

To: POLICY AND RESOURCES (FINANCE & CUSTOMER SERVICES) SUB-COMMITTEE		Subject: FIRST STOP SHOP SUPPORT FOR WELFARE REFORM INTRODUCTION.
From: HEAD OF E-GOVERNMENT & SERVICE DEVELOPMENT		
Date: 15 November 2013	Ref: IMcK/PT	

### 1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is:

- To provide an update to committee on increased demand across the First Stop Shop network; and
- To seek approval for the creation of 6 temporary posts to address this demand.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 Our network of ten First Stop Shops (FSS) is the main face to face contact point for the majority of our customers. These shops deal with a very wide range of demand types, including enquiries in relation to Housing and Social Work Services, Revenue Services, Learning and Leisure services, as well as Cash Receipting and Banking transactions.
- 2.2 Face to Face demand levels have been steadily increasing and in 2012/2013 our FSSs dealt with 1,122,630 transactions. This comprises 223,131 customer enquiries and 899,499 payments and municipal bank transactions
- 2.3 In operational terms, this increasing demand has been absorbed by a combination of streamlined processes, improved training, multi-skilling and cross skilling from the Customer Contact Centre. In fact, increasing efficiency allowed the staffing levels in the FSS to be reduced from 60 FTE to 56 FTE in 2012 while generally maintaining performance levels.
- 2.4 However, with further increases in demand due to the impact of Welfare Reform, a temporary increase in resourcing levels is required to ensure that this new demand can be managed. Over time it is anticipated that, through the on-going review of processes and improved efficiency, demand will return to a level which can be managed within the current resources..

### 3. Current Demand Levels in FSS

- 3.1 The council's cross service transformational approach, the implementation of the customer services strategy and the strategic priority of 'more customer focus' has led directly to an increase in the FSS demand as detailed in the table below. It should be noted that this is both as a result of new services being introduced, as well as an increase in demand relating to existing services.

<b>FSS Demand</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
Reception Services	12834	11109	12553
Housing Allocations	38280	40360	46408
Housing Benefits	40661	47682	48040
Council Tax	22891	24766	29366
Housing Repairs	7479	9063	8336
Housing Rents	21954	22244	21349
Private Benefits	16494	17553	18144
Homelessness	6589	6646	7407
Estate Services	6387	7219	7959
HC Insurance	1946	2240	1910
Garden Ass Scheme	2323	3854	2584
Blue Badges	n/a	2129	10064
Free School Meals & Clothing Grants	n/a	7029	8415
Under Occupancy	n/a	n/a	596
<b>Totals</b>	<b>177,838</b>	<b>201,894</b>	<b>223,131</b>

3.2 The introduction of Welfare Reform has resulted in a further increase in demand at the FSS, which is putting pressure on front line service provision. Analysis and comparison of FSS demand from April to July 2012 and April to July 2013 shows a further 17% increase in footfall and demand. From April to July 2012 enquiry numbers were 76,463 and for the same period in 2013 they increased to 92,185. Therefore in the first four months of 2013 FSS have dealt with 15,722 more enquiries and if this trend continues the overall figure for demand for 2013/2014 would be approximately 276,555 enquiries.

3.3 Below are details of the main demand types and comparison figures for April to July 2012 and 2013 and highlighted are demand types that have increased due to Welfare Reform and the current economic climate.

FSS Demand Type	2012 April to July	2013 April to July	Increases in demand
Reception Services	3524	5003	1479
<b>Housing Allocations</b>	<b>14686</b>	<b>16829</b>	<b>2143</b>
<b>Housing Benefits</b>	<b>16964</b>	<b>18351</b>	<b>1387</b>
<b>Council Tax</b>	<b>9018</b>	<b>11601</b>	<b>2583</b>
Housing Repairs	2840	2689	-151
<b>Housing Rents</b>	<b>7022</b>	<b>9651</b>	<b>2629</b>
Private Benefits	5724	5883	159
Homelessness	2333	2898	565
Estate Services	2505	2906	401
Home Contents Ins	635	724	89
Garden Ass Scheme	883	1036	153
Blue Badges	3411	4123	712
FSM&CG	5711	5907	196
<b>Under Occupancy</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1207</b>	<b>1207</b>
<b>Scottish Welfare Fund</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2832</b> Includes FSS and Municipal Bank enquiries	<b>2832</b>

3.4 Demand was analysed over a four month period to ensure there was a consistent increase in customer footfall and demand had not been affected by other factors or one off events that could have adversely impacted or skewed the figures, for example limited access to rent balances for a four week period in April 2013.

