

OFFICER DELEGATED DECISIONS FORM

State the Delegated Authority that you are relying on in order to make this decision: e.g. specific (identified in constitution) or general

Following approval at the Individual Executive Meeting on the 11 October 2022, delegated authority to approve modifications to the Council's Revenues and Benefits telephony solution, was provided to the Head of Resident and Business Support <https://moderngov.middlesbrough.gov.uk/documents/s14295/Report.pdf>

The delegation provided to the Head of Resident and Business Support ended on 31 July 2023 and as such any further amends to the telephony opening hours will be subject to approval by the Finance Director/Section 151 Office.

Subject of decision: Resident and Business Support Telephony Solution

Approval was provided on 11 October 2022, to close the Revenues and Benefits phone lines for one day per week. With effect from 3 November 2022, the service closed the phone lines to the public for one day each week (Thursday).

Revenues and Benefits have a full suite of self-serve options and residents wanting to engage with an advisor are still able to achieve this. Staff continue to support residents and businesses with queries and continue to provide comprehensive advice and guidance.

The closure of the telephony offering on a Thursday has allowed the service to focus on reaching out to some of the towns more vulnerable residents through an outbound telephony contact solution. This has had a real positive impact, in particular engaging with some of the towns most deprived wards. There has been a significant increase in contact with residents in wards such as North Ormesby, Newport, Central improving engagement rates from 24% to 54% using the outbound call solution. Payment problems have been resolved, benefit and welfare checks have been undertaken through this engagement route.

The report to Executive also proposed a further closure, increasing from 1 day to 2 days per week (Tuesday and Thursday). Phone lines will remain open for 3 days per week (Monday, Wednesday & Friday) for residents to contact Revenues and Benefits. On the days when the phone lines are closed to incoming calls, the service will be operating an outbound call solution which is designed to encourage residents who are experiencing payment difficulties, who are reluctant to make contact with the service to speak directly to a nominated officer. Given the success of 1 day per week, a further one day increase to 2 days per week is now proposed.

It is recommended that a 3-month trial be introduced with effect from **1 February 2024** this trial will track and monitor the progress and outcomes of a further 1 day closure (Tuesday). If this provides similar findings to the existing 1-day closure, the service will move to a permanent closure of two days per week with effect from **1 May 2024**.


Outcomes from 1 day Closure.

- Inbound call demand has reduced by circa 30%.
- No complaints have been received by the service regarding the 1-day closure, quite the opposite residents have welcomed the contact by the service to help resolve payment difficulties.
- The service has responded more timely to demand, whilst also placing

OFFICER DELEGATED DECISIONS FORM

<p>more officers on the telephony solution when the phone lines are open.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• System congestion and wait times have reduced, and abandoned calls have reduced by 10%.• Engagement rates for more deprived wards have improved significantly.• Income collection of £105k in payments from outbound calling.• Engaged with c3000 residents – of which 75% had no previous contact with the service. <p>Through the use of technology, the service has improved contact specifically with hard to reach residents. Moving to a 2-day closure will allow the service to widen contact/targeted groups/residents providing an opportunity to sort payments problems, provide welfare advice and support and undertake benefit checks, all of which are designed to support residents meeting their council tax obligations.</p>
<p>Text of decision: e.g. can include monies received by the Council, list any terms agreed, brief summary of the policy – Do not include any confidential information.</p>
<p>Approval to trial an additional 1-day closure on a Tuesday. The inbound telephone solution will close with effect from 1 February 2024 on a Tuesday and a Thursday.</p> <p>The service will provide a telephone solution on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday each week.</p> <p>An evaluation of the trial will be undertaken over the 3-month period, subject to findings, if successful the service will move to a permanent closure of 2 days per week with effect from 1 May 2024.</p> <p>Although the service will be closed to inbound calls on a Tuesday and a Thursday, the service will provide an outbound call offering, designed to target difficult to reach residents building on the success of the current 1 day closure.</p>
<p>Reason for Decision</p>
<p>The findings and evidence gathered following the 1 day closure has demonstrated that the expectations from the original proposal have been realised and have added a great deal of value to the residents of the town, especially the towns more vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The opportunities provided by closing a second day, against the background of the Council's current financial situation, mean that even were the consequences of the restriction more noticeable for residents then the balance required between customer service and ensuring collection of income might still justify the choice in the longer term. However, given the findings so far, the service is confident that progressing to a second day closure will enable a greater roll out of the outbound call offering and provide a opportunity to engage with residents who may be reluctant to engage with the service.</p>
<p>Other options considered (if any)</p>
<p>Maintaining the status quo, but this does not provide as much potential to deliver a more effective service.</p>

OFFICER DELEGATED DECISIONS FORM

Has an Impact Assessment been completed Yes/No – if yes please attach to the decision.
No
Declarations of Interest by any member or relevant local government body
N/A
Who have you consulted as part of the decision making process e.g. Head of Service, Executive Member, Community Association, Surveyor?
Executive Member – Councillor Nicky Walker
Date of decision
Service area
Finance Directorate.
Name of Delegated Officer making decision - i.e. Officer who is designated the power in the Constitution
Debbie Middleton (Interim Section 151 Officer & Finance Director).
Name of the Officer making the decision – if power has been sub-delegated to another Officer.
List of background papers (do not list if contain exempt/confidential information)
Signed: 
Dated: 02/01/24