

Draft Supporting Information and Impact Assessment

Service / Policy:	Connections Service –Trial Closure for Torquay and Brixham
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Director / Assistant Director:	Fran Hughes / Bob Clark

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Section 1: Background Information	
1.	<p>What is the proposal / issue?</p> <p>The proposal is to close Torquay and Brixham Connections offices for a trial period of four weeks to understand what the impact could be and to allow members to consider the options and proposals for the future of the service.</p> <p>The proposal is to close the Torquay and Brixham offices from 10th August 2015 and re-open them on 7th September*.</p> <p><i>*As this decision has now been 'called in' the dates of a trial closure period will be subject to change.</i></p>
2.	<p>What is the current situation?</p> <p>The Connections Service provides the main access channel for the public to contact Torbay Council.</p> <p>Face to face services operate from central locations in each of the three towns in Torbay. One operates in Torquay Connections whilst the others are co-located services at Brixham Library and Paignton Library Information Centre (PLAIC).</p> <p>In addition to providing information on Council services, Torquay and Paignton also offer self serve facilities via internet pods and drop in sessions and surgeries for partner organisations.</p> <p>Torbay Council also offers customer services via a 'Contact Centre' which manages telephone contact for a wide range of council services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing Benefits ▪ Council Tax ▪ Business Rates ▪ Community Safety ▪ Elections ▪ Registrars ▪ Housing Options ▪ IER (Individual Electoral Registration) <p>Customers can also access services via the Councils website.</p> <p><u>Torquay:</u> The Connections office in Torquay is open Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm</p>

	<p>Other services provided at Torquay include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing services (appointment only – every day) • Housing Benefits (appointment only - every day) although this has not been provided in recent months. • Age UK (drop in - Monday) • Family Information Service (FIS) (1st and 3rd Tuesday every month) – although this has not been provided in recent months. • Taxi and licensing (appointment only) <p>The Council’s occupational health office is occasionally accessed via the Torquay Connection office by Torbay Council staff.</p> <p><u>Brixham:</u> The Brixham Connections office is co-located with Brixham Library and is open Monday – Friday 9.00am – 4.00pm.</p> <p>The facility to provide Housing benefit appointments is available at Brixham, although this has not been utilised in recent months by customers.</p> <p><u>Paignton:</u> The Connection office at Paignton Library and Information Centre (PLAIC) is open Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm</p> <p>Other services provided at Paignton include: NHS depression and Anxiety (appointment only – Friday)</p> <p>All offices are accessible.</p> <p>Torquay and Paignton offices have computer facilities, and all offices provide a free internal customer enquiry telephone and private interview rooms.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>What options have been considered?</p> <p>At this stage no other options have been considered as this is a trial closure to understand the impact a closure would have on service users. The proposal was discussed at the Mayor’s Executive Group (MEG) meeting on 9th July 2015.</p> <p>The intelligence gained from this trial closure will provide members with an insight as to the potential impact on service users to allow members to consider the options and proposals for the future of the service.</p> <p>Consultation will be undertaken with service users and staff throughout and after the trial closure period.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Who will be affected by this proposal and who do you need to consult with?</p> <p>Customers who intend to use the Torquay or Brixham offices during the trial will no longer be offered a face to face service by Connections at these locations. These customers will have to travel to Paignton or use an alternative method of contact to resolve their enquiries: i.e. via existing alternative customer access channels e.g. via the customer contact centre and the Council’s website.</p> <p>Although the face to face service will be closed in Brixham and Torquay during the</p>

