council Cabinet accepted those recommendations and considered a further report on 13 January which highlighted that significant numbers of customers were moving to alternative payment methods, in particular to the use of the PayPoint card system.
4. On 13 January 2009 the Council Cabinet gave final approval to close the cashiers' service from 27 February 2008.
5. This report describes the work undertaken with customers visiting the cash counter to support them through the transition to more efficient payment methods suiting their individual needs and minimising inconvenience.

### RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the work undertaken to convert customers to alternative ways of paying Council bills so as to minimise disruption to them when the cash counter closes.

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. In April 2008 over 5,000 cash transactions were made at the cash counter in the Council House. There were also approximately a further 6,800 transactions each month made by cheque or debit card over the counter. Since then the numbers using the counter has been steadily reducing as customers find alternative payment methods
2. Following Scrutiny Management Commission meeting on 18 November we have been working with our customers to help them identify alternative methods for them to pay their council bills. We have dedicated resource to greet customers as they visit the cash counter to discuss alternatives available and reviewing customers' individual circumstances to help identify the most appropriate alternative payment method that meets their needs. These alternatives include:
  - Direct Debit
  - Over the internet using the 'Council Tax Online' system
  - Over the phone, either
    - During office hours by ringing Derby Direct
    - 24 hours a day 7 days a week using our automated telephone service
  - Cheque which can be posted or delivered through the post box facility in the Council House
  - PayPoint swipe cards for use at one of the 24 Post Offices or 50 PayPoint outlets in the City.

For customers considering a PayPoint swipe card we have identified those outlets most convenient to the customer.

3. Direct Debit is our preferred option for paying Council Tax and we continue to encourage customers to adopt this payment method. We have some success in increasing the number of customers who pay by Direct Debit. The number paying by Direct Debit has increase from 46,147 in April 2008 to 49,518 in January 2009.
4. That said, we are aware that some customers prefer not to use Direct Debit and for these people we have promoted PayPoint as the best alternative. Our discussions have highlighted that there still many customers who were unaware PayPoint. Having one to one discussions with customers as they come into the Council House has helped raise the awareness of PayPoint and we have promoted the added benefits of using it as an alternative to cash payments at Council House, for example
  - There are 50 PayPoint and 24 Post Offices across the City which are evenly spread at convenient locations across the city
  - Most of these outlets are open long hours and many open 7 days a week, while the cash counter in the Council House is open 6 hours a day 5 days a week.
  - 2 of the PayPoint outlets and the Post Office in Victoria Street are city centre locations and close to the Council House.
  - Should they need to, customers can pay a range of different bills from other organisations as well as Council bills at the same time using a PayPoint Outlet

- Promoting payment by this method will encourage increased use of local businesses, making them more financially viable and sustainable and helping us to build stronger communities, supporting the Council priority of 'Making us proud of our neighbourhoods'.
5. To raise the awareness further we have produced publicity for local PayPoint outlets. We will be doing further work to update this information to show which of the outlets are suitable for disabled people.
  6. As a result of the one to one discussions we have been having we have issued a further 1,572 PayPoint cards to Council Tax payers.
  7. We will be issuing PayPoint cards to all remaining Council Tax customers who have not already opted for Direct Debit or PayPoint and these will be issued in time for the payment of their first Council Tax payment on 1 April.
  8. In addition to Council Tax payments, which represent 65% of the 5,000 average cash payments made at the cashiers' counter, there are a number of other Council debts bills that are paid at the cash counter. We have been working with our colleagues throughout the Council to make sure they have alternative arrangements in place when the cash counter closes. We have introduced barcodes on bills issues for National Non Domestic Rates, Housing Benefit overpayments and Sundry debts which will mean these can be paid at PayPoint outlets or Post Offices. We have solutions for the remaining, lower volume, payments. These are detailed in Appendix 4 of the Cabinet Report
  9. In summary following the work undertaken in recent months we have alternative arrangements for all customers who have been using the Cash Counter in the Council House.
    - All those who pay Council Tax will have been issued with a PayPoint card with guidance about where and how to use it.
    - All Derby Homes tenants have already been issued with PayPoint cards
    - Bar codes have been introduced to NNDR, Housing Benefit overpayment and sundry debts which means those customers can pay their bills at any PayPoint outlet or Post Office. We are giving guidance on the invoice about where and how to use the barcode.
    - Arrangements are in place for the range of other council debts that have been paid at the cash counter

As a result of this work there are alternatives available for all of the 5,000 customers who had been using the cash counter.

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>
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**Financial**

- 1.1 All costs associated with the project will be contained within existing budgets.

The cost of receiving payment by Direct Debit is much cheaper than other methods. If we can successfully convert customers to paying by Direct Debit there will be savings and associated efficiencies in collection.

**Legal**

- 2.1 None

**Personnel**

- 3.1 All staff affected will be redeployed to fill existing vacancies within Customer Services

**Equalities Impact**

- 4.1 An equality Impact assessment has been carried out.  
The project encourages a wider range of payment methods at a significantly higher number of more convenient locations across the City.

**Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

- 5.1 There are links to the Council's Priorities, in particular –

Making us proud of our neighbourhoods  
Leading Derby towards a better environment, and  
Giving you excellent services and value for money