

REPORT TO CABINET
Local Service Provision

Agenda Item 7a

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Background Papers:-

Local Service Provision Report

Financial Implications: -

None identified for this stage of the project. The ongoing cost of face to face service provision will not be increased as a result of this review.

Equalities Implications: -

The aim of the project is to improve the access to services for our customers across the district.

Legal Implications: -

None identified at present

Options:

Identified in report

Risks:

The suggested recommendations would need to be developed in conjunction with other partners. There is a risk that other partners may not wish to proceed with the recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the Customer Access Strategy a review of face to face services provided by the Council has been undertaken. This has identified key options and researched them to establish proposed options, which will then be developed into a business case, as a further stage of the project.

The objectives of the review were to identify options to provide face to face services that

- Deliver the right services
- Ensuring services are easy to access
- Ensuring that we are providing value for money services to our customers

The conclusions of the review are set out in the main body of the report and the recommendations are detailed below.

DECISION

For cabinet to support the recommendations of the review as set out below.

1. To work with Essex County Council to develop a full business case to deliver services in libraries across the district. There would be two models of service delivery from the libraries.
 - a. Service Delivery Points – These would deliver a wide range of services and would have regular surgeries for in depth queries for benefits and planning.
 - b. Information Points – These would provide signposting to district council services and staff supported internet access, from other libraries across the district. There would also be telephone points provided to provide access to the Customer Service Centre.
2. To consult further with parish and town councils to identify further opportunities for partnership working to improve access to a range of public services for customers.
3. To support any further consultation with Post Offices around payment taking to be dealt with as part of the strategy around taking payments for services being developed by Finance.
4. To await the outcomes of the Village agent project before conducting any further research into the possibility of providing mobile services across the district.
5. For Essex County Council to continue to provide a service on behalf of BDC from Witham Library until a Business Case has been developed to provide services from libraries across the district.
6. To continue the Service level agreement with Greenfields at Halstead Area Office until a full business case has been developed with Essex County Council for the provision of services in libraries across the district.



Local Service Provision

A review of Face to Face services in our district

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Background

A review of how we provide Face to Face services across the district has been commissioned to ensure that we are providing a value for money service to our customers.

The aim of this review is to ensure that more people get access to the services that they require, at places and times convenient to them. This project is being conducted parallel to other projects with the same aim, including reviewing the Customer Service Centre and providing more service online to our customers.

Issues considered as part of this review are; the services that are provided in area offices, the locations that these services are provided and who is providing the service.

These issues have been matched with the demand for these services, and we have used prior customer consultation to identify demand for services, as well as mapping the concentration of our customers across the district.

This stage of the project seeks to identify some clear options that can be further investigated to draw up a full business case.

The majority of options that have been considered have been to deliver services in conjunction with partners that may already be delivering services across the district. The aim of this is to look at the possible synergies of delivering services in partnership in line with our corporate strategy priority to provide one stop shops to our customers where they can access a range of services from different public bodies.

At this stage some consultation has been undertaken with partners to identify their willingness to work with us, and to identify their strategies for delivering services moving partnership. This consultation has not been comprehensive due to the number of options. The preferred options would be researched and consulted on more thoroughly to allow us to draw up a fully costed business case.

This report will also take into account the changes in the way that our customers are accessing services including services that are delivered online and over the phone.

Objectives

The objectives of the overall project are to ensure that we are:

- Delivering the right services
- Ensuring services are easy to access
- Ensuring that we are providing value for money services to our customers

Research and method of review

A review team has looked at the different options to identify the best use of resources to provide our customers with the services they need.

This team brings together expertise in

- Customer service
- Rural services
- Providing services for older people
- Providing specialist services
- Communications

The team has evaluated the options, studied the research undertaken, and put together recommendations based on this information.

It should be noted that these options have not been fully consulted on and the cost benefit analyses do not provide full financial information, due to the number of options. This report will recommend options that can be fully costed and worked on to enable all partners to take through their decision making process.

