

This Report will be made public on 15 June 2021

Report Number: **C/21/15**

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 23 June 2021  
**Status:** Non Key Decision  
**Director:** Tim Madden, Transformation and Transition  
**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Ray Field, Portfolio holder for Digital Transformation

**SUBJECT:** Customer Access Point (CAP)

**SUMMARY:** The paper considers establishing a new Customer Access Point (CAP) initially within the Civic Offices and subsequently within Folca in Folkestone town centre. It considers the nature of service provision and also updates members on the discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

Cabinet is asked to agree the recommendations set out below:

- (a) So that the Council can launch a new Customer Access Point, initially at the Civic Offices before moving to Folca, and continue discussions with the DWP to co-locate at the Folca site.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Cabinet is asked:**

1. To consider report C/21/15.
2. To agree the service delivery approach for the new CAP;
3. To agree the initial establishment of the CAP at the Civic Offices;
4. To agree the future intention to locate the CAP at Folca;
5. To agree that officers, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Digital Transformation, prepare and establish a CAP at Folca;
6. To agree that officers, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Digital Transformation, continue discussion with the DWP to provide services from Folca;
7. To note the comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in paragraph 2.8;
8. To note the estimated cost of the initial launch and subsequent move can be met from the overall agreed budget of £250,000 for civic office feasibility work.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 At its meeting of 20 January 2021, Cabinet agreed the following (report C/20/70):

- To agree that officers, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Digital Transformation, continue to undertake further work to identify a Customer Access Point in Folkestone and to bring detailed proposals back to Cabinet for approval during 2021.

The report set out the rationale for a Customer Access Point and also agreed that further work be undertaken on a potential relocation of the Civic Offices to smaller more sustainable new-build facilities at Otterpool Park. The relocation of the Civic Offices is being taken forward as a separate piece of work which will be reported to Cabinet for decision at a later date.

This report considers the work undertaken on the development and launch of a Customer Access Point (CAP).

1.2 Report C/20/70 set out the key strategic principles for future service delivery modes. For ease of reference, the key principles which relate to the CAP are set out below:

- To deliver on the council's commitment to reduce its estate and operations to zero net carbon by 2030;
- To ensure services are appropriately delivered and to maximise the use of technology and on-line means to provide access to those services;
- To recognise that some members of the community are unable to access services through these means, and to have an appropriately located access point for those who may be digitally excluded or need additional support;
- To ensure that any new facilities maximise the opportunity to be sustainable and offer net zero carbon or better;
- To optimise the use of public transport for accessing facilities;
- To optimise a joint facility with partners to provide economies of scale, efficiencies etc.; and
- To provide the potential for joint community use in order to maximise the use of the asset.

1.3 As previously set out, the main reasons for developing a CAP are:

- Central Folkestone is the most populous centre in the district. It will facilitate access for those who either cannot or have difficulty accessing digital services;
- A central location in Folkestone town centre is close to public transport links and local footfall to associated public amenities;
- By being in Folkestone town centre localized regeneration activity will be stimulated through increased footfall;
- It is part of the overall Place Plan for Folkestone and provides part of a more vibrant mix of future community facilities;

- Investing in the town centre is further support from the district council and conveys a focal point and sense of confidence to other potential investors;
- Being in a town centre location offers the opportunity to engage closely with other public sector partners to provide a complementary range of services, that are sometimes offered to the same customers; and
- A district council Access Point will be clearly differentiated from the services and activities of Folkestone Town Council.

1.4 Since January 2021 officers have looked at the options for how services could best be delivered. The continued roll out and development of “My Account” to allow self-service means that the council continues to be on track to deliver many of its services digitally. The experience of the pandemic has also shown that there are many services which can be provided more effectively through other means than face-to-face, with a more positive convenient experience for customers. Take up of the My Account function has been steadily increasing and as at the end of May 2021 this stood at 35.6% of all households having signed up for the service. This is shown in more detail at Appendix A.

1.5 Alongside this work, discussions have also been ongoing with the DWP on the possibility of co-locating within the new CAP. DWP are considering ways to develop services from a more central location. Discussions are ongoing but it is anticipated there are benefits from this type of joint working.

