

## Local Service Provision – Business Case

Agenda Item 9b

**Portfolio Area:** Customer Services  
**Report Presented by:** Cllr Joanne Beavis

**Background Papers:** Report to Cabinet – Local Service Provision 11/05/09  
**Corporate Implications:** Face to face services are currently provided in three main locations across the district, with limited services being already provided from libraries and tourist information offices.

**Options:**

The outcomes of this project would change the way that these services are delivered as detailed below.

**Option 1** – To provide face to face services from all libraries across the district, including Service Access Points at Witham and Halstead Library, and Customer Information Points at smaller libraries.

**Option 2** – To provide face to face services at Witham and Halstead Library, in line with current services provided at these libraries.

**Option 3** – To continue to provide face to face services at Witham Library and Greenfields C.H. Halstead Area Office.

**Option 4** – To extend the pilot at Witham Library and SLA with Greenfields at Halstead, and review other options for face to face service delivery, discussed in the options appraisal.

**Risks:**

The main risks regarding this project relate to adequate provision of face to face services for customers living across the district and the costs of service delivery. These are further outlined in the Cost Benefit Analysis of each option.

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

Following the options appraisal completed in May 2009, this business case further explores the option of delivering face to face services in partnership with Essex County Libraries located in our district.

This business case seeks to inform a decision regarding how we continue to deliver our face to face customer service across the district.

Part of the options appraisal authorised a pilot of this model to be carried out at Witham Library. The outcomes of this pilot have been taken into account when drawing conclusions for this business case.

When a recommendation has been put forward for decision, this will also need to be agreed by Essex County Council.

This review has not included looking at services delivered in the Braintree area. These are being considered separately as part of the proposals for Braintree in the Three Towns One Vision project.

**Decision**

To recommend which of the four options outlined above, best suits the needs of the authority and its customers moving forward.

**Financial:**

There are financial implications of each option, which have been outlined in the main body of the report and summarised here.

	<b>Set Up</b>	<b>Annual Ongoing</b>	<b>Total Year 1</b>
Option 1	£12,212	£42,823	£55,035
Option 2	£9,512	£36,365	£45,877
Option 3	£0	£61,625	£61,625
Option 4	N/A	N/A	N/A

***Please Note – These costs would be subject to review by Essex County Council after the first year, pending the cost of delivering the service. These costs could vary if the number of visitors significantly rises or falls from current recorded levels.***

**Legal:**

There will need to be a formal Service Level Agreement drawn up with Essex County Council if we choose to deliver services through them.

There will be a requirement to discuss the possibility of an extension for Halstead Area Office with Greenfields C.H. if Option 3 or 4 are chosen. If option 1 or 2 is chosen the SLA with Greenfields will require termination.

**Equalities & Diversity:**

An equality impact assessment will be drawn up for the chosen option.

The Rural Isolation Task Group was a key driver for this project and has influenced the recommendation to ensure our customers across the district have good access to council services.

<b>Customer Impact:</b>	This decision will impact where and when customers can access Braintree District Council Services. It is fundamental to the way that we engage with our customers and therefore has been considered as a key element in the Cost Benefit Analysis of each option.
<b>Environment &amp; Climate Change:</b>	<p>This has not been thoroughly considered in developing this business case.</p> <p>There may be some reduction in the number and distance of journeys undertaken to access face to face services, but no analysis has been undertaken to date.</p>

<b>Environment &amp; Climate Change:</b>	<p>This has not been thoroughly considered in developing this business case.</p> <p>There may be some reduction in the number and distance of journeys undertaken to access face to face services, but no analysis has been undertaken to date.</p>		
<b>Consultation/Community Engagement:</b>	Local Committees		Partners
	Public		Staff
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes		
<b>Public/Private Report:</b>	Public		
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	Cherie Root		
<b>Designation:</b>	Customer Services and ICT Manager		
<b>Ext No:</b>	2601		
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## Local Service Provision

### Business Case

#### ***Background***

The development of this business case follows an options appraisal to identify and assess the different methods of delivering face to face services to our customers across the district.

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

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

The outcome of the options appraisal was an agreed recommendation set out below.

*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 for access to the Customer Service Centre.*

#### ***Aim of Report***

The aim of this report is to set out the models of delivery for face to face services in partnership with the Libraries, highlighting how they meet the original aims of the project, stated above.

