

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 7 September 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Customer Access – Reception Service (Face to face)

Report summary:

Since the start of Covid we have been operating an appointment service for those residents who require face to face support both at Exmouth Town Hall and Blackdown House. Although Covid restrictions were fully lifted in early 2022 we have continued to maintain an 'appointment only' service.

Following concerns being raised by Members, in particular in relation to Exmouth Town Hall that the doors are still not open, it was agreed that a report would be brought to Cabinet explaining the background and our reasons for operating an 'appointment only' service. It also sets out the measures we are putting in place to improve accessibility for our residents. The recommendations are seeking for the position to be reviewed again in 6 months.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. That Cabinet recommends we continue to operate the 'appointment system' for visitors at Exmouth Town Hall and Blackdown House and the position is reviewed again in February 2023 for the reasons highlighted in the report.

Reason for recommendation:

Due to the reasons set out in the report it is considered that Members reviewing the position again in 6 months, will allow sufficient time for the intercom to be trialled, the lease renewal to be sorted and staff shortages addressed.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets

- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact High Impact

[Equalities Impact Assessment](#)

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 At the Full Council meeting on 20 July 2022 a number of Members expressed their deep concern that the doors to Exmouth Town Hall were not open to the public in order for people to access our services, especially our vulnerable residents who may not have any other means to contact the council. Members also highlighted that the building is used by other tenants and therefore consideration on their impact should also be taken into account. Some Members also felt that due to the seriousness of not having our doors open then ideally this report should be brought to an earlier Cabinet meeting than the original planned October meeting.

Background

- 1.1 Since the start of Covid our offices have been open on an appointment only basis and so visitors have not been able to access a drop in service.
- 1.2 Prior to Covid the offices at Exmouth Town Hall and Blackdown House were open to the public between the hours of 8.30 – 5pm Monday to Friday. Customer Services manages the reception and are able to deal with the majority of straightforward queries but any complex or technical issues would need to be dealt with by officers of the relevant service. This means that there are no guarantees that a visitor would be able to see the relevant team or officer without having first made an appointment. The two teams that did have staff based at both locations and would have staff available for a ‘drop in’ service were Housing Benefits and Housing Options (Homeless service).
- 1.3 For the past twenty plus years we had always provided a drop-in service for Housing Benefits and Housing Options. At the time this was largely due to supporting vulnerable residents who needed a more ‘hand holding’ service. However, from data capture carried out in 2019 and feedback from officers (via staff survey feedback sessions in 2021) it was clear that the majority of residents who came to the offices was mainly for demand that could easily be serviced over the phone or online. Therefore the ‘drop-in’ service wasn’t necessarily being utilised by vulnerable residents, those with complex needs or residents who couldn’t use or have access to phones or online services.

- 1.4 Based on demand capture we recognised that there was an opportunity to review the face to face service delivery prior to Covid-19 and that there was the potential to streamline and create efficiencies due to the way residents now expect and want to do more online. See appendix 1 for a summary of the data capture carried out in 2019.
- 1.5 Covid-19 accelerated the shift to online services and more automated ways for residents and businesses to transact with us. For instance we had residents that would only pay their council tax at the post office (despite for years having promoted the benefits of Direct Debit). With Covid we have seen our Direct Debit payers increase by 4,168 to 84% an increase of 3%, and each year more and more are paying this way. We also know from all the government schemes we've had to deliver to our residents and businesses especially over the past two years, that we were able to service these primarily online. A recent example is the Energy Rebate Scheme that we're currently delivering on behalf of government to over 47,000 of our households, including those on low incomes. What our data shows is that of the 10,495 residents that have made a claim (as not a Direct Debit payer) 9,187 (87.5%) have claimed online, 1,293 (12.3%) have needed to make a phone assisted application and 15 (0.2 %) have come to our offices for face to face support.
- 1.6 One of the service areas that used to have a lot of face to face visitors was Housing Benefits (the highest footfall being in Exmouth). Not only are more of our residents using our online services, but there has also been other influences which will result in a reduction in the need for a face to face and telephone service. One of these influences is Housing Benefit for working age being replaced by Universal Credit. Since Covid we have seen a large reduction in our Housing Benefit caseload (reduced from 6086 as at February 2019 to 4,033 as at August 2022). This has therefore reduced the number of new claims and the changes in circumstances we have to process for Housing Benefit. Managed migration is due to restart in the coming months which will mean a further reduction in our Housing Benefit caseload. In addition to this the other main reason we used to have visitors needing Benefit advice was for supplying proofs (in particular payslips). Prior to Covid we moved to accepting evidence supplied electronically and we also now have more enhanced automated data transfer links with the Department for Work and Pensions for notification of changes, further reducing the need for evidence to be supplied by the claimant. During Covid we were able to service all this demand online or over the phone resulting in minimal requirement for a face to face service. This means that it is inevitable that we will no longer see the levels or type of face to face Benefit demand that we used to deal with due to the reasons highlighted.