In our research we have accessed a number of pieces of research that have been conducted. These include:

- Rural Services Survey
- Rural Isolation Task Group report
- Place Survey
- Ward Profiles
- Customer Access Strategy
- Customer access stats for face to face, web and phone
- State of the Countryside Report (Rural Commission)

Issues to be considered

Channel Migration and Current Service Provision

As customer behaviour changes so do their methods of accessing our services. The number of people using the website to access our services has increased dramatically over the last three years. The range of different services they access has also increased. The website provides a 24/7 solution for those people who cannot get into the council offices during the normal working day, and don't wish to travel to the offices.

There are between 20,000 and 25,000 unique visitors to the website every month, access information and carrying out transactions.

There are not specific measures available around the number of people writing in to access services, but nationally it is generally considered to be decreasing. Some of this has been picked up by the number of people emailing in to us and accessing services via the web.

Another method of accessing council services is via the phone. Our Customer Service Centre was set up in 2004 to allow customers to access a single point of contact to deal with a variety of council services. There are still some services which provide dedicated phone lines for customers, and still have back office staff answering phones. The major services operating via this method include Exchequer (revenues and benefits) and planning. There are approximately 25,000 calls received into the authority every month, a figure which has been sustained over the last two years.

There are approximately 5,000 visitors to the offices at Causeway House, Witham Library and Halstead Area Office every month.

Due to the nature of our district, being a large area with a number of rural settlements, and also because of the nature of some of the services that we provide, some services provide a home visiting service. This tends to be for people who have difficulty leaving their home for whatever reason. These services include benefits and welfare advice and benefits applications.

To help us make decisions about the number of people who would need to access services in each area, we have attempted to map not just the population of each area within the district. To get this data we have used the ward profiles.

This data helps us to establish the best use of resources to ensure that we are matching our services as close as possible to the areas of demand.

Density of population

The three towns in the district are located more to the south of the district, leaving a large area of the north of the district without a face to face access point. We have mapped the dwellings in these areas to establish the percentage of people in these areas in comparison to the areas closely located around the three main towns.

This map is provided as an appendix to this document.

Cost of service provision

Aside from Causeway House there are two main service points provided to the district. These are located in Halstead and Witham and are currently provided via a service level agreement by Greenfields Community Housing.

The area offices have been located in the three main towns and, until the stock transfer, provided predominantly BDC services.

The current cost of providing face to face services at these area offices is £82,000 for the Greenfields SLA. There are also staffing costs associated with providing surgeries for planning and benefits at Witham and Halstead, although it is not proposed to amend these at this stage, so these costs have not been taken into account.

It is not proposed to research detailed costs of the options at this stage, as these will be established as part of the full business case for the recommended options.

Access to communication and facilities

Service provision increasingly relies on communications technology. This includes access for officers to key systems to provide up to date information provided to customers and to provide telephone access to Causeway House to give access to specialist officers for more involved queries.

Other projects being conducted

Our face to face service provision should not be considered in isolation from other projects being conducted by us and partners to improve facilities for customers in our district. Some of the key projects we have linked into include:

Village Agents – This project is being conducted through the Local Strategic Partnership and is being led by Health. The aim of the project is to provide key people in locations across the district that can signpost customers to services from various partners. The key person will be a point of contact for those who are not sure how to access services and will have up to date information about what services are being provided and who they are being provided by. This project is further strengthened by the provision of a community transport service to take customers to their key contact from their homes, reducing the likelihood that those who find it difficult to get about in the district will not be able to access their key contact.

Essex Face to Face strategy - Essex County Council are reviewing the services that they provide across the county and the way that they are provided. We have a link in to this project through the Customer Excellence team at ECC. The timing of our project and that being conducted by ECC are different, but there is key research being conducted by ECC that we can use to inform later stages of our project.

Supporting our Communities – A number of key services that are designed to support vulnerable people in our community have been reviewed in light of the financial crisis affecting the UK at the moment. Our teams are looking to improve the services they provide in benefits advice, benefits take up and increasing the funding provided to the Citizens Advice Bureau. There are improvements being introduced in the way that these services are promoted to ensure that our customers are aware of the services available to them.