## ***Options Appraisal***

<p><b>Option 1</b> To provide face to face services from all libraries across the district</p>	<p><b>Cost per Annum</b> <b>£42,823</b> <b>Excluding one-off set up costs of £12,212</b></p>
<p><b>Description of Option</b></p> <p><b>Service Delivery Points</b> This option will extend the current working model at Witham Library to Halstead Library. This will include Library staff providing general advice and access to BDC services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting issues and incidents</li> <li>• Benefits application and verification of information</li> <li>• Holding plans and weekly planning lists</li> <li>• Mediated self service via free internet access points</li> <li>• Frequently asked questions</li> <li>• Distribution of Application forms and Clear Sacks</li> <li>• Telephone access service to staff at Causeway House where required</li> </ul> <p>Staff at Halstead would be extensively trained on BDC services and would be able to provide a similar service to reception staff at Causeway House.</p> <p>Benefits and Planning Surgeries would be provided at Halstead and Witham Library for complex and detailed enquiries from customers requiring a high level of knowledge from officers.</p> <p><b>Information Points</b> Smaller libraries would also provide a limited function on behalf of BDC, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediated self service via free internet access points</li> <li>• Distribution of Clear Sacks</li> <li>• Telephone access service to staff at Causeway House where required</li> </ul> <p>Library staff at smaller libraries would require minimal training to provide these services.</p> <p>Some services (those which did not require access to council officers) would be available on Saturdays and Sundays.</p> <p>There would be a set up cost for this option to provide furniture and interview facilities at Halstead Library, and training costs for Library staff.</p>	

### **Benefits**

**Increased Access Points** - This option would extend the number of access points across the district, and provide points closer where customers live. This will address some of the issues raised in the rural isolation task groups report, enabling more people without ready access to transport to access our services easily.

**Increased Opening Hours** - This option will also extend the opening hours of access points across the district. It will allow customers who work full time to access some council services on a Saturday and Sunday.

**Reduced Costs and Joined Up Service Delivery** - Working with Essex County Council is mutually beneficial to both organisations. It will reduce the cost for delivering our services, and enable us to deliver joined up services to customers from ECC and BDC. Essex County Libraries will also benefit from increased footfall into the library, which it is anticipated will lead to increased membership of the library service.

**Foundation for public service model** – Providing District and County Council services in one place will set a foundation from which other public service agencies could develop their face to face services leading to seamless public service delivery for our mutual customers.

### **Risks**

**Essex County Council Strategy** – There are a number of different strategies being investigated by ECC as to how to provide face to face services. It is possible that Essex County Council would not wish to pursue this model. Extensive discussions have taken place with the Libraries team and the Customer Excellence team, and ECC have committed to pursuing the pilot at Witham Library, leading us to believe that the level of this risk is currently low.

**Access to BDC Information** – There have been a number of issues identified in the pilot with regard to officers accessing BDC information across the Essex County Council network. These have impacted on service delivery during the pilot and are temporarily being resolved on an ad hoc basis. A new public service network is being introduced across all ECC sites, which it is anticipated will significantly reduce these issues.

**Provision of confidential interview area at Halstead Library** – Due to the size of Halstead Library, there is not currently an interview area for surgeries. Essex County Council are looking at the option of putting a partitioned interview area for these surgeries to take place, but this would be subject to planning restrictions and would be quite small to ensure minimal impact on library space.

<p><b>Option 2</b> To provide face to face services from Witham and Halstead Library</p>	<p><b>Cost per Annum</b> <b>£36,365</b> <b>Excluding set-up costs for service at Halstead of £9,512</b></p>
<p><b>Description of Option</b> This option will extend the current working model at Witham Library to Halstead Library. This will include Library staff providing general advice and access to BDC services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting issues and incidents</li> <li>• Benefits application and verification of information</li> <li>• Holding plans and weekly planning lists</li> <li>• Mediated self service via free internet access points</li> <li>• Frequently asked questions</li> <li>• Distribution of Application forms and Clear Sacks</li> <li>• Telephone access service to staff at Causeway House where required</li> </ul> <p>Staff at Halstead would be extensively trained on BDC services and would be able to provide a similar service to reception staff at Causeway House.</p> <p>Benefits and Planning Surgeries would be provided at Halstead and Witham Library for complex and detailed enquiries from customers requiring a high level of knowledge from officers.</p> <p>Some services (those which did not require access to council officers) would be available at weekends.</p> <p>This option would not provide increased access points for customers.</p> <p>There would be a set up cost for this option for furniture and interview facilities at Halstead Library and training costs for Halstead Library staff.</p>	
<p><b>Benefits</b></p> <p><b>Increased Opening Hours</b> - This option will also extend the opening hours of access points across the district. It will allow customers who work full time to access some council services on a Saturday and Sunday.</p> <p><b>Reduced Costs and Joined up service delivery</b> - Working with Essex County Council is mutually beneficial to both organisations. It will reduce the cost for delivering our services, and enable us to deliver joined up services to customers from ECC and BDC. Essex County Libraries will also benefit from increased footfall into the library, which it is anticipated will lead to increased membership of the library service. It is not anticipated that this will generate more savings than Option 1, as some services (including distribution of clear sacks) are already carried out at the smaller libraries and there would not be extra resource required from ECC to provide services on our behalf.</p>	

