

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision 07 March 2022

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Cash Office Provision</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Leisure and Community
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Dynamic, prudent and progressive Council

**Purpose:**

To inform the Executive of the Cash Office Review findings and to seek approval for the proposed changes to the cash office as outlined within the report.

**Executive summary:**

At the meeting of the Executive on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021, 'The Council's Approach to the Pandemic – A Review' was presented and noted. Part of the report discussed the future of the cash office with regard to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it was agreed that a review would be conducted about its future at a later date.

Such a review was recently conducted, and this report presents the findings of the review and seeks approval for the proposed provision of cash office services to be relocated to the main reception desk within the Civic Offices, and the rationale for this proposal. This new approach will provide a more responsive and flexible service provision whilst continuing to meet the needs of those residents who wish to make payments in person.

An important aspect to note is that an agreement has recently been reached with current Civic Office tenants, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to extend their current lease by a further ten years and as part of that agreement, they have requested to occupy a quarter of the ground floor, which could include the current cash office area.

This has been taken into account when designing the cash office proposal.

**Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

It is recommended that the Executive approves the proposed transfer of cash payment facilities to the ground floor reception desk.

**Reason:**

The proposed changes to the provision of the cash office will ensure a more flexible and responsive service that continues to meet the needs of customers who prefer to make payments in person, whilst also facilitating an increase in rental income.

**Cost of proposals:**

Moving the cash office infrastructure and making the required modifications to the reception desk to accommodate the cash office function will cost up to £15,000. This amount can be met from the capital budget for improvements to the Civic Offices.

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### Executive Briefing Paper

<b>Date:</b>	07 March 2022
<b>Subject:</b>	Cash Office Provision
<b>Briefing by:</b>	Director of Leisure and Community
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources

#### INTRODUCTION

1. This report discusses the results of a recent review into the Council's cash office and details proposals for the provision to be moved to the ground floor reception desk.
2. It also provides an overview of the potential ten-year extension to the Ministry of Justice's lease at the Civic Offices.

#### Background

3. At the Executive on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021, a report entitled 'The Council's Approach to the Pandemic – A Review' was presented. Part of the report discussed the use of the cash office and it was agreed that a review would be conducted about its future. The following paragraphs outline the findings of the review.

#### What does our cash office provision look like?

4. The Council's cash office is currently located on the ground floor of the Civic Offices. Residents and businesses can make payment in person for a range of Council services, including:
  - Council Tax
  - Business Rates
  - Penalty Charge Notices
  - Rents
  - Overpaid benefits
  - Miscellaneous e.g. (Licenses, Planning fees)

Payments can be made using cash, debit or credit card, cheque payments and postal orders, although the latter is used rarely.

#### How many customers use the cash office?

5. The main findings from customer data gathered between 01 May 2019 and 31 January

2022 is that:

- Cash office customer numbers had been declining prior to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
  - In 2019 the average number of core visitors to the cash office was 1,000 per month, equating to 46 per day
  - During the period 01 May 2021 to 31 January 2022, the average number of core visitors to the cash office was 285 per month, equating to 14 per day. This is a significant decrease from 2019 levels
  - There was a peak during the Garden Waste Scheme's early-bird sign up offer during September and October 2021, resulting in the average number of visitors for each of the two months increasing to 545 per month
  - This means that in September and October 2021 an average of 26 people visited the cash office per day
  - Many customers made alternative payment arrangements to visiting the cash office at the time of the first lockdown in March 2020
  - Many customers did not return to using the cash office during periods when lockdowns were lifted, and this remains the case to date.
6. The reduced number of visitors to the cash office has most likely been caused by customers changing their behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic to more remote methods of payment for both convenience and personal safety. The reduction in customer numbers has also resulted in lower levels of cash and cheques being handled and stored by Customer Service Centre (CSC) officers.
7. Whilst customer numbers visiting the cash office have significantly reduced, there is still currently the need to ensure the continuation of a high-quality service to customers who prefer to make payments to the Council in person.

### **Ministry of Justice**

8. During the review, current tenants of floor three, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), requested an extension of its lease at the Civic Offices. Following the renationalisation of the supervision of released prisoners, the MOJ plan to provide a fully integrated probation service from the Civic Offices. All MOJ clients will be Fareham based, some of whom may have previously reported to locations outside of the Borough.
9. In order to provide the service, the MOJ will need to occupy a quarter of the ground floor, which could include the current cash office area (See Appendix A). However, they would no longer need the use of the two glass fronted interview rooms they currently lease, which are also located on the ground floor.
10. The MOJ require their own entrance and reception on the eastern corner of the Civic Offices closest to Civic Way. It would be completely separate from the Council's customer facing services and only be available for use by MOJ customers.
11. Whilst commercially sensitive, the additional income generated will help in the response

to the Council's financial challenges.

12. The MOJ's proposal was taken into account when conducting the review of the cash office, however it did not influence the cash office provision proposal.

### **Proposed Approach**

13. The proposed plan is to move the cash office facility to the main reception desk on the ground floor. There would need to be two contactless/chip-and-pin payment terminals located at the desk, allowing up to two customers the ability to make card payments at any one time. The proposed plan involves using the existing equipment from the cash office and therefore no new payment terminals will be required.
14. CSC officers would manage both general enquiries and payments and are already trained to do so. Resourcing would be more flexible with potentially one CSC officer at the reception desk during quiet periods and two CSC officers at the desk during busier periods e.g. Monday mornings. A third officer could also be stationed at an additional desk if ever required e.g. signing in visitors for large meetings.
15. The installation of electronic payment kiosks was explored as a possible option however, the reduced level of customer demand means that it is currently difficult to justify the additional expenditure required to pursue this option at this time. It is also likely that the core group of current cash officer customers are those least likely to be confident in the use of electronic payment kiosks and would therefore either not use the machines or require officer assistance to do so.
16. This approach will provide a flexible, responsive and personal service for customers. The level of resourcing will be assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure that it matches the level of demand.
17. Secure cash storage drawers will need to be installed, alongside an additional PC and a low height shelf at the front of the reception desk. The Council's insurers have confirmed that the new approach to cash handling and processing is secure.
18. Customers in wheelchairs will still have easy access to the payment facilities and the proposed shelf will still provide accessible space for writing cheques and other administration.

### **Cost**

19. The estimated budget required for the proposed relocation of the cash office function is £15,000, which can be met from current capital budgets and offset against the increased rental income payable by the MOJ. This amount will cover the required modifications to the current reception desk, along with specialist services required to move the safe to a new secure location.

### **Conclusion**

20. A proposal is presented to move the Council's cash office facilities to the main reception desk, and the Ministry of Justice are looking to extend their lease at the Civic Offices for an additional ten years and have requested an area for their use on the ground floor.
21. The proposed change outlined within this report will allow the MOJ to offer a comprehensive service to their Fareham based clients, whilst also ensuring that the ability for customers to make payments to the Council in person remains.

**Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Alexander Jolley. (Ext 4470)

**Appendix A**

Proposed ground floor plans:

Proposed area MOJ  
will occupy: 