Options Considered

1. Working with Essex County Council to provide services in Libraries

Description of Service – There are already a limited number of services carried out in libraries on behalf of BDC. These include provision of clear sacks for recycling, signposting to Council services and mediated self service using the free internet access provided at all libraries in the district. The service that could be provided in the libraries would be similar to the service provided now.

Model of service delivery

Library staff would provide a general service on behalf of customers, including

- Reporting issues and incidents
- Benefits application and verification of information
- Holding plans and weekly planning lists
- Mediated self service via free internet access points
- Frequently asked questions

There could also be surgeries provided by BDC officers for planning and benefits similar to those currently provided at Witham and Halstead.

Consultation with Partners

Greenfields are due to be moving out of Witham Library in May 2009. To ensure that service continues to be delivered whilst the face to face strategy is being determined, Essex County Council will be providing services on behalf of BDC using the model detailed above for a temporary period.

We have been working with the Libraries team and the Customer Excellence team to develop this service, and the libraries team would be keen to roll this out to all libraries in the district in some form. It should be noted that whilst there is commitment from ECC to provide a temporary solution for BDC, there has been no decision taken to support this project from ECC.

If this option were chosen as a way forward, a further benefit would be the ability to use the solution at Witham Library as a pilot to resolve any issues before rolling out to other libraries in the district.

Benefits

There are eight libraries excluding Braintree across the district including

Hatfield Peverel
Witham
Coggeshall
Halstead
Earls Colne
Silver End
Sible Hedingham
Kelvedon

There is also a mobile library service that could be used to access services.

All libraries are located within the village, within walking distance of the centre of the village.

All libraries are staffed throughout opening times, which are different, but including as an appendix to this document. There is a network of back up staff and good business continuity in place at each library.

The opening times in libraries include weekends, which gives us the opportunity for our customers who work part time to access some of our services outside of our normal office hours

All libraries are DDA compliant and have access for wheelchairs. They also have internet access which can be used by customers, and links in place to securely transfer data to and from Causeway House.

There would be only one SLA required to provide these services with a single point of contact for performance management. There would still be a requirement for ongoing training for staff at all libraries.

Issues

The libraries have different opening times, and some do not have private facilities for surgeries or private discussions.

Libraries are open on Saturdays which will improve the availability of some services, but as the majority of BDC staff do not work on Saturdays, this could lead to frustration for staff or customers who need advice for more in depth queries from back office staff.

2. Working with Town/Parish Councils to deliver services from Town/Parish council offices

Description of Service – This service would be carried out from the town and parish councils that had manned offices. The current models have been based on the service hours that town and parish councils open, but there could be scope as part of the next stage of the project to negotiate with each council to standardise these, and give a consistent level of service to our customers if required.

Model of service delivery

The preferred model of delivery for service provision from town/parish council offices would be for the general advice and enquiries to be carried out by parish/town council staff through an SLA. BDC would then provide benefits and planning surgeries using BDC staff.

Consultation with Partners

Due to the number of potential partners there has been limited consultation to date. It has been felt that it would be better to consult with the 10 parish/town councils, when there is a clear proposal which could be discussed with them.

Benefits

There are 11 locations we are aware of which have parish/town community or parish offices open to the public. These are located in:

- Coggeshall
- Cressing
- Earls Colne
- Feering
- Great Bardfield
- Halstead
- Helions Bumpstead
- Kelvedon
- Rayne
- Sible Hedingham
- Witham

Most offices are located in or near the centre of the village and are easily accessible. They are staffed during opening times, although often there is one person staffing them. The opening times are included as an appendix to this document.

If services were provided from parish/town council offices this would involve managing a number of SLAs, which would be less time effective than managing one SLA.

There is good coverage of town/parish council offices throughout the district, however opening times in some areas are limited, and business continuity plans are unknown at present.

