

Report to Leader

Subject: Re-opening of the Civic Centre to the public for appointments

Date: 2 July 2020

Author: Service Manager Customer Services

Wards Affected

All

Purpose

For the Leader of the Council to authorise from 6th July 2020 and until further notice, the re-opening of the Civic Centre to the public on an appointment only basis.

Key Decision

This is a key decision as it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the borough.

Recommendation(s)

THAT the Leader of the Council:

- 1) Authorises from 6 July 2020 and until further notice, the re-opening of the Civic Centre building to the public on an appointment only basis.**
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director of Organisational Development and Democratic Services to take any operational measures necessary to facilitate the re-opening.**

1 Background

- 1.1 Following on from the lockdown announcement by government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, a decision was made on the 24 March 2020 to close the Civic Centre to the public.

- 1.2 Within the decision provision was made that, in the event of an emergency, customers could request an emergency face to face to appointment at the Civic Centre.
- 1.3 Since the 24 March 2020 all customer queries have been dealt with either digitally or over the telephone. There have been no requests for any emergency appointments.
- 1.4 The majority of staff are now working from home and are able to deal with customer enquiries remotely.
- 1.5 Within the first eight weeks of the lockdown nearly 8500 extra telephone calls above the normal average were made to the Customer Services team. Despite this, the teams call answering performance improved from 96% to nearly 99%. A 10% increase in online forms submitted to was also seen along with a 308% increase in social media messages and a 21% increase in emails dealt with by the Customer Services Team.
- 1.6 All queries have been dealt with, including continuing with the administration of existing taxi licences. New taxi driver applications remain delayed whilst a safe way to deliver the knowledge test to drivers is established.
- 1.7 Partner organisations within the Civic Centre are still limiting contact with the public. Gedling Homes continue to not accept visitors to the Civic Centre and the Department of Work and Pensions are only permitting emergency face to face appointments with most customer contact being done by phone. The Citizen's Advice Bureau, also have not returned to face to face contact with customers.
- 1.8 Information supplied from neighbouring authorities suggests that most authorities are planning on reopening for appointments only, where business cannot be conducted digitally or over the telephone, once safety measures and screens are in place, at some point in July. Rushcliffe Borough Council has opened for two half days a week for appointments only, where business cannot be conducted digitally or over the telephone and already had screens installed.
- 1.9 In light of subsequent guidance issued by government, steps have been taken to install safety measures at the Civic Centre to protect residents and staff in the event of a return to face to face contact. This has included commencing the installation of screens on the booths and developing proposals for screening of the reception and the taxi licensing desk.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that from start of business on 6th July 2020, face to face contact resumes at the Civic Centre on the following basis, which complies with government guidance on a secure and safe return to business and has been subject to appropriate risk assessments;

<i>Basis</i>	<i>Guidance</i>
Appointments only, where business <u>cannot</u> be conducted digitally or over the telephone	Encouraging visits via remote connection/working where this is an option. Limiting the number of visitors at any one time. Limiting visitor times to a specific time window and restricting access to required visitors only. Staggering visit times Maintaining a record of all visitors, if this is practical.
Until screens are completed on reception the booths will be used without presenting at reception	Installing screens to protect workers in receptions or similar areas.
Advising if the customer has symptoms of Covid-19 on requesting an appointment or arrival they cannot be seen Advising on presenting directly at allocated booth number Advising to arrive alone. If children need to be present for childcare issues then they must be supervised at all times Taping of areas and arrows on the floor, use of barriers and various signage Sanitiser station to remain in area	Providing clear guidance on social distancing and hygiene to people on arrival, for example, signage or visual aids and before arrival, for example, by phone, on the website or by email. Social distancing guidance.

The kiosk will remain restricted (there have been no complaints in respect of the unavailability of the kiosk, customers are still able to pay by cash through the night safe)	Limiting or restricting use of high-touch items.
The interview rooms will not be used for general appointments. If it is required that the Housing Needs interview room must be used, then time will be limited to 30 minutes	Adequate ventilation
Carlton Hub to remain closed (due to the layout of the reception area staff are sat less than a metre from Police staff)	Social distancing guidelines

- 2.2 New taxi driver licensing applications remain suspended. However further proposals will be forthcoming to resume this service once alternatives to providing 'classroom' safeguarding and knowledge tests in agreed and formalised.
- 2.3 It is proposed that in order to facilitate the re-opening of the Civic centre to the public for appointments, a delegation be given to the Director of Organisational Development and Democratic Services to ensure any appropriate operational measures are undertaken.
- 2.4 It is proposed that this decision be kept under review, any changes to government guidance which could facilitate a full re-opening of the Civic Centre to the public will be monitored and implemented when it is safe to do so.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 An alternative option is for operations to continue as they are. With the relaxation of full lockdown and the resumption/future resumption of many Council services provision needs to be made to see customers face to face where business cannot be conducted remotely. Given the size/nature of the Civic Centre reception and interview areas, and taking into account staff and customer safety, government guidance and risk assessments, the proposals in 2.1 are considered to be the safest way to enable some face to face customer service at the Civic Centre.

- 3.2 A further alternative option is for operations to revert to normal with no restriction on public access to the Civic Centre. The government is clear that social distancing and other safety measures are necessary to protect the public and staff. The Council has a responsibility to its residents and staff to ensure that they remain healthy and safe and wherever possible to limit face to face contact. These measures are considered absolutely necessary at the current time to reduce social contact in the Civic Centre and to endorse government's measures. They will be kept under review.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Although the kiosk remains closed, payments can still be made by cash securely through the night safe. The vast majority of customers have diverted to making payment online or over the telephone. As such there are no direct financial implications arising from this report in this respect.
- 4.2 The installation of safety screens and any other appropriate safety measures have incurred additional costs and have been discussed with the Finance Team.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The measures proposed in this report to re-open the Civic Centre have been considered taking into account current government guidance and after thorough risk assessment. The Council has a duty to ensure the safety of staff and visitors to the Civic Centre as part of its responsibilities under health and safety law. These proposals are in line with that duty.

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 There are positive impacts on employees in respect to disability, age, and gender. Employees in these groups will be protected from unnecessary exposure to Covid-19 infection through the policy decision proposed.
- 6.2 There will be positive impacts on a range of service users who fall within the protected characteristics of disability and potentially age due to the reduced opportunity to participate in activities as they will now be able to resume face to face contact. Other than the equality impacts identified the equality impacts are neutral. No further actions are recommended as a result of this equality impact review.

7 Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 The reported positive environmental impacts of Covid-19 through a reduction in the use of vehicles, particularly earlier on in the lockdown have had a positive impact on carbon reduction. Whilst enabling face to face appointments in the Civic Centre may see a slight increase in the use

of vehicles to travel to the Centre, it is not expected that the impacts will be significant.

8 Appendices

8.1 None

9 Background Papers

9.1 No specific background papers have been identified but government guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

10 Reasons for Recommendations

10.1 To take proportionate action in relation to the current COVID-19 pandemic aimed at protecting the residents of the Borough and Council staff and to ensure that social contact is reduced and strictly managed, in line with government guidance, at the Civic Centre whilst still maintaining essential public services.

10.2 To ensure any necessary operational measures can be taken to aid a safe re-opening of the Civic Centre to the public for appointments.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by: Principal Finance Business Partner
Date: 1/7/2020
On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by: Service Manager Legal Services
Date: 1/7/2020
On behalf of the Monitoring Officer