

Call in Reasons –Trial closure of Connections

1. The short notice will inevitably result in inconvenience for the public. Why was a month's notice not given?
2. The conclusion from the Priorities and Resources Review in September 2014 in relation to Connections was:

"The Board feel that the proposals in respect of Connections should be deferred due to the lack of a robust business case and financial information especially in respect of the investment in new IT infrastructure and operational costs of running the remote locations and opportunity for income from the potential lease of the Torquay Connections Office. There was also insufficient evidence on the rationale for locating the centralised Connections Office in Paignton and that the benefits of co-locating or locating the Connections Office near to the Job Centre had not been fully explored, such as Torquay Library."

At Council in October 2014, the proposal for a centralised Connections office at Paignton Library and Information Centre was agreed but with £102,000 of transitional funding being applied in 2015/16 to enable further work to be undertaken to review the Connections operating model and having a centralised office.

In January 2015, the Board asked the Mayor:

"What progress has been made in developing the Business Case for a centralised Connections Office? What is the timetable associated with this proposal? How will non-executive members be involved in the development of the Business Case?"

And received the following written answer:

"A report on the financial viability of centralising Connections in Paignton is currently with the Mayor for his consideration. We are currently re-designing our Website; on-line forms; back office processes to improve our "self service" offer which will also support any future Connections office centralisation."

It remains the case that the business case for centralising Connections has not been shared with all members. Members would wish to see the original business case and any other supporting information taken into account by the Executive Lead for Business in reaching his decision (including any impact assessment of the temporary closure) prior to the call in meeting. This would allow a greater understanding of these proposals.

3. Whilst it is hoped that the following points will be covered in the business case and supporting information referred to above, for completeness:
 - (a) What consultation has there been with key partners such as the Department of Work & Pensions?

- (b) Is there sufficient capacity at Paignton library to handle all enquiries?
 - (c) What impact will there be on the quality of advice to members of the public by delivering the face to face service in a location where the back office staff are not located?
 - (d) There would appear to be failure to consult with staff, Unions and back bench Councillors prior to implementation. Why was this not undertaken?
4. Why was there no mention in the press release of how Torquay residents could be assisted in getting to Paignton library? e.g. Bus passes. How would they be picked up if the Torquay office is closed? In light of it being the summer holidays, is the Council prepared to issue bus passes for the children of claimants who would be accompanying their parent/s during the summer holidays? What is the estimated budget to cover transport for people having to travel to Paignton?