2.0 Current data

- 2.1 Due to concerns being raised about visitors turning up at both buildings and the potential for vulnerable residents not being able to access help we have carried out a data capture to better understand the numbers and the reasons. To do this we had a member of staff sat in the main reception areas in Honiton and at Exmouth.
- 2.2 Data covers period 20 June 2022 to 5 August 2022 (7 weeks / 35 working days) :

Reasons for visits	Exmouth Visitors		Honiton		Total
	Total number 20 June to 5 August (% of types of visits)	Average per day based on 21 days	Total number 20 June to 5 August (% of types of visits)	Average visits per day (35 days)	Across both locations /Average per day
Delivering post, files, parcels, etc	15 (22%)	0.71	101 (33%)	2.89	116 / 3.60

Contractors, attending meetings or interviews	8 (11%)	0.38	121 (39%)	3.46	129 / 3.84
Needed advice that had an appointment	7 (10%)	0.33	8 (3%)	0.23	15 / 0.56
Needed advice but no appointment	5 (8%)	0.24	65 (21%)	1.86	70 / 2.10
Required other organisations/tenants – Honiton Business Centre, Devon Registrars, Exmouth Town Council, Devon County Council (seen by our officer before being signposted).	33 (49%)*	1.57	14 (4%)	0.40	47 / 1.97
Total visitors to the offices	68 (100%)	3.23	309 (100%)	8.82	379 / 12.05

Note: There will be instances where data has not been captured (e.g member of staff had to leave the desk and someone turns up or dealt with by another officer so not captured within the above figures). For Exmouth only 21 days of data captured where a member of staff was working in the Exmouth reception. This was due to staff shortages.

2.3 In most instances the Devon Registrars will collect their own appointments from the entrance and they have advised that they can see up to 12 appointments per day so not all of the tenants visitors will be reflected in the above table. Other points to note:

- Significantly more visitors are coming to Blackdown House than Exmouth
- On average we get two visitors a day at Blackdown House that are turning up without an appointment
- The majority of visitors for Blackdown House are those attending meetings, interviews or are a contractor and are therefore expected by the relevant officer.
- The highest need for Exmouth is those who need to see tenants of the Town Hall building.
- Based on the average 12 visits per day across both locations - 7.44 relates to post being delivered, contractors and people attending meetings and interviews. Only 2.1 relates to those attending for advice without an appointment.

2.4 Types of advice needed (includes appointments):

	Exmouth		Honiton	
	Nos	Comment	Nos	Comment
Energy Rebate Scheme	0		23	This is a temporary scheme. Main scheme will be closing end of September and Discretionary scheme end of November
Council Tax	0		11	Payment enquiry, moving address, etc.
Benefits	0		8	Submitting a case review, changes in circumstances, etc
Housing Options	3	Homeless cases, advice needed, etc	5	Homeless cases, needed to bring in paperwork.
Housing rental	1		3	
Housing Allocations	0		1	

Planning	0		4	Pay a hedge fee, wanted planning advice, etc
Other:	8	Signpost to meetings x 7. Attacked by seagull and wanted to report it x 1.	15	TPO query, Neighbour dispute, Home Safeguard, Green waste checking subscription, Business Rates, Overseas pension signing x 3 (not a statutory requirement), Estate Management, Licensing, Anti-Social behaviour, etc
Devon County Council /Citizens Advice	0		3	Bus passes x2 Citizens Advice x1
Total	12		73	

2.5 Time of day when visitors are coming to our offices.

Honiton:

Time of day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total
08:30-9.00	6	2	3	1	4	16
09:00-12.00	32	42	32	32	17	155
12.00-14.00	16	11	30	16	9	82
14.00-16.30	7	10	17	14	4	52
16:30-17:00	0	3	1	0	0	4
Total	61	68	83	63	34	309

- Highest time for visitors is between 9-12 and lowest after 4.30pm
- Tuesday and Wednesday are the highest day for visitors and Friday is the lowest

Exmouth:

Time of day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total
08:30-9.00		1	1	1		3
09:00-12.00	11	5	5	16	7	44
12.00-14.00	2		2	1	1	6
14.00-16.30	6	2	1	5	0	14
Total	19	8	9	23	8	67

- Highest time for visitors is between 9-12 and lowest is before 9am
- Busiest day for visitors is Monday and Thursday

2.6 To set this in context the number of face to face visitors compared to the volume of phone calls (our main communication channel) that the council receives (via our call centre technology) is as follows:

- During the same period 20 June 2022 to 5 August 2022 the council answered 30,535 calls which equates to an average of 872 calls per day / 4,362 calls per week.
- 12,651 are answered by customer services officers which equates to 361 calls per day / 1,807 per week.
- On average Customer Services Officer will answer in the range of 60+ to 90+ calls per day. In addition they will also deal with online contact forms, social media responses, processing claims, etc.