There has been limited discussion with each of the town/parish councils to date, so there would need to be further discussion with them to identify the exact resources available from each parish/town council office. However, it is known that some have private rooms which could facilitate specific surgeries or appointments.

If this were to be chosen as an option each parish/town council would need to be approached and would need to be prepared to work with the district council to deliver services in partnership.

Issues

For this to be an effective solution we would need a large proportion of parish/town councils with offices to be prepared to work in partnership, and for them to be well spaced throughout the district.

The facilities available (public internet, staff internet, telephone access, DDA compliance etc) will differ at each office. This means that a consistent level of service could not be offered at all locations.

There would need to be multiple SLAs with each parish/town council which would be time consuming and costly to manage. It is also likely to be more costly to have 11 small SLAs than one larger SLA.

3. Working with Post Offices

Description of Service

Post Offices across the district are resourced to take payments on behalf of a number of organisations. There is an opportunity to use Post Offices to take payments on behalf of BDC.

Method of Service Delivery

The Post Offices would take payments on behalf of BDC as part of an SLA to complement the telephone, direct debit and web services that are already available to our customers.

Consultation carried out

Discussions are taking place with Essex County Council around the services that can be provided through Post Offices to support these as a service to the community. **Any discussions with Post Offices?**

Benefits

Post Offices are generally well located in villages and a number of customers who like to pay by cash may use them for other payments. There are already facilities to take large payments, and use a variety of payment methods.

There are over 25 Post Offices in the Braintree District at the time of writing this report, and they are well spaced out across the district.

All post offices are staffed and will have business continuity arrangements in place.

Essex County Council are exploring the option of introducing online Community Information Points in Libraries

Issues

There would need to be multiple SLA with Post offices and training requirements. This would be a significant cost if it could not be managed as one SLA with the Post Office.

The number of post offices is varying and this could cause issues with communication as to where services can be provided.

4. Other Options Considered

Community Halls

Almost every parish in the district has a community hall, which gives the best coverage of services, but would be prohibitive cost wise as these are not staffed and there would be significant set up costs for internet communications, telephone communications, and staffing.

Providing services from a limited number of community halls was also considered, but these are not manned as information points so staffing costs would be very expensive.

Mobile Services

Mobile services other than libraries were also considered. These include the mobile police vans and a joint community vehicle with Essex County Council.

These would need to be staffed from BDC resources which would be expensive and would not provide services often enough to each community to be effective.

Conclusions

During the review of face to face services, there have been a number of other projects ongoing, and a number of projects agreed which will have an impact on the services available to customers across the district.

The village agents project is designed to ensure that there are points of contact across the district who can signpost customers to public services, and identify vulnerable members of the community who may have difficulty accessing council services. As part of this project funding has been agreed to improve community transport links specifically to allow customers to access their point of contact. This project will improve access to all public services, rather than just district council services.

The supporting communities programme will have a number of initiatives which may already be ongoing, but which may be better promoted. This includes benefits officers conducting surgeries in a number of locations throughout the district, and promoting awareness of the benefits and services that people in our district can access.

Libraries have good coverage across the district and excellent facilities provided from them. Initial discussions with Essex County Council have been positive, and the libraries team are providing a temporary solution for BDC from Witham Library following the departure of Greenfields, who currently provide services on behalf of BDC there. Witham Library has hosted a service provided by Greenfields on behalf of the Council for the last three years, and this has been successful. Lessons can be learned from this and the service could be further improved.

There are opportunities to work more closely in partnership with parish and town councils, but further discussion is needed with them to identify the benefits for our customers and all organisations.

Mobile services could still be an option to deliver services moving forward, but it would be beneficial to see the results from the Village Agents and Supporting Communities programmes before deciding how to progress with this.

The recommended options will need to be worked into a full business case; costs and service levels will need to be agreed with partners. Decision making processes will need to be taken by potential partners, to ensure that any partnership working meets their requirements.

