

# CABINET

## Customer Service Centres 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008

### Report of Corporate Director (Finance & Performance)

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To update Members on the progress within the Customer Service Centres and to consider the ways of accessing the Lancaster Town Hall.			
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Referral from a Corporate Director	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Date Included in Forward Plan	N/A		
This report is public			

#### OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Cabinet determine their preferred option in respect of the front doors at Lancaster Town Hall
- (2) That Cabinet approve the installation of a new controlled access scheme into Lancaster Town Hall
- (3) That Cabinet note the information relating to customer access to the new customer Service Centres.

#### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 At their meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007, Cabinet resolved as follows:

- (1) That Cabinet notes the process for transferring reception staff into the customer service centres when the face to face facility opens.
- (2) That Cabinet adopts Option (1), to keep the front doors open during normal working time, but to secure the existing glass doors to prevent access by the public in respect of the front doors at Lancaster Town Hall once the side entrance is used as the main entrance to the public, with a review being undertaken in 3 months time.

1.2 Since that time the Customer Service Centres have been in operation and this report provides an update on the operation of the Centres together with proposals regarding access to Lancaster Town Hall.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

### **Customer Service Centres**

- 2.1 The Customer Services Centres in Lancaster Town Hall and Morecambe Town Hall opened to the public at the start of October and each had an official opening ceremony on the 8<sup>th</sup> October. Cllr Mace opened the centre at Morecambe Town Hall and Cllr Gilbert opened the centre at Lancaster Town Hall. There was some positive press coverage and photos from each event were used in the local media.

Between the 1<sup>st</sup> October and 1<sup>st</sup> December just under 6000 people visited the two centres – 54% of whom had Council Tax or Benefit enquiries. Details about visitor numbers etc. are in Appendix A

### **Public Access to Lancaster Town Hall**

- 2.2 Since the opening of the Customer Service Centre (CSC), the Front doors of the Town Hall have remained open with temporary signage in place. There has been a very mixed reaction from customers, some of whom have read the signs and accessed the CSC appropriately. However there have been some incidents of people who have tried to access the building through the front doors despite clear signage as the doors being open have given the impression that the front doors are the way into the main building. The numbers involved in this are getting less, but nevertheless it is still a problem.
- 2.3 To resolve this situation, the options for the Council are to retain the existing arrangements or to close the front doors. The details in respect of each option are set out below.
- 2.4 The first option is to leave the front doors open. This would possibly retain a situation where some customers may think that the front doors still provide access to the Town Hall and therefore make an unnecessary trip up the front steps only to find the doors are closed and access is required around the side of the Town Hall. This option does allow the existing doors to be retained for fire exit purposes and still gives an impression that the Town Hall is open for business.
- 2.5 The alternative option is to close the front doors. The doors would be opened for civic occasions and for evening and weekend meetings as required. The doors would also have to be altered at a budget cost of £8,000 + VAT to allow for their emergency use as a fire escape.
- 2.6 For both options, external signage is being improved. Signs are being erected on the pavement at the front of the Town Hall, one in the area close to the traffic lights, and the other adjacent to the gates leading to the Memorial Gardens and the CSC. This should improve the information for customers, but there is still no guarantee that some will not climb the steps to the front doors.

### **Staff & Member Access to Lancaster Town Hall**

- 2.7 The scheme to create the CSCs included a sum that was for an access control system for staff and Member access to the building. At present access is through the doors to the Memorial Gardens which is controlled by a small keypad. Whilst this is generally effective for security purposes, it is not particularly customer friendly. It also creates a major safety risk in that visiting staff/ members may not be identified as being present in the building should an emergency occur.

- 2.8 The initial contract envisaged the use of a more controlled system. This would be based on a Key Fob/ID card system that would be placed against a “reader” which authorises access into the building. The “reader” is connected to computer software which records the presence of an individual in the building, the information then being available to assist in identifying staff present in the building if an emergency evacuation is required.
- 2.9 The system costs £11,100 and the funding is included within the budget for the CSC scheme. For this cost, three separate sets of doors would be covered by the system together with the software that operates it. This system can be used for as many different sets of doors in different buildings that the council wish to adapt. Under the refurbishment programme for the Access to Services Review, it would then be possible to improve security in the main buildings by using this system.

### 3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 There has been no specific consultation of the door access but customers were asked to give their views on the new Customer Service Centres. A number of comments have been received.

Positive	Negative
I wish to thank all counter staff at MTH who dealt thoughtfully and extremely efficiently in a manner many other local authorities should aim to emulate, being courteous, friendly and kind. If bouquets are handed out they should each receive one.	Why not sell dog waste bags at Town Hall and tourist information centres?
Came into LTH to report missing recycling bin and staff were very helpful during visit.	Can we have main door open at LTH? Symbolically it is very negative to have these great doors shut. Its like shutting out the community
Came into pick RADAR key up – was very impressed with ladies on reception. The welcome was lovely and the efficiency of lady who attended to me was first class. Thank you all.	Why can't I pay my council tax at the council AND why does your automated system not accept visa electron?

### 4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

#### Public Access to Lancaster Town Hall

- 4.1 Option 1 – leave the front doors open. This would possibly retain a situation where some customers may think that the front doors still provide access to the Town Hall and therefore make an unnecessary trip up the front steps only to find the doors are closed and access is required around the side of the Town Hall. This option does allow the existing doors to be retained for fire exit purposes and still gives an impression that the Town Hall is open for business.
- 4.2 Option 2 – close the front doors. The doors would be opened for civic occasions and for evening and weekend meetings as required. The doors would also have to be

altered at a budget cost of £8,000 + VAT to allow for their emergency use as a fire escape.

#### **Staff & Member Access to Lancaster Town Hall**

- 4.3 Option 1 – implement a new controlled access scheme into Lancaster Town Hall. This system would allow for a much improved security access to the Town Hall which can be adapted to be used in other buildings as part of the Access to Services review. More importantly, it has the key benefit of improving emergency evacuation procedures. Funding is already available within the Customer Service Centre budget as set out below in the Financial Implications.
- 4.4 Option 2 – retain existing access arrangements for staff and Members. A saving in the Customer Service Centre budgets would be made amounting to £11,100. This would not lead to any improvements in access arrangements and retains the existing safety risk to visiting staff/ members in that they cannot easily be identified as being present in the building during an emergency evacuation. In addition, should any legal action be taken against the Council for having insufficient evacuation procedures, it is likely that the Council's defence would be inadequate. For instance, a member of staff injured as a result of being untraced in an emergency, would have a reasonable case for negligence against the authority. .

#### **5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)**

##### **Public Access to Lancaster Town Hall**

- 5.1 Cabinet are asked to determine their preferred option in respect of the front doors at Lancaster Town Hall.

##### **Staff & Member Access to Lancaster Town Hall**

- 5.2 Option 1 is the preferred option as this would be more user friendly and provide improved security and evacuation procedures within a budget that is available.

#### **RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The development of Customer Service Centres is a key council priority to improve the public's accessibility to council services.

#### **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

None directly from this report.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Customer Service Centre budget for 2007/08 is £491,000 with £479,900 having been committed. This leaves a surplus of £11,100 available for the door access control. The amendment to the front doors to allow for emergency use would be financed from the maintenance budgets where works will be prioritised within the repairs budget which is on target to be fully spent to meet repair and maintenance commitments in order that the

buildings remain operational. There are no ongoing additional revenue implications arising from the report.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The s151 officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Legal Services have seen the report and have no comments to make.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Cabinet item and minutes 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

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