What this hopefully highlights in terms of value for money is that a member of staff will be able to deal with far more customer transactions/enquiries over the phone than in person. However as set out under paragraph 5.3 our aim as part of our digital and customer access strategy is to move more of our phone calls online, an even more efficient way to handle straightforward transactions than on the phone.

3.0 Improvements we are making and how we will ensure we are protecting our vulnerable residents

- 3.1 I understand Members concerns that by not having our doors open at either Blackdown House or Exmouth Town Council, could mean our vulnerable residents who are digitally excluded or don't have a phone (or credit) are at risk of not being able to access our services. The intercom facility that is being installed at both locations will help to address these concerns and ensure that our services remain accessible to all. There will also be a rain cover installed so that in wet weather any visitors can be shielded.
- 3.2 The intercom system that is being installed will link directly to our corporate customer phone line and these will be identifiable as either Blackdown House intercom caller or Exmouth Town Hall intercom caller. Our existing call centre technology means that as we can identify these callers we can give these calls top priority and in effect push them to the top of the call queue. As we plan to have a customer service officer available during office hours in both locations this means that any callers (including those that are vulnerable) who need urgent support will be assisted. However what this does mean is that staff will not be tied up dealing with simple or non-urgent processes that can be delivered more efficiently online or by phone. It should also be noted that the majority of callers for East Devon services (para 2.2) are either for contractors, attending meetings/interviews or for delivering post/parcels. This supports our digital strategy that has been approved by Members where face to face is reserved for high and complex needs or where someone is digitally excluded (including those without phone credit).
- 3.3 The intercom will also help to address concerns raised by Members regarding residents and visitors having to wait outside in the pouring rain or cold weather prior to an appointment as they will be able to use the intercom to notify us of their arrival.
- 3.4 I appreciate that the intercom will not alleviate all of Members concerns as clearly this isn't going to be the same as having a Customer Services Officer on reception with the doors open but we do anticipate that this will improve accessibility in particular for those residents who are unable to access our services via other means.
- 3.5 As we have not yet installed the intercom ideally we would want to trial this before considering whether there is a need to re-open the offices at Blackdown House and/or Exmouth Town Hall. The intercoms are due to be installed between the 12- 15 September 2022.
- 3.6 Other improvements we are making:
- We are making improvements to our signage for visitors at both buildings. As can be seen from the table above we do get people coming to the wrong building or don't use the designated post boxes but instead want to hand post/documents into the receptionist.
 - Better communication regarding the appointment service and improvements to our website to make it clearer that we provide appointments at both Exmouth and Honiton and these can be booked direct with the relevant service.
- 3.7 Other improvements that could be explored. There will be costs associated with this improvement which aren't currently being considered:
- To create secure lobby areas in both Exmouth Town Hall and Blackdown House reception areas which do not have a receptionist where visitors can self-serve through the use of computers or designated phone (linked to our customer services team). The areas would need to have security cameras. This could also include an internal waiting area for visitors to sit whilst waiting for an appointment.

- 3.8 If this is something that Members were interested in exploring then the Estates team could consider this as part of future proofing the best utilisation of our office buildings now we are working in a more hybrid way.

4 Concerns being raised in relation to Exmouth Town Hall

- 4.1 Members will appreciate Exmouth Town Hall building is also used by our tenants Exmouth Town Council, Devon Registrars and Exmouth Council of Voluntary Services. Both Exmouth Town Council and the Devon Registration Service have face to face callers. For the Devon Registration Service these are by appointment only but for Exmouth Town Council they can be by 'drop-in' as well as by appointments.
- 4.2 Within tenants leases/rent agreements there is no express provision for East Devon District Council to provide a reception facility and there is no charge being included within the service charge that the tenants pay.
- 4.3 We are aware that Exmouth Town Council and the Devon Registrars would like the building to be re-opened and the reception staffed. Exmouth Town Council have also advised that they consider that it's important the main town hall building doors are open and that they are accessible for the residents of Exmouth. Although the intercom will go some way to improve accessibility it will not fully address their concerns. They have expressed that it would be helpful to have the reception open at least each morning from Monday to Friday.
- 4.4 Devon Registrars do not consider the intercom system will address their needs as they want their visitors attending appointments to be able to access the building and be directed to the waiting area as their staff would be tied up either on a phone call or in an appointment.
- 4.5 Our Estates team are in discussion with Exmouth Town Council regarding their requirements for having a publicly accessible reception area. This is currently being considered as part of the Town Council's lease renewal and taking into account our own requirements.
- 4.6 Following refurbishment of the building pre Covid we were providing a reception service because at that time the majority of callers were for East Devon matters, and we accommodated a signposting service for Devon Registrars and for the Town Council. As already highlighted this was not a service that was being paid for.
- 4.7 I appreciate that our current face to face delivery model is not meeting the needs of our tenants but our preference is that should they want to discuss alternatives to our proposals then this should be done as part of the negotiations of the lease/rent renewal.