Recommendations

1. To seek approval from Essex County Council to work together to develop a full business case to deliver services in libraries across the district. There would be two models of service delivery from the libraries.
 - a. Service Delivery Points – These would deliver a wide range of services and would have regular surgeries for in depth queries for benefits and planning.
 - b. Information Points – These would provide signposting to district council services and staff supported internet access, from other libraries across the district. There would also be telephone points provided to provide access to the Customer Service Centre.
2. To consult further with parish and town councils to identify further opportunities for partnership working to improve access to a range of public services for customers.
3. To allow any further consultation with Post Offices around payment taking to be dealt with as part of the strategy around taking payments for services being developed by Finance.
4. To await the results of the Village agent project before conducting any further research into the possibility of providing mobile services across the district.
5. For Essex County Council to continue to provide a service on behalf of BDC from Witham Library until a Business Case has been developed to provide services from libraries across the district.
6. To continue the Service level agreement with Greenfields at Halstead Area Office until a full business case has been developed with Essex County Council for the provision of services in libraries across the district.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Opening Times of libraries across the district
- Appendix 2 – Opening times of Parish/Town Councils across the district
- Appendix 3 – Population map for the district
- Appendix 4 – Map of service points across the district as at September 2008

Details of opening times of libraries in Braintree District

Braintree

Fairfield Road

Braintree

CM7 3YL

Monday: 9am – 7pm

Tuesday: 9am - 7 pm

Wednesday: 9 am - 7 pm

Thursday: 9 am - 7 pm

Friday: 9 am - 7 pm

Saturday: 9 am - 5 pm

Sunday: 1pm - 4 pm

Coggeshall

Friends Meeting House

Stoneham St, Coggeshall, Colchester, CO6 1UH

Tuesday & Friday 2pm to 7pm

Thursday & Saturday 9am to 1pm

Book delivery service for the housebound available via Sue Norris at the library: 01376 561962

Cressing

Colchester mobile service:

http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/vip8/ecc/ECCWebsite/content/binaries/documents/Libraries/CM3_WK1_Timetable_Jan09.doc?channelOid=null

Earls Colne

William Hunt Reading Room & Library

High Street

Earls Colne CO6 2PA

Tuesday 1pm – 6pm

Thursday 10am – 6pm

Friday 1pm – 6pm

Saturday 9am – 1pm

Feering

Colchester mobile service:

http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/vip8/ecc/ECCWebsite/content/binaries/documents/Libraries/CM3_WK1_Timetable_Jan09.doc?channelOid=null

Great Bardfield

N/a

Saffron Waldon week 2 – Thursday Bendlowes Road 10-10.20, Town Hall 10.25-10.50, 5/3/09, 19/3/09 etc

Halstead

Bridge St

Halstead, CO9 1HU

Monday 8.30am to 5pm

Tuesday 8.30am to 7pm

Wednesday closed

Thursday 8.30am to 6pm

Friday 8.30am to 6pm

Saturday 8.30am to 5pm

Mobile library

Week 1 Friday

Location	Stop Name	Arr.	Dep.
Gainsford End	Telephone Kiosk		9.40 10.00
Wethersfield	Village Hall	10.15	11.40
Wethersfield	Hereward Way	11.55	12.15

Visits Fortnightly

Jan 2, 16, 30	Feb 13, 27	Mar 13, 27
Apr 24	May 8, 22	Jun 5, 19

Week 2 Friday

Location	Stop Name	Arr.	Dep.
Bocking	Dorwards Avenue	9.30	9.50
Bocking	Hanover Gardens	9.55	10.20
Stisted	Onley Arms	10.35	11.05
Bradwell	Hilary Close	11.25	11.50
Coggeshall	Homeweave House	12.05	12.30
Coggeshall	Lakes Meadow	12.40	13.00

Visits fortnightly

Jan 9, 23	Feb 6, 20	Mar 6, 20
Apr 3, 17	May 1, 15, 29	Jun 12, 26

Helions Bumpstead

Mobile library for Saffron Waldon visits: see

http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/vip8/ecc/ECCWebsite/content/binaries/documents/Libraries/SFM_WK2_Timetable_Jan09.doc?channelOid=null