## 2 Range of Services

2.1 In scoping the range of services the Council has been guided by the strategic principles as set out in paragraph 1.2 above, particularly the move to self-service while recognizing the need to support those who have difficulty accessing services on-line.

2.2 Following discussions with service managers in order to maintain levels of customer satisfaction and to capitalize on the best of our experience from operating through the Covid pandemic, the proposed service activity for the CAP is set out in the table below:

Activity	Purpose	Resources
Supporting self-serve	To help those who are not digitally enabled to self-serve or who need to be shown how to do this. The facility will integrate with FHDC networks so all self-serve functionality can be accessed and documents for all departments can be scanned.	Accessible Wi-Fi with appropriate security settings  Staff & ICT resources

Private Meeting Rooms	A small number of private meeting rooms with flexible use e.g. community safety, corporate debt, recovery/pre-court appointments, etc.	Interview rooms with glass (frosted) doors. Access to ICT & staff resource
In-person and document verification	Applicant needs to be seen in person to verify documents received, e.g. Election materials, Taxi Licensing DBS Forms, and Life Verifications, etc.	ICT & staff resources
Depositing or collection of hard paper / voucher / permissions etc.	Where a resident needs to hand in hard copy documents, e.g. election material, or cannot print at home, a paper service can be offered	Chargeable print facilities. Access to ICT & staff resources

- 2.3 The intention is to launch this range of services shortly after the covid restrictions are lifted. The model is akin to the assisted self-serve approach which is now prevalent in the banking sector we experience at branches. Signposting will also be a major part of the offer and support will be available to encourage the use of on-line access wherever possible.
- 2.4 There will not be a general drop-in meeting facility as appointments will be made for the continued use of convenient technology-based meetings with customers, or they can be scheduled for a future date as needed.
- 2.5 The aim will be to develop the service and learn from what works through the first few months with a view to carrying that learning through to the establishment of the CAP at Folca. A number of steps will need to be taken to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place, for example:
- Communications strategy prepared
  - Customer facing staff engaged and all staff aware
  - Risk assessment and safe system of working completed (following government guidelines)
  - Equipment identified from the risk assessment ordered
  - Self-serve kiosks, scanners, pc's & furniture moved to main part of reception and tested
  - IT requirements and cabling works completed
  - New signage displayed
  - Enforcement of visitors car park re-instated

It should be noted that this is based on the national easing of Covid restrictions being lifted with an estimated go live launch during the summer period. If the easing of restrictions is delayed then this timetable will be affected.

- 2.6 Current expectations are that Folca will not be available until autumn 2021 when its use as a vaccination centre is expected to end. The intention is to move the CAP to Folca where it is more appropriately located in the town centre. As mentioned above, Council officers are also in discussion with the DWP and the detail of the arrangements between the Council and the DWP are still being developed including floor layout, financial contribution and potential for use of shared resources. This is likely to be an ongoing exercise and it is recommended that as these discussions are progressed, consultations are held with the portfolio holder for digital transformation to agree the final format of the service and all Members will be advised prior to the launch in the town centre.
- 2.7 In addition, discussions are ongoing to maximise the funding opportunity available through the Folkestone Community Works CLLD Programme to meet the needs of DWP and other employability service providers within Folca. Some £250,000 ERDF capital funding is available through Objective 3 of the Programme to establish a Community or Employability Hub which will act as a coordinating and signposting point for delivery for employment (and pre-employment) services, as well as business start-up and support service.
- 2.8 The original proposals were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 6 October 2020 and have considered in more detail proposals set out in this report at its meeting of 1 June 2021. The key comments from the committee are set out below:
- Libraries – could be used as future customer access points, should there be high demand for multiple CAPs across the district.
  - Consider a hybrid approach when completing and verifying forms for services officered to residents so that assistance may be provided when a customer has partially filled out the form.
  - Some residents lack resources, i.e. they don't own devices to be able to access on-line services. Is there a way this can be addressed with partners and other government funding?
  - The Folca building will need to consider disability access and how far carbon neutrality matters can be addressed in the development plans.
  - Pleased to see that private meeting rooms will be made available to support residents who need to discuss sensitive issues.
  - Consider the potential for local charities to co-locate and share workspace at Folca as the development plans are prepared.