5 Other Considerations

5.1 Value for Money

- The government Digital Efficiency Report suggests that for some government services the average cost of face to face support can be fifty times higher than online.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-efficiency-report/digital-efficiency-report>
- In order to return to the service provided pre Covid would mean we will need a minimum of four Customer Services staff to cover both locations. The reason we need a minimum of two staff at both locations is due to staff safety and covering lunch breaks, start and finish times. There also needs to be staff including management working from the ground floor keeping any eye on the cameras and being alive to any potential inflammatory issues in order to implement our safety protocols, due to not employing a security officer in our reception areas.
- Although staff can work on other matters in between visitors, the types of work they can do is limited due to confidentiality issues and being available for when visitors arrive. Staff will

often get caught up in 'conversation fillers' as this very much comes with the role of providing a welcoming and helpful reception service. It is naturally a more disruptive environment for staff to work in which means they are far more limited on what other work they can deal with.

- This means that staff capacity to answer calls, respond to online demand, determining claims, resolving queries is far more limited when manning a reception service. We know from our data capture that one of the high volumes of callers is for deliveries/dropping off items etc and even though there are designated post boxes if the reception is open then these will be handed to the reception instead.
- There is also an administrative burden when organising the rotas to reflect work patterns, staff leave, etc. These can often be subject to change and also have to be done in conjunction with responding to phones, online demand, determining claims, resolving issues, caseload management, etc.
- Re-opening the doors will create demand that isn't even necessarily for services that East Devon delivers or that is primarily used by those that are vulnerable or need face to face support as evidenced from our data capture. It is important for Members to take into consideration the cost of resourcing a reception service at both or one of the locations in terms of providing best value for money to all the taxpayers of East Devon.

5.2 Equalities duties

5.2.1 When making decisions it is important that these are considered in relation to our equalities duties to ensure that we have properly considered those with protected characteristics. An [Equalities Impact Assessment](#) has been carried out.

5.3 Digital and Customer access strategy

5.3.1 Members approved in March 2022 the Council's digital strategy which clearly sets out:

- The majority of customers serve themselves using online transactions and information at a time and place, and using the digital technology, that they choose.
- Face-to-face, telephone and email contact is reserved for high and complex needs.

5.3.2 By providing an appointment service we can ensure that we are targeting face to face support for our vulnerable residents or those with high and complex needs. Due to the diversity of the services East Devon provides it also means that appointments will be dealt with by the appropriate skilled/trained officer therefore the member of the public can be certain that their matter will be dealt with during their visit to the offices.

5.3.3 Having an intercom will mean that anyone who does turn up without an appointment who is clearly vulnerable (for example; no access to phone, online services or is distressed, etc) will have a member of the customer services team to prioritise support and help address their immediate concerns or needs with the relevant team. This means that we remain available to those who can't access our services digitally or over the phone.

5.4 Greener East Devon /Cost of living

5.4.1 Keeping an appointment system supports the Council's plan for a Greener East Devon as it ensures that we are not creating unnecessary travel to our offices as services are provided on-line or over the phone. Appointments also avoids the risk of members of the public making wasted journeys to our offices and provides for a much more business-like service as they can be certain that they will be seeing the right officer to deal with their need. An example of this that I witnessed in reception in July 2022 was an Axminster resident turning up at the Honiton offices without an appointment. We were unable to fully deal with their request because of certain information they needed to bring with them and did not know this was required. This meant that they needed to go back home and return or send in the information electronically or by post. Had they made an appointment or called us before they travelled to the offices this could have been avoided.