**Foundation for public service model** – Providing District and County Council services in one place will set a foundation from which other public service agencies could develop their face to face services leading to seamless public service delivery for our mutual customers.

**Risks**

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<p><b>Option 3</b> To continue to provide face to face services from Witham Library and Greenfields Halstead Area Office</p>	<p><b>Cost per Annum</b> <b>£61,625</b></p>
<p><b>Description of Option</b></p> <p>Following agreement of the pilot at Witham, this is the current model of service delivery.</p> <p>Staff at Witham and Greenfields offer services on behalf of Braintree District Council, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting issues and incidents</li> <li>• Benefits application and verification of information</li> <li>• Holding plans and weekly planning lists</li> <li>• Mediated self service via free internet access points</li> <li>• Frequently asked questions</li> <li>• Distribution of Application forms and Clear Sacks</li> </ul>	

- Telephone access service to staff at Causeway House where required

Benefits and Planning surgeries are held by BDC officers, to deal with complex and detailed enquiries.

Halstead Area office is currently open Mondays to Fridays, and Witham Library is open 7 days a week.

The cost of Essex County Council providing services from the library is less than the current cost of service being delivered from Greenfields Area Office.

### **Benefits**

No change for customers – Customers are currently used to having these service provided in this model. There would be no requirement to communicate any changes.

Synergies between Greenfields and BDC – Customers can currently have their Rent and Benefit issues dealt with at the same time, by one office, which would not be possible if BDC services were moved to Halstead Library. There is no evidence that this has been an issue for customers at Witham, following the introduction of the pilot in May 2009.

### **Risks**

**Partner strategies** – Greenfields have not indicated that they wish to stop the arrangement at Halstead, so it is assumed that this can continue indefinitely. Essex County Council is also comfortable with delivering the service through Witham Library, and there is no expectation that they would wish to stop this arrangement. However, by having smaller SLAs with each organisation, this will reduce the strength of negotiation with each party, if any changes to strategy are considered.

**Management of multiple SLAs** – Continuing the current model would require us to continue to manage an SLA with Greenfields and Essex County Council. However, there is not significant time spent managing these SLAs so it is not expected to have a significant impact on internal resource requirements.

**Limiting benefits of increases opening hours and access points** – By selecting this option we will be limiting the benefits to our customers in the Halstead area of increased opening hours and will not be in a position to offer services from the smaller libraries across the district.

**Costs of service** – The current cost of service would remain the same as they are now. Through changing the service delivery at Witham, we have already saved over £20,000 on the budgeted cost for Witham.

<p><b>Option 4</b> To re-evaluate alternative options from the original options appraisal</p>	<p><b>Cost per Annum</b> Unknown</p>
<p><b>Description of Option</b></p> <p>This option would temporarily provide the same model of delivery as the option above, whilst a re-evaluation of other options was considered. This would mean returning to the options appraisal produced in May 2009 and identifying other options for face to face service delivery, which could be worked into a business case.</p> <p>This option should be considered if it is not felt that the options above provide sufficient benefits for Braintree District Council, or if the current position of DC has changed significantly in terms of how it wishes to carry out face to face service provision.</p>	
<p><b>Benefits</b></p> <p>Re-evaluating current position – This option would allow us to review the options against our current position, and identify any emerging options since the options appraisal was completed in May 2009.</p>	
<p><b>Risks</b></p> <p>Deferring cost reductions – This option would not allow us to benefit from cost reductions identified in some of the options above. There may not also be other options which offer as good value for money as the options identified.</p>	

### **Recommendation**

Following the review of the pilot, and the options appraisal above, it recommended that we proceed with Option 1 as detailed above. This would be subject to some of the risks being mitigated, including the implementation of the improved network solution by Essex County Council, and the provision of interview facilities at Halstead Library.

To review the services provided in Braintree as part of the accommodation project, to include the possibility of extended opening hours and Saturday opening.

### **Dependencies**

It is not anticipated at this stage that it will be necessary to utilise the mobile library services, but this could be considered at a later stage if a demand was identified.