

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**5<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2009**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

### **CABINET DECISION/KEY DECISION**

Access and Communities – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Coleman

#### **ACCESS TO SERVICES – REVIEW OF INGLEBY BARWICK COMMUNITY ACCESS POINT**

1. Summary

The report details the results of a review of the Community Access Point service at Ingleby Barwick. The Ingleby Barwick Community Access Point is the first of a proposed borough-wide network of locations, that operate on a part-time basis. Customers that want to interact with the Council on a face-to-face basis, but are unable to access one of three main multi-service centres, can call in to talk to a Customer Service Officer. The report makes recommendations for the future delivery of the Ingleby Barwick service.

2. Recommendations

1. That the trial Community Access service at Ingleby Barwick change from weekly to monthly and take place on Saturday mornings.
2. That the range of activities at the Ingleby Barwick Access Point (and any new access points) be expanded to include promotions of forthcoming events and topical matters that may be of interest to residents.
3. That the Ingleby Barwick trial be extended for a further six months at which point a final decision be made about the future of the service.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

The recommendation takes account of the low take-up of the existing weekly service whilst accepting the results of consultation that indicate there is still demand for the type of service provided at the Community Access Points. The change will free-up staffing resources to deliver improved performance in the main contact centre or open new Community Access Points elsewhere within the borough.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

**Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the trial Community Access service at Ingleby Barwick change from weekly to monthly and take place on Saturday mornings.
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**DETAIL**

1. In January 2006, Cabinet approved a vision for the way that the Council's customers might access its services in the future. This became the Council's Access to Services Programme and included the development of a corporate telephone contact centre, three multi-service centre in the town centres of each of Stockton, Billingham and Thornaby and a borough-wide network of "Community Access Points" for customers who have special needs or live in outlying communities and might not be able to access one of the three town centre multi-service centres.
2. The plan for the Community Access Points was that through the use of mobile technology and the new CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software, Customer Service Officers could work in outlying areas on a "surgery" basis, visiting various locations regularly (eg once a week). Although it might not be possible to resolve the same range of queries at first point of contact as at one of the main multi-service centres, customers would be able to talk to officers face-to-face and the officer concerned would take ownership of any queries or requests for service that are raised, either dealing with them on the spot or following them through when they return to the main office.

3. During 2006, consultation exercises were undertaken with Members and Viewpoint Focus Groups to consider possible locations for the Community Access Points. Suggestions included supermarkets, GP surgeries and the mobile library bus. The consultation indicated that this type of service would be welcomed, however it was difficult to gauge demand. It was therefore decided that, initially, one network point should be set up as a pilot, to enable further analysis and review.
4. In following up customer suggestions, an approach was made to Tesco Ingleby Barwick branch where management expressed an interest in working with officers to establish a Community Access Point within the store. Space could be provided for a "Council stand" in the main customer thoroughfare together with a room for private discussions with customers. It was decided to open the first Community Access Point within the Tesco store and that this should form the pilot scheme. Experiences of the exercise would inform the roll-out of other Access Points.
5. The Access Point was launched on 11th January 2008. It opens between 11:00am and 3:00pm each Friday. The hours of operation were originally 1:00pm to 4:30pm; however these were changed in September, to try to pick-up Tesco's mid-day customers, as it had been noticed that there were very few visitors later on in the afternoon.
6. Even with in-store publicity, promotions in Stockton News and local Ingleby Barwick newsletters, take-up of the service has been disappointing, averaging 9 enquiries per week. April 2008 was the busiest month with 62 enquiries and September was the quietest month with only 20 enquiries. With two members of staff available, there is the capacity to deal with many more enquiries.
7. A review of the Ingleby Barwick service has been undertaken, to inform a decision about a possible change in venue, frequency or time of the service. This has included consultation with residents and ward councillors, and trying radio as a new method of promotion. At its meeting on 4th December 2008, Cabinet requested a further report on the results of the review and recommendations arising from it.