6.0 **Staffing resources**

- 6.1 For the past two plus years Revenues, Benefits, Corporate Customers Services and Fraud & Compliance staffing resources have been utilised to support our Covid response work (we were at the forefront of delivering numerous financial support measures for both residents and businesses). We are currently delivering schemes for government on the Energy Rebate (Main Scheme and Discretionary Scheme), Household Support Fund and Homes For Ukraine Scheme. All these schemes have to be implemented at pace with very little notice and are all currently live. The Energy Rebate Scheme has in particular been incredibly resourceful to administer but has had to be prioritised to ensure eligible residents receive their payment. Unfortunately due to staff recruitment issues we are having to continually prioritise work which is meaning that there are key areas of our work which we are falling behind with (in particular around collection and enforcement, compliance, etc). We have tried to bring in extra staff to support this additional work due to a number of our existing staffing leaving (mainly progressing to new roles within the council) and currently have 4 permanent vacancies to fill across the service plus two fixed term contracts to cover secondments. We had also tried to recruit 4 temporary staff to support this additional work and although at the time we had only managed to recruit two temporary staff these have now progressed into permanent roles. This is good on one hand but the service never benefitted from having additional capacity to support the new areas of work. It also takes time to train new staff which takes away existing resource again impacting on workloads.
- 6.2 We also recognise that this coming winter with the pressure on household bills due to high inflation and energy costs additional work for all my teams will be created – greater demand for emergency help, more residents falling into council tax arrears, dealing with non-payment issues, more requests for discounts/ reliefs as people look at ways to reduce their outgoings, businesses struggling, etc. We know that it's important that we have our skilled and trained officers available to support our residents and businesses this winter as we know that many of our residents are going to be experiencing unprecedented financial pressure in being able to afford the basics.
- 6.3 We are already exploring ways and will be scoping up plans that will be presented to the Poverty panel at their September meeting on additional measures we will need to consider putting in place this winter to help our residents who are going to struggle. All of this work will create additional resource pressure on our teams. It is therefore important that we ensure that we are targeting our resources in the most effective way to achieve the best outcomes for our residents.
- 6.4 Prior to Covid we were clearly resourced to service both reception facilities but at the present time due to staff recruitment and retention issues and the additional work being absorbed by the teams we don't have the resources to re-open the reception service at either locations, unless there are areas of work that we stop doing in order to direct resources into staffing the reception area. Alternatively we would need to be able to recruit additional staff on top of filling the current vacancies to reopen the reception areas to a pre Covid service.
- 6.5 My current concern with the recruitment and retention issues that the service is currently experiencing is that we will have difficulty recruiting temporary staff. Should we commit to re-opening and see a further churn in turnover or are not able to recruit to existing permanent vacancies then this will put the team under even more pressure. Currently we are having to pull staff off council tax and benefit work, pause collection and recovery work in order to support the Energy Rebate Scheme due to staff shortages.
- 6.6 Even when these additional schemes come to an end it is highly likely that more will follow. We have also experienced growth in a number of areas of our existing work, are behind in a number of areas and are also being impacted by current external economic influences. This means that even when we have caught up it will still be difficult to gauge whether we will have the capacity to absorb the staffing resources needed for reopening both receptions. The landscape is continually changing and we recognise that there are many areas of our work that can be streamlined or are ripe for automation/ digitalising. However, this takes

time to implement and for efficiencies to be realised so although we would hope that longer term the administrative resources needed will reduce, this is against a backdrop of a changing landscape where certain external influences are out of our control. It is important that should Members want to re-open the doors on a permanent basis that we may need additional budget to allow for this especially in the short to medium term.

6.7 Housing Options have also advised that they will need additional resources if we revert to pre Covid service levels and is something that they would need to plan for.

7.0 What are the rest of Devon offering in terms of face to face service:

Local Authority	Face to Face Service
Exeter	Appointment only service although doors are open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday 9am -12pm & 1pm -4pm. Phone on outside of building which links into switchboard for public to use. They have a receptionist and a security guard.
Mid Devon	Visits are by appointment only or for self service. Open 9am to 1pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday.
North Devon	Lynton House, Barnstaple –Monday, Wednesday & Friday 9 am-1pm Ilfracombe Centre – Tuesday, Thursday & Friday 9am – 1pm & 2pm- 5pm The Amory Centre, South Molton – Tuesday & Thursday 9am - 1pm & 2pm – 5pm. Friday 9am – 1pm & 2pm -3.30pm
South Hams	Reception closed
Teignbridge	Appointment only service. Reception doors open as access required for DWP (Job Centre) who provide a security guard. Visitors can use the computers or the electronic booking system to notify that they have arrived for their appointment. No officer in the main reception as monitored by CCTV.
Torrige	Monday to Friday 9am to 1pm & 2pm to 4.30pm
West Devon	Open one day per week
Torbay	Closed face to face services some years prior to Covid. Self-service kiosks available in libraries.
Plymouth	Closed face to face.

- 4 out of 9 do not have a customer services officer on reception to help visitors who drop in.
- Most authorities that do have their reception open are only open for part of the day or for some of the days from as low as one day per week.
- North Devon is the only authority that has more than once reception service within their district.

8.0 Summary

8.1 Based on demand we are seeing at Exmouth it is difficult to justify that there is a business need to provide a receptionist for servicing East Devon's demand. The numbers for those needing advice are extremely low and the majority are making an appointment rather than just turning up. However, I appreciate that our tenants and some of our Members have expressed their concerns of the doors being closed. Clearly if the doors were open then we would see more residents calling into the offices and it may also be felt that there are wider benefits for having our doors open and the reception staffed.

8.2 From a resourcing issue and to also allow time to trial the intercom my recommendations would be that we continue with the existing delivering model but review the position again in February 2023. This will also allow time to explore with Exmouth Town Council their

requirements and how best these can be supported but reflecting that we currently don't make a charge to our tenants for providing a reception service.

