

Equality and Safety Impact Assessment

The **public sector Equality Duty** (Section 149 of the Equality Act) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people carrying out their activities.

The Equality Duty supports good decision making – it encourages public bodies to be more efficient and effective by understanding how different people will be affected by their activities, so that their policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people’s needs. The Council’s Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) includes an assessment of the community safety impact assessment to comply with section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act and will enable the council to better understand the potential impact of the budget proposals and consider mitigating action.

Name or Brief Description of Proposal	<p>HOU 24 - Removal of cash collection facility at Woolston Housing Office.</p> <p>HOU 26 - Removal of cash collection facility at Shirley Housing Office.</p>
Brief Service Profile (including number of customers)	<p>In January 2011, the Housing Management Division restructured with the aim of taking the service into the local neighbourhood by having housing staff out and about more on their ‘patch’ recognising issues before they become a problem. This decision necessitated the closure of several cash collection facilities.</p> <p>To mitigate the impact, PayPoint cards were introduced allowing payments to be made at local outlets and now over 30% of tenants pay by this method and a similar percentage pay by Direct Debit.</p> <p>Since the reorganisation, further closures have taken place leaving only Peartree and Shirley Local Housing Offices available to take cash payments. Around 25% of tenants eligible to pay rent, after housing benefits have been taken into account, still utilise one of these offices. Currently, the cash collection facility is available between 8.30am to 4pm daily (Peartree is closed on Wednesdays).</p> <p>The numbers of payers fluctuates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Peartree the number people paying rent a month is in the region of 1,250-1,500 and the number of people paying Council Tax is in the region of 800 per month. • For Shirley the number of people paying rent a

	<p>month is in the region of 3,500 – 4,000 and the number of people paying Council Tax is in the region of 2,000 – 2,500 per month.</p> <p>They also deal with a range of other enquiries.</p> <p>The proposal is to cease cash counter facilities at Woolston from April 2016 following the move from Peartree Local housing Office to the new Woolston Library. Cash collection services in Shirley Local Housing Office will also be removed from April 2017.</p>
<p>Summary of Impact and Issues</p>	<p>The proposal to close Peartree cash office in 2016 and Shirley cash office in 2017 is under consideration due to budget pressures but also fits in with the wider Council transformation strategy of digital by default. The closure of the remaining Housing cash collection facilities will inevitably have an effect on a large number of customers both Council tenants and Council Tax payers. However previous experience has shown that when one payment avenue is closed then payers migrate to other options. It is incumbent on the Income Services team to manage this transition smoothly through good communication providing information on other options.</p> <p>After previous closures of Local Housing Office cash facilities, there was a partial rise in non-cash based enquiries to other Council facilities such as Gateway.</p> <p>However, these proposals do not change the key point of contact for Housing enquiries from tenants from Local Housing Teams and therefore it is not anticipated this proposal will have any significant impact on Gateway. However we will ensure that steps are taken to provide customers with as much information as possible as to best alternatives such as direct telephone numbers for particular enquiries.</p>

Potential Positive Impacts	<p>PayPoint provides tenants with a flexible and convenient method of payment. All other payment options are cheaper than the face to face transactional model and given that we will inevitably see an exponential rise in transactions as Universal Credit is phased in and direct Housing Benefit payments (of some £35 Million per annum) are phased out, this change will mitigate the extra transactional costs.</p> <p>The changes should assist in the Council's ability to maintain a focus on personal contact with individual tenants to understand their concerns. It is also an opportunity for Income team to respond to those affected by the change and not only provide options on alternative payment methods but also use the conversations wisely by providing advice on welfare changes that may impact on the tenant.</p>
Responsible Service Manager	Mike Carey
Date	27/10/2015

Approved by Senior Manager	Nick Cross
Date	05/11/2015

Potential Impact

Impact Assessment	Details of Impact	Possible Solutions & Mitigating Actions
Age	The reduction in opening hours may have an effect on elderly tenants who do not have a PayPoint outlet in the vicinity although this is unlikely given there is a wide geographical spread of over 100 outlets identifiable by a PP sign outside the shop.	Tenants will be issued with new PayPoint cards along with a list of outlets in their vicinity. They will also be informed of other ways in which to pay their rent including on-line, by telephone or Direct Debits.
Disability	The reduction in opening hours may have an effect on tenants with a physical disability or impairment who do not have a PayPoint outlet in the vicinity although this is unlikely given there is a wide geographical spread of over 100 outlets	Tenants will be issued with new PayPoint cards along with a list of outlets in their vicinity. They will also be informed of other ways in which to pay their rent including on-line, by telephone or Direct

Impact Assessment	Details of Impact	Possible Solutions & Mitigating Actions
	identifiable by a PP sign outside the shop.	Debits.
Gender Reassignment	No identified negative impacts.	N/A
Marriage and Civil Partnership	No identified negative impacts.	N/A
Pregnancy and Maternity	No identified negative impacts.	N/A
Race	No particular impact on rent payments but may have a slight impact on those seeking advice.	Need to ensure that signs and posters include consideration of language barriers and give clear indication of other ways to pay with contact numbers for other services.
Religion or Belief	No identified negative impacts.	N/A
Sex	No identified negative impacts.	N/A
Sexual Orientation	No identified negative impacts.	N/A
Community Safety	Could be perceived as a reduction in the ability to discuss neighbour problems.	More use of telephones and home visits. Greater opportunity for Housing staff to spend time on the estates dealing with incidences of anti-social behaviour particularly at a lower level.
Poverty	Could be perceived as a reduction in the ability to discuss financial issues face to face.	Greater opportunity for Income Services staff to make home visits/hold surgeries and provide advice on benefits and welfare advice to tenants suffering financial exclusion. This is particularly important given the ongoing roll-out of welfare reform changes.
Other Significant Impacts		