## **Research**

### Consultation

8. During November 2008 a survey of Ingleby Barwick residents was undertaken to ascertain:
  - Awareness of the Tesco Community Access Point service
  - Awareness of the radio advertising campaign
  - Use of the service
  - Satisfaction with the way in which the service is delivered
  - Potential future use of the service
  - Need for the service
  - Suitability of the location and days/times of operation
  - Views and experiences about contacting the Council

In total 706 interviews were carried out – 450 doorstep interviews and 256 at the Tesco store. High level results of the interviews together with comments and conclusions are detailed in the following paragraphs.

### Awareness of the Service

9. Despite in-store advertising, press releases, radio adverts and adverts/articles in Stockton News and local newspapers only 31% of respondents were aware of the service. Respondents interviewed at Tesco were no more aware of the service than those interviewed at their homes.

10. If the service is retained in the future, the way that it is promoted will need to be reconsidered to ensure that marketing activity is cost effective and targeted.
11. Only 3% of respondents had heard the radio campaign, suggesting that this is not an effective way to promote the service.

#### Use of the Service

12. Only 8% of people who were aware of the service had used it (17 people) and with regard to the queries raised, 71% had been dealt with at the first point of contact. Of the few queries that were referred on to another officer or service to deal with, all were responded to within the agreed period of time.
13. Users were asked to rate their satisfaction with the service on a scale of 1 – 10. The mean score was 8.53.

#### Future Use of the Service

14. When asked about future service provision, 76% of respondents thought that there should be a Community Access Point in Ingleby Barwick, although 28% of those said they would not use it themselves and a further 15% were not sure whether they would use it.
15. Reasons for using the service in the future (many qualified by “if the need arises”) included the convenience and opportunity to speak to someone face-to-face. Those unlikely to use it in the future felt that current means of access, by telephone, on-line or visits to one of the main council offices were sufficient to meet their needs, or that the current opening hours were not convenient as they were at work. A number also expressed concerns that the Tesco store lacked privacy to discuss confidential matters, indicating that the availability of private interview facilities needs to be emphasised in future promotions of the service. Those who were not sure whether they would use the service wondered whether the need for use would ever arise.
16. Of the respondents that considered there should be an Access Point in Ingleby Barwick, the large majority (95.4%) thought that the Tesco store was a suitable location, and some of those that suggested alternative venues did so because they had concerns about private interview facilities and were not aware that these were available at Tesco. Suggested alternative locations included the Community Centre, library or Post Office.
17. When asked about the frequency of the service, 43% of respondents thought it should be available on a weekly basis, 29% said it should be fortnightly and 26% monthly. Respondents were asked to give three preferences for the days they would like to see the service available. The top three preferred days (in order) were Saturday, Monday and Friday. Respondents were evenly split about the times of day they would require the service with 31% preferring a morning, 28% an afternoon and 28% an evening – the remainder did not have a preference.

#### Preferred Method of Contact

18. Whilst there will always be demand and a requirement for face-to-face communication between the Council and its customers, the advent of electronic communication has changed the way that customers like to make contact:

<i>If you want to find out about Council services, or request a service from the Council how would you prefer to do this?</i>	Viewpoint Survey 2003 (Council-wide)	Viewpoint Survey 2007 (Council-wide)
By telephone	70%	74%
Face-to-face	21%	6%
Electronically (e-mail / website)	3%	18%
By letter	6%	2%

19. The survey of Ingleby Barwick residents indicates similar preferences. Over the last year 46% of respondents said they had contacted the Council and of those 79% had last made contact by telephone, 12% electronically, 6% face-to-face, 1% by letter and 1% had gone through a third party (e.g. their Councillor). Those who had not made contact with the Council over the last year expressed similar preferences if they were to make contact, with 7% saying they would prefer to make contact through the Access Point.

#### Consultation with Ward Councillors

20. The Ingleby Barwick Ward Councillors have taken an active interest in supporting and promoting the Access Point and have provided valuable comments and feedback that have been incorporated into this review.

21. The feedback from ward councillors can be summarised as:

- Customer services staff should interact with shoppers and attempt to engage/interest them (staff have been more active in this regard over recent months with some success in increasing take-up during October and November);
- Suggestions that the service be trialled on a weekend;
- Consider alternative locations (note consultation with residents indicated that the current location was the most preferred).