- 8.3 If Members feel that there are wider benefits to our residents and businesses in having our doors open to the public for a drop-in service then my recommendation is that we move to a more restricted service where we start by only opening for two mornings per week maximum (9am to 1pm) at each location. The rest of the time visitors will be able to use the intercom facility. This is then something we can look to put in place to start before the next financial year subject to having addressed our recruitment issues.
- 8.4 Overall, the main reason we can't currently open our reception at Blackdown House or Exmouth Town Hall is due to the resourcing issues we are experiencing – recruitment/retention and the additional work associated with implementing these latest government schemes which is why we are seeking to review the position again in February 2023.

Appendix 1

2019 Demand capture for visitors - Blackdown House and Exmouth Town Hall

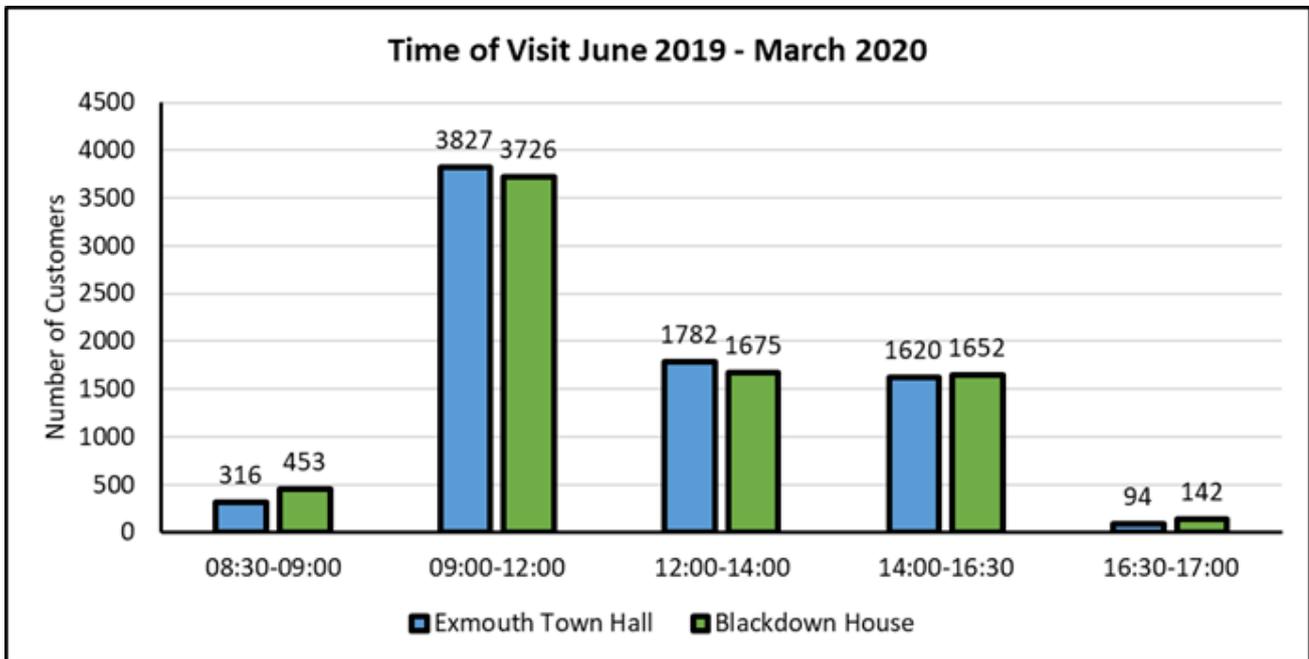
1.0 Number of visitors to Blackdown House & Exmouth Town Hall

Visitors	BDH	Exmouth
Jun-19	983	1012
Jul-19	1052	1081
Aug-19	805	806
Sep-19	778	772
Oct-19	811	735
Nov-19	777	723
Dec-19	497	520
Jan-20	779	819
Feb-20	746	730
Mar-20	421	466
Total	7,649	7,664
Average per month	850	852

Comments:

- Customer footfall was starting to show signs of reducing across both sites although this may be due to colder weather compared to the summer months.
- Exmouth has a slightly higher footfall than BDH but will also include data visitors for other tenants.
- Data includes visitors attending appointments, contractors, deliveries, signposting as well as advice.
- March 2020 will be lower due to the impact of Covid-19