- 3.5 A further breakdown of the main demand types for Rents, Allocations, Council Tax, and Housing Benefits highlighted the following as the main customer enquiry types –
- Rents – balance and rent arrears enquiries;
  - Housing Allocations – update on housing applications, change of circumstances, new housing application forms and supporting evidence enquiries;
  - Council Tax – balance and change of circumstances enquiries; and
  - Housing Benefits – benefit application forms and supporting evidence, as well as change of circumstance enquiries.
- 3.6 Enquiries relating to Under Occupancy, Discretionary Housing Payments, Prevention and Sustainability Funding, Community Care and Crisis Grants are also contributing to the upward trend in demand.
- 3.7 There has been an increase in the number of challenging customers due to a combination of customer frustration as a result of Welfare Reform and confusion over the Councils role in implementing these reforms. Although staff are trained to deal with these types of incidents, it does increase the time that needs to be taken with individual customers and therefore has a knock on effect on waiting times, particularly at peak periods of demand.
- 3.8 As part of on-going operational improvements, changes to shift patterns have been introduced, for example lunch cover to deal with peaks in demand. Processes and procedures have been reviewed to reduce waste and improve first time resolution. Staff are multi-skilled and can move between the First Stop Shop and Municipal Bank depending on demand levels. Resource planning has been centralised to make sure staff can move between locations to cover any shortfalls. Alternative service delivery options have been introduced, for example floor walking and use of appointments and interview rooms to try and minimise customer waiting times. However as demand increases further, these types of interventions have reached the limit of their effectiveness and to make sure FSS performance targets are achieved the current Team Leaders (6 FTE), Development Officer (1FTE) and Modern Apprentices (6FTE) have all been utilised on a full time basis to support the front line service.
- 3.9 The use of Team Leaders as front line cover was implemented as a temporary measure to allow us to assess demand levels over a time frame that would accurately reflect customer footfall. However this is not an option that can be sustained as the core duties of the Team leaders are not being fulfilled and, over time, this will impact on our overall performance standards.
- 3.10 Also Modern Apprentices are not getting the required time need to cover their course work and we are finding it increasingly difficult to release staff for holidays, training, feedback on performance etc which is having an impact on staff morale and therefore customer service standards.
- 3.11 In First Stop Shops where there are fewer staff now located in the back office and no Customer Services supervisory presence (Kilsyth, Moodiesburn, Shotts and Viewpark) there was a reliance on managers from other back office Services to deal with any escalated customer issues. However increases in demand have resulted in back office staff not always being available to assist and support FSS staff. For example Housing Services have more staff working in the community as a result of Welfare Reform and front line staff have indicated that when there is no one available to assist with challenging customers they often feel isolated. With increased resources, Team Leaders would be available to provide the necessary support in these areas.
- 3.12 There are a number of projects underway focussed on reducing face to face demand as analysis has shown that a significant volume of customer demand at First Stop Shops is failure demand caused by our own processes. There are also enquiries that could be

handled by telephone or on-line, for example Council tax and rent balances, which would allow front line staff to focus on the more complex enquiry types that require face to face contact. There is currently a Business Change Review underway to examine rents and housing benefit procedures, however many of these projects will take time to review, implement and monitor before rolling out to the front and back office and therefore will not reduce demand in the short to mid term.

#### 4. Proposal

4.1 All of the changes that have been implemented to date in the First Stop Shops were based on the historical demand and it had been anticipated that this demand would be a decreasing trend. In the wake of the significant changes as a result of Welfare Reform it is increasingly apparent that demand is increasing beyond the delivery capability of our current resources. We are working on a number of projects to improve processes and remove unnecessary face to face contact; however these projects will take some time to deliver.

4.2 It is proposed therefore that 6 temporary Customer Service Officer (NLC5) posts be created for an initial period of 12 months, up to a maximum period of 18 months to help us bridge the gap. Demand levels will be continuously monitored throughout this period and a review will be undertaken within a 12 month period to ensure that the increased staff levels are still required.

4.3 Indicative costs over the 18 month period are:

Staffing	Cost 2013/14	Cost 2014/15	Cost 2015/16	Total
6 x Customer Services Officers @ NLC5	32,247	128,988	32,247	<b>193,482</b>

Salary costs are based on grade mid-point and include on costs at 26%

With the costs of these being met from the one-off Welfare Reform Fund (£1m) established by the Council in February 2013;

4.4 In addition, demand levels will be analysed during this period to assess the effectiveness of the on going projects to reduce front line demand and fully understand the impact of Welfare Reform on Council front line services, to allow an informed decision to be made on the long term resource requirements of the First Stop Shop and Municipal Bank.

#### 5. Corporate Considerations

5.1 Proposals contained within this report have been the subject of consultation with the Director of Finance and Customer Services, the Head of Human Resources and the appropriate Trade Union representatives.

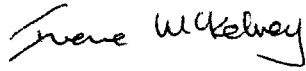
#### 6. Recommendations

6.1 That the Committee:

- Notes the progress made to date;
- Approve the creation of 6 temporary posts of Customer Services Officer (NLC5) for an initial period of 12 months;
- Homologates the action taken by the Head of Human Resources in consultation with the Conveners of Policy and Resources (Finance and Customer Services) Sub-Committee and Policy and Resources (Human

Resources) Sub-Committee in commencing the recruitment process for the creation of 6 temporary posts of Customer Services Officer for a period of 12 months;

- Agrees that the Head of E-Government & Service Development undertakes a review within a 12 month period and submits a further report to a future meeting of the sub-committee advising whether the posts would be required for the full 18 month period; and
- That the report be remitted to the Policy & Resources (Human Resources) Sub Committee for consideration.



**Head of E-Government & Service Development**

For further information please contact Irene McKelvey on 01698 302532