Kelvedon

Aylett's Foundation School

Maldon Road

Kelvedon

CO5 9BA

Monday: 1.00-6.00

Tuesday: Closed

Wednesday: Closed

Thursday: 1.00 - 6.00

Friday: Closed

Saturday: 9.00 - 1.00

Sunday: Closed

Rayne

Mobile library from Witham, visits every fortnight on Wednesday: 4/3/09, 18/03/09 etc

Rayne Symmons Close 14.25 14.40

Rayne Rayne School 15.00 16.00

Sible Hedingham

169 Swan Street

Sible Hedingham

CO9 3PX

Tuesday 2pm to 8pm

Thursdays 2pm to 7pm

Saturday 10am to 1pm

Silver End

10 The Broadway

Silver End

CM8 3RB

Monday: Closed

Tuesday: 2pm - 6pm

Wednesday: Closed

Thursday: 2pm - 6pm

Friday: Closed
Saturday: 9am - 1pm
Sunday: Closed

Witham

Open Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9am to 7pm; Wed 9am-1pm, Sat 9am-5pm Sun 1pm to 4pm
Plus mobile library for Chelmsford area.

Details of opening times of Parish and Town council offices in Braintree District

Coggeshall

The Council Office, Village Hall, Stoneham Street, Coggeshall, Essex, CO6 1UH
10am to 2pm Monday to Friday

Cressing

Wednesday 1st, 3rd and 4th weeks of the month
Tuesday 3rd week of the month
Approx 9.15am to 5pm
St Barnabus Claud Ince Avenue
Cressing
Essex
CM77 8AY
cressingpc@fsmail.net
01376 329288

Earls Colne

Clerk's Office, Council Office, Village Hall, York Road, Earls Colne, Colchester, Essex, CO6 2RN
9.30am to 12.30pm Monday to Thursday

Feering

Feering Community Centre, Coggeshall Road, Feering, Colchester.
Tuesday 10am to midday
Thursday 10am to midday

Great Bardfield (and Finchingfield)

Town Hall Cottage, Dunmow Road
Great Bardfield, Essex CM7 4SA
(Times not yet available)

Halstead

Council Offices, The Mill House, The Causeway, Halstead, Essex, CO9 1ET
Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm

Helions Bumpstead

Community office in village hall.
Tuesday 11am to 3pm
Thursday 11am to 3pm
Fridays 12.30pm to 3pm

Kelvedon

102 High St
Kelvedon, Colchester, CO5 9AA
01376 570285
Mondays only, 9:30am – 12:30pm.

Rayne

Community Information Point, which from Monday 5 January 2009, the opening hours will be:
Monday 10.30am to 1pm
Thursdays 9.30am to midday

Silver End

Information on Silver End PC can be obtained through the Silver End library or via the secretary:
Mrs. B. Temple
35 Derwent Way,
Great Notley,
Braintree, CM77 7UH