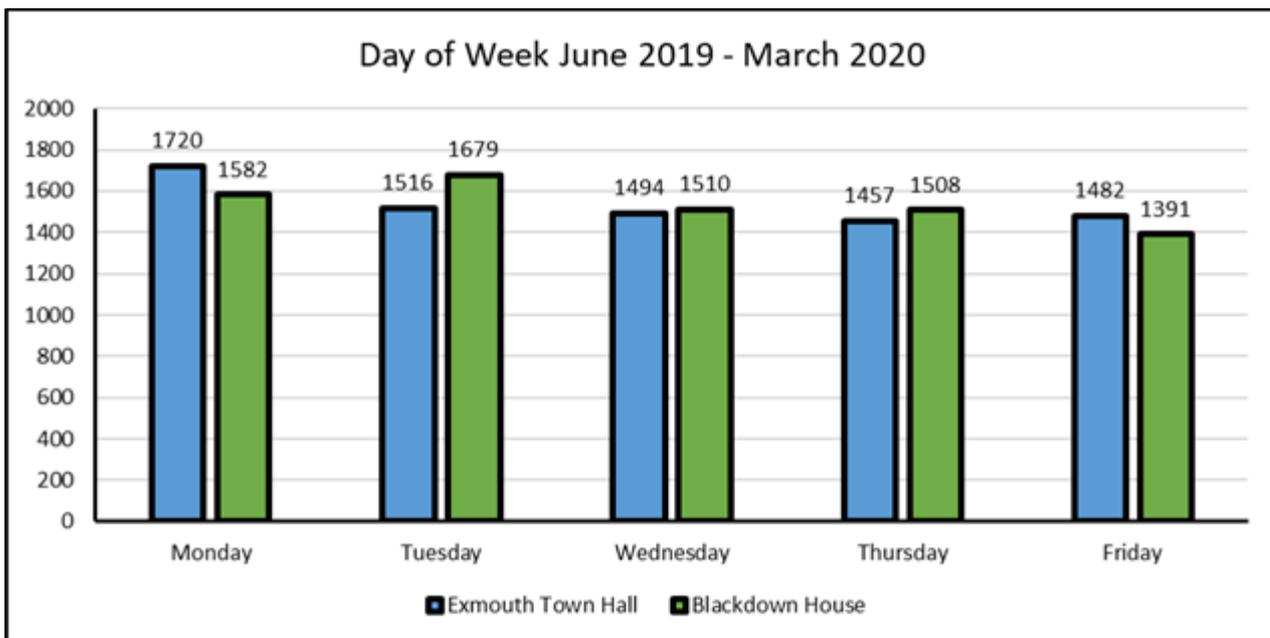
2.0 Time of visits.



Comments:

- Majority of visitors attend between the hours of 9-12
- Significantly lower customer demand between 8.30-9.00am and 4.30 to 5pm

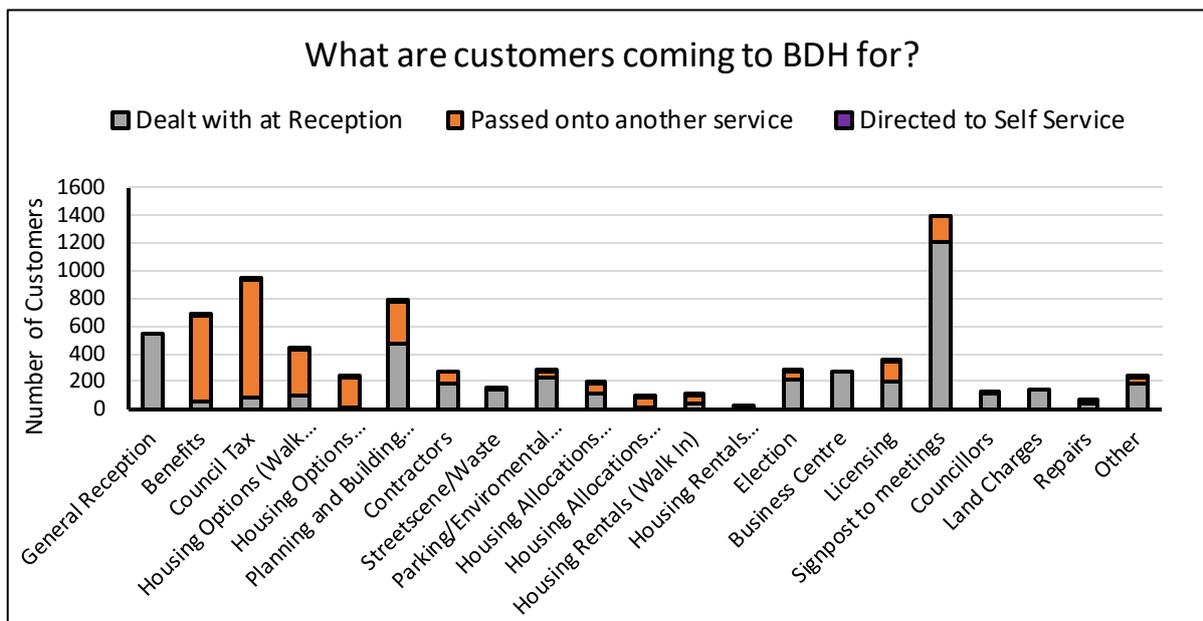
3.0 Visitors by Day



Comments:

- Monday is the busiest day in Exmouth
- Tuesday is the busiest day in Honiton
- Friday is our quietest day in Honiton which is likely to be due to less meetings and also when less staff are working (most popular day for leave/flexi or non-working day).