#### Comments/Conclusions

22. The following comments and conclusions have been drawn from the consultation feedback and the Customer Services performance monitoring information previously reported to Cabinet:

- Residents like the idea of having a Community Access Point but there is no regular demand for the service – demand arises “if and when” a situation arises and a resident has a need to contact the Council and feels that they would prefer to do this on a face-to-face basis rather than over the telephone. It also depends on how urgent the matter is. However, having a “presence” in the Tesco store creates an opportunity for the Council to promote its services, special events and other topical matters that may be of interest to residents. We could do more to exploit this aspect of the service.
- The existing service does not represent value for money – take-up is low, resources are under-utilised and would be better deployed in the contact centre (Friday is one of the busier days in the contact centre).
- If the service is to be retained, it should remain at its current Tesco location, but more publicity is needed around the availability of private interview facilities.
- Changing the timing of the service to Saturday mornings (Tesco are agreeable to this) may result in greater take-up of the service, but the opening of the new Thornaby multi-service centre which offers face-to-face customer access facilities throughout the week, including Saturday mornings may impact. It is not feasible, with existing resources, to provide a service on a Monday, as this is the busiest day for the contact centre and releasing staff to go to Ingleby Barwick would have a detrimental effect on contact centre performance.
- The frequency of the service would have to be weekly or monthly e.g. the first Saturday of the month, as with a fortnightly service it would be difficult for residents to keep track of which Saturday the service would be in the store. Changing the service to monthly would free-up staffing resources to open other Community Access Points.

23. It is recommended that we retain an Access Point within the Tesco store at Ingleby Barwick for a further six-month trial, but that to make more effective use of resources the service be changed to monthly. In order to increase take-up, it is also recommended that the service be changed from Friday lunchtime/early afternoon to Saturday morning and that in addition to dealing with specific requests for information, advice or service it also be used to promote

forthcoming Council events or other topical issues relating to the Council's (or partner) services, such as adult education courses, SIRF, electoral registration.

### New Community Access Points

24. At its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008, Cabinet delegated the approval of any further trial Community Access Points to the Corporate Director Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Access & Communities. The Customer Services team is currently working with representatives from Tristar Homes to set up a joint Community Access Point in the Tesco store on Durham Road. This will operate on the first Friday of every month commencing 6<sup>th</sup> February 2009. It is envisaged that the service would be used by local residents as well as customers from the nearby villages that use the supermarket. This will provide the opportunity for a second trial in an area of different demographics from the first.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

25. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

26. There are no legal implications arising from the report.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

27. The Access to Services Programme has been assessed as medium risk (risk score 12). Existing management and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

### **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

28. The Council Plan recognises the role of the Access to Services Strategy in modernising customer access arrangements and improving customer satisfaction. The roll-out of the programme is a key development priority (No 52, Improving Organisational and Operational Effectiveness – Focus on residents and customers)

29. There are no community safety implications associated with the report.

### **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

30. The proposals in this report have been subject to an Equality Impact assessment and have been judged to have a positive impact. An action plan has been developed to ensure that the service is promoted appropriately, particularly the availability of private interview facilities and that we continue to consult with residents to ascertain their views and experiences of the service.

### **CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS**

31. The Access to Services Strategy was developed in consultation with Customers, partners and Members.

32. As described in paragraphs 8 – 21 of the report, the review of the Ingleby Barwick Community Access Point has been undertaken in consultation with Ingleby Barwick residents and ward councillors.

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Background Papers

“Access to Services Strategy – Progress Report and Future Plans” - report to Cabinet 4<sup>th</sup>  
December 2008

“Ingleby Barwick Survey – Access Point in Tesco Store” report from NWA Social Market and  
Research December 2008

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

The Review of the Ingleby Barwick Community Access Point has been undertaken in consultation  
with councillors representing the Ingleby Barwick Wards:

- Ingleby Barwick West – Councillors Dixon, Narroway & Patterson
- Ingleby Barwick East – Councillors Faulks, Harrington & Larkin

Property

There are no property implications arising from this report.