Telephone: 01376-528760

e-mail: btemplesepc@ukonline.co.uk

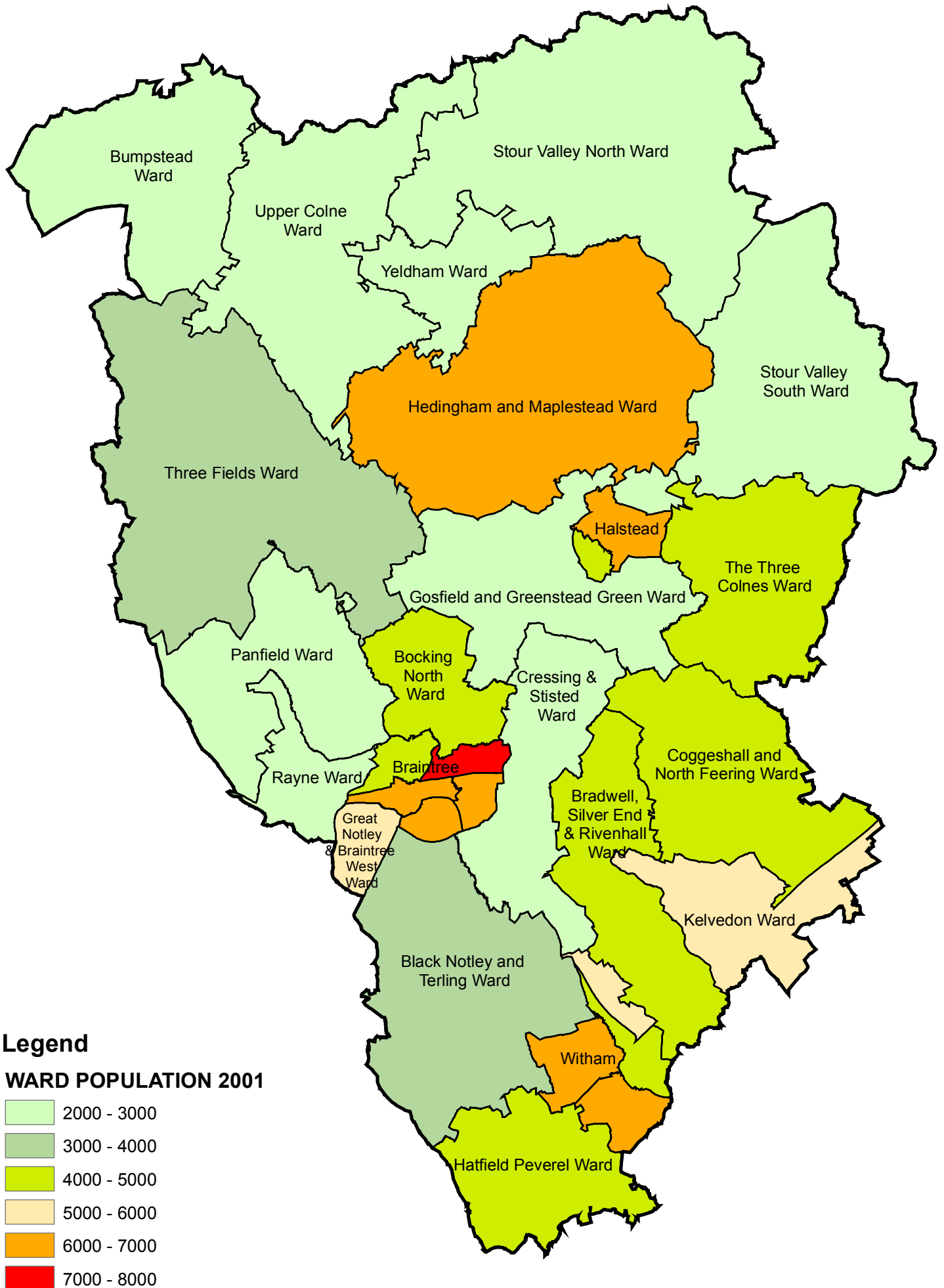
Sible Hedingham

The Parish Council Office, 75 Swan Street, Sible Hedingham, Essex, CO9 3HT
(Times not yet available)

Witham

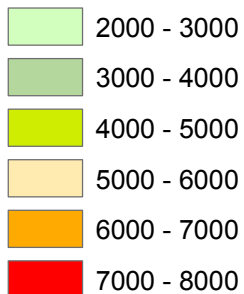
Town Council Offices, 61 Newland Street, Witham, Essex, CM8 2FE
Mondays to Thursdays 9am to 5pm, and 9am to 4pm Fridays