### **3. Human Resources**

- 3.1 Whilst all office based staff have been working from home through covid restrictions, contractually their work base location has remained at the civic centre. Therefore, in terms of launching a Customer Access Point staff will return to their base location to carry out some of their duties on a rota basis. There will still be days where they will work from home when their duties can effectively and efficiently be delivered remotely.

Conversations have begun with the staff in Customer Services to explain the principles of how this will work and to discuss any implications arising.

At the same time as considering how the council engages staff with the launch of the Customer Access Point at the civic centre, the move to Folca has also been considered to minimise the change for affected staff.

All current employment contracts contain the following clause:

*Your role has been designated as a Flexible Worker. Your principle place of work is the Folkestone and Hythe District Council premises at the Civic Centre, however your work location may be flexible and may vary as long as this is in accordance with the needs of your role and the service. You may be required to work, on either a temporary or an indefinite basis, at any of the council's premises, or any premises at which it may from time to time provide services having been given reasonable notice of the change in work place.*

For many years the staff within Customer Services have provided the service from 'one stop shops' across the district under this clause as their working week would include one or two days from a location other than the civic centre. Over time the requirement for this has diminished due to low customer demand, however the opening of the Customer Access Point in Folca is classed as council premises under the clause outlined above. Staff will continue to be engaged with the plans to provide the service from Folca.

Although the service will be run from a new location, many of the affected staff park in the facilities at the top of Sandgate Road in Folkestone and as a result there is virtually no difference in distance when comparing to working at the civic centre or at Folca.

The recommendation from HR is that there is no requirement to change employment terms and conditions to launch and run the CAP as described, and that when there is a permanent change for all staff relating to the potential relocation of the civic suite to Otterpool Park, a fundamental review of all contract terms and conditions will be undertaken for all staff. This is not expected to be for another 2/3 years and will be subject to a separate council report and decision relating to the new civic proposals.

#### **4. Financial Issues**

- 4.1 The initial move to operate the CAP from the Civic Offices is expected to be low cost at an estimated £3,000. Any new equipment / furniture that needs to be purchased will be utilized at the Folca location when that is opened.
- 4.2 An upgrade on equipment, such as improved customer booths, that may be necessary would be on the basis that they could be utilised when the CAP locates in Folca.
- 4.3 The cost of the move to Folca is estimated at under £30,000 although work remains ongoing to provide a more detailed and robust cost estimate. The above costs can be met from the previously agreed budget of £250,000 which

can utilized for both this CAP project and the feasibility work relating to the potential relocation of the Civic Offices to a new smaller and sustainable facility at Otterpool Park.

## 5. Communications

- 5.1 A communications plan has been produced to launch the CAP as a markedly different offer to the Civic Centre simply re-opening. One of our key messages will be about the scope of the service and how the online channels can effectively be used. Signage will be developed for the CAP which will help residents navigate the new set up.

## 6. Risks

Perceived Risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative Action
Costs of proposed moves are excessive	High	Low	Ongoing assessment is being made of costs which are expected to be within budget
Assumption services will be provided as per pre pandemic	Medium	Medium	Social Media and communications campaign preparing customers for the change and what to expect
Customers refuse to use online services	High	Medium	Continued promotion of My Account so that for the majority of customers this will be the default route through which services can be accessed allowing resources to be targeted on those who cannot do so
Potential change in how DWP may wish to provide services	Low	Low	Ongoing discussions with DWP and ability to flexibly respond to changes in requirements

## 7. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

### 7.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising out of this report.

### 7.2 Finance Officer's Comments (TM)

These are set out in the body of the report

### 7.3 Diversity and Equalities Implications (TM)

Access requirements will be considered as part of the work for both the sites of the CAP. The aim will be to support those who are unable to access

through on line services and all arrangements will be in line with the respective Covid guidance.

## **8. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councilors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

*Tim Madden, Director, Transformation and Transition*

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### **Appendices**

Appendix A – My Account Take Up

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None