4.0 Breakdown of demand for BDH

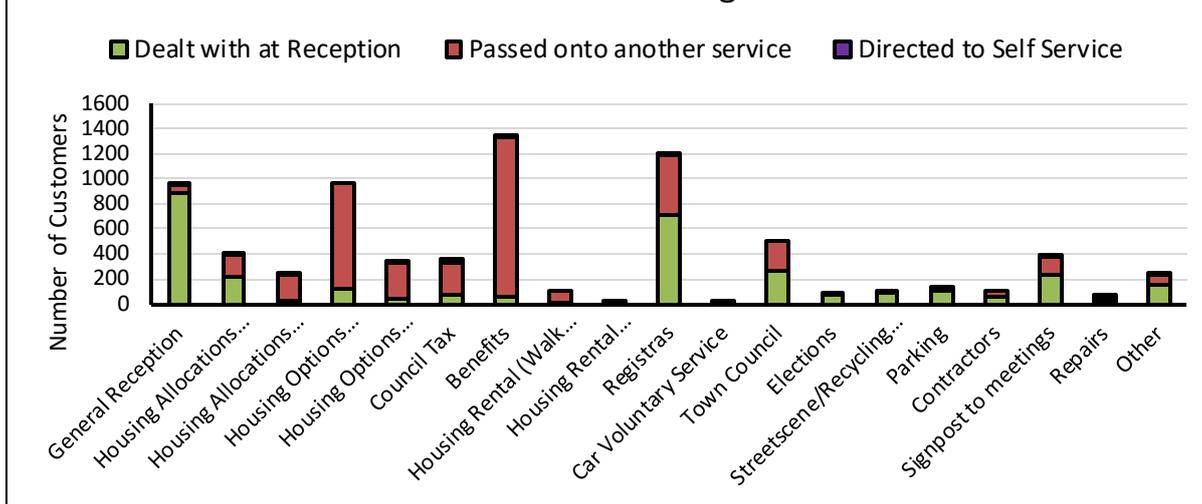


Comments:

- Highest demand is signposting for meetings (21%). Visitors on arrival will naturally make their way to reception even though there is no requirement to sign in and there is clear signage for location of meetings.
- Since Covid-19 many officers are used to holding virtual meetings so the need for face to face meetings once restrictions are lifted is likely to significantly reduce.
- Second highest is Council Tax – main demand is for moves, paying, discounts/reliefs & general advice. As this demand can all be handled over the telephone or online then this type of transaction is ideal for primarily servicing online.
- Third highest is Planning – this will include dropping off planning applications, appointments with planners or building control officers as well as general advice.
- Fourth highest is Benefits– main demand is supplying proofs, changes in circumstances, making a new claim, discretionary housing payments. All can be done online and most can be dealt with over the phone. Due to automated links with Department for Work and Pensions we are no longer reliant on claimants reporting changes because a higher number of these are now automatically notified to us. With Universal Credit now replacing Housing Benefit for working age we have seen a significant reduction in new Housing Benefit claims and will only continue to reduce as more claims are migrated onto UC.

5.0 Breakdown of demand for Exmouth Town Hall:

What are customers coming to ETH for?



Comments:

- Demand includes for other tenants of Exmouth Town Hall.
- Highest demand is for Benefits – see section 4.0 for reasons.
- Second highest is for Registrars –demand is to signpost appointments to the Registrar’s office.
- Third highest is for Housing Options – includes appointments and walk ins.
- Fourth highest is for general reception – contractors, post, deliveries, directions, general advice, etc.

6 Key points from data

- Data is limited as does not provide sufficient explanation on what advice/support was needed from the relevant service.
- Data is now 3 years old and Covid will have influenced changes in the way residents will want to transact with services. Also, certain services will have also be subject to change (as highlighted with Benefits).

Blackdown House

- Visitor numbers were starting to show signs of decreasing and could be due to switching to alternative communication methods or due to colder weather and people being less inclined to travel.
- The highest reasons for visitors was signposting to meetings (21%), council tax (14%), planning (10%) and then benefits (9%).
- The highest time for visitors is between 9-12 with minimal visits between 8:30-9 & 4:30-5.
- Busiest day for visitors is a Tuesday.

Exmouth Town Hall

- Visitor numbers were decreasing, see above.
- The highest reasons for visitors was benefits (18%), signposting to registrars (16%), housing (13%) and general reception (13%)
- The highest time for visitors is between 9-12 with minimal visits between 8:30-9 & 4:30-5.
- Busiest day for visitors is a Monday, with the rest of the week dropping consistently.

Financial implications:

No direct financial implications from the report. If considered any future changes to reception areas will require funding to be identified.

Legal implications:

The legal issues are covered in the report.