Braintree District by Ward Population 2001

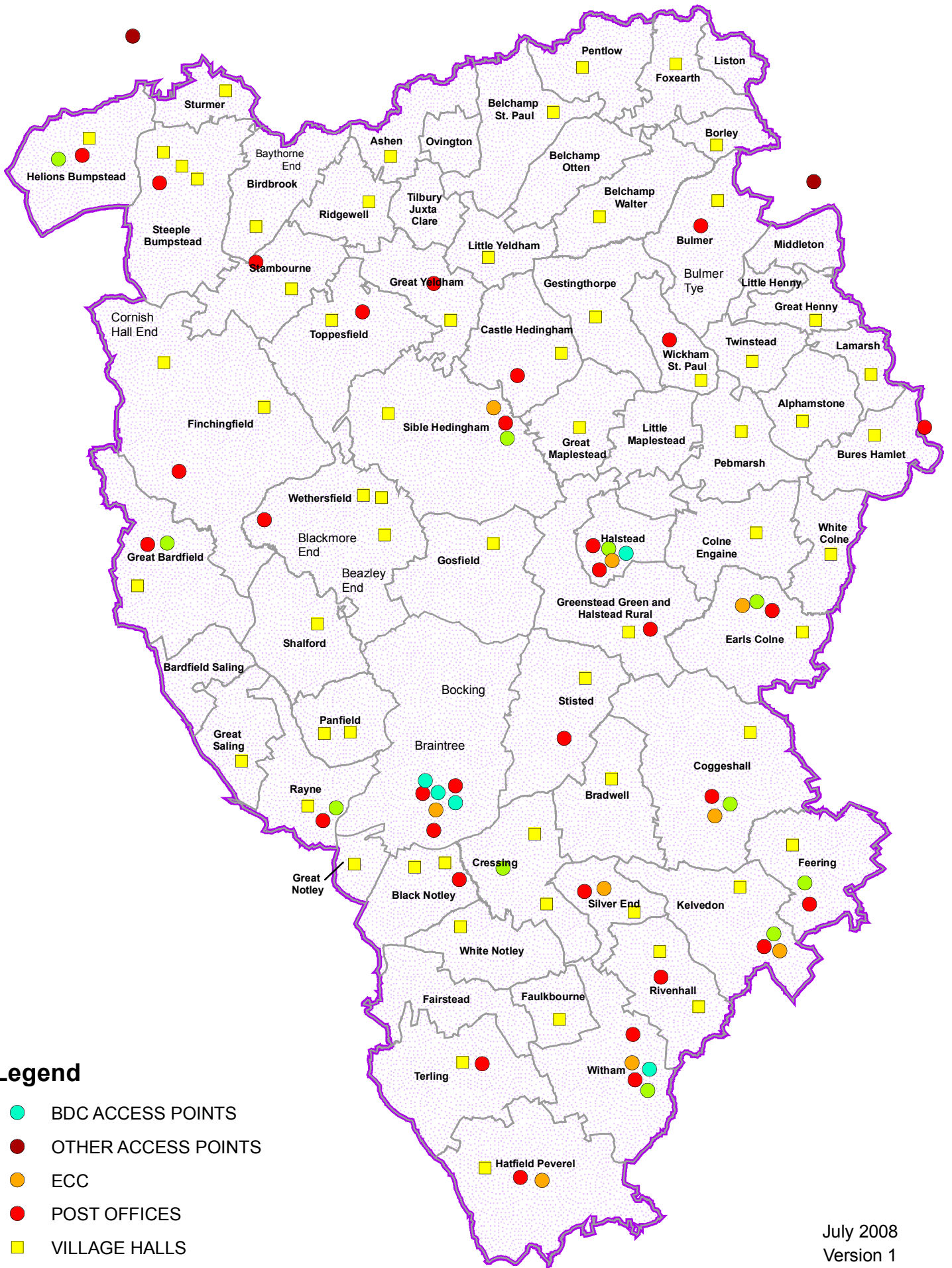


Legend

WARD POPULATION 2001



ALL ACCESS POINTS



Legend

- BDC ACCESS POINTS
- OTHER ACCESS POINTS
- ECC
- POST OFFICES
- VILLAGE HALLS
- PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

July 2008
Version 1
Scale 1:150,000