	<p>trial period customers will have access to the additional following services (as well as the existing methods of alternative contact listed above):</p> <p>Brixham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freephone telephone in Brixham library • Drop box for documents for scanning in Brixham library • Computers in Brixham library (free to library members) which can be used to access Council Services <p>Torquay:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computers available in Torquay library which are free to library users which can be used to access Council services • Letterbox available to customers to drop off documents for scanning which is available at the existing Connections office main door <p>The following drop in sessions and surgeries will also be affected while the trial closure is in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing services and benefits appointments – customers requiring access to these services either via an appointment or via face to face contact will have to travel to Paignton • Taxi and licensing appointments will take place in an alternative location in Torquay while the trial closure is in place • Age UK customers who currently use the drop in service at Torquay will be affected as this service will not be provided during the trial closure. Customers can still contact Age UK directly. • Family Information Service customers will be affected as this service will not be provided while the trial closure is in place – customers can still access this service via the existing free phone number, and online. • There is the potential that members of staff who attend occupational health appointments that may have mobility issues and access their appointment through the connections offices may be affected – alternative arrangements are being considered.
<p>5.</p>	<p>How will you propose to consult?</p> <p>Consultation will take place throughout, and after the trial closure period to assess the impact the trial closure has had on service users.</p> <p>Torbay Council will consult on this proposal in the following ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A survey will be developed for service users to complete – paper copies will be made available at PLAIC during the trial closure and in all connections offices after, the survey will also be available for the whole consultation period online. 2. An exit survey will be developed which will gather information from those people attending the connections office in Paignton during the trial closure to understand why they needed to visit the service, how their enquiry was resolved, where people have travelled from and if they encountered any problems travelling to reach the service in Paignton. 3. Events will be held in each of the three Connections offices once the trial closure has finished gathering further qualitative feedback from service users.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Libraries Services in Torquay and Brixham will be contacted and asked to identify what, if any impact there has been on the library service during the trial. 5. We will contact other services (i.e. Age UK, FIS and Community and Voluntary Groups through the Community Development Trust (CDT)) to understand the impact of the trial closure on their services. 6. Members of the public and organisations will be able to make written representation to the Council throughout the consultation period. 7. Staff will be consulted as part of the trial closure to gather further information about the impact of the trial closure
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Section 2: Implications and Impact Assessment	
6.	<p>What are the financial and legal implications?</p> <p>There is a potential that customers requiring an emergency housing appointment may need to be provided with a travel warrant to attend a face to face appointment at PLAIC. This will be assessed by the relevant department i.e. housing support/crisis support who will determine whether the Council will fund this. This will be monitored during the trial and any significant cost will be considered in developing future proposals regarding this service.</p> <p>There are no further financial and legal implications anticipated in relation to a trial closure. As stated, the purpose of the trial closure is to understand the impact and this will include assessing any financial and legal implications.</p>
7.	<p>What are the risks?</p> <p>The temporary closure of Torquay and Brixham Connections will enable members to develop informed proposals regarding the future provision of the Council's Connections service.</p> <p>Risks will be identified during the trial, however the Council will monitor the amount of footfall to PLAIC, the impact on customers travelling to PLAIC from Brixham and Torquay and the suitability of the current space within PLAIC. These risks, and any others identified throughout the trial closure will be considered as part of any proposals developed in relation to the future of Connections.</p>
8.	<p>Public Services Value (Social Value) Act 2012</p> <p><i>Not applicable</i></p>
9.	<p>What evidence / data / research have you gathered in relation to this proposal?</p> <p>Face to face demand has been gradually reducing year on year as customers choose alternative channels of contact. It is worth noting that since April 2010 the</p>

face to face demand in Connections Offices has reduced by around 34,000 visits and it is predicted that this will continue over the next five years due to improvements in the Self Service (Web) and telephony customer contact offer.

Face to Face Contact Across Connections Offices:

Period	Number
April 2010 to Mar 2011	101,387 visitors
April 2011 to Mar 2012	94,465 visitors
April 2012 to Mar 2013	81,994 visitors
April 2013 to Mar 2014	71,578 visitors
April 2014 to Mar 2015	66,896 visitors

In Torquay, 50 customers a week are seen by a Customer Service Advisor (CSA) and 900 a week are triaged either for document scanning, online service, free phone to call centre. In relation to appointments, there are approximately 12 appointments a day and approximately 6 appointments a week for taxis and licensing.

In Paignton, 50 customers a week are seen by a CSA and 450 a week are triaged either for document scanning, online service, free phone to call centre.

In Brixham 90 customers per week are seen, all are dealt with by a CSA.

Further evidence will be collated throughout the trial closure to understand what the impact could be and to allow members to consider the options and proposals for the future of the service.

10.

What are key findings from the consultation you have carried out?

Consultation will be undertaken throughout, and after the trial closure. There will be an additional exit survey for customers visiting PLAIC during the trial period to gather comments and understand the impact. The findings will be considered and will inform any future proposals developed.

11.

Amendments to Proposal / Mitigating Actions

The impact of the trial closure will be assessed (i.e. exit survey, monitoring demand, staff feedback) throughout so that amendments can be put in place or action taken to manage customer demand, improve the customer experience or resolve any issues.

Equality Impacts

12	Identify the potential positive and negative impacts on specific groups			
		Positive Impact	Negative Impact & Mitigating Actions	Neutral Impact
	Older or younger people	Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.	Older people may potentially be affected by this proposal as there will be no drop in service for Age UK throughout the trial closure. Customers will still be able to access Age UK services directly.	
	People with caring Responsibilities	No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place. Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs		
	People with a disability	Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer	Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs. People with a disability may have difficulty travelling to a central location.	

	face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.		
Women or men	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p> <p>Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs.</p>		
People who are black or from a minority ethnic background (BME) <i>(Please note Gypsies / Roma are within this community)</i>	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p> <p>Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs</p>		
Religion or belief (including lack of belief)	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p> <p>Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs</p>		
People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p> <p>Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs</p>		
People who are transgendered	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p>		

	Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs		
People who are in a marriage or civil partnership	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p> <p>Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs</p>		
Women who are pregnant / on maternity leave	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p> <p>Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs</p>		
Socio-economic impacts (Including impact on child poverty issues and deprivation)	Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.	Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs	
Public Health impacts (How will your proposal impact on the general health of the population of Torbay)	<p>No differential impact – Existing alternative methods of contact will remain in place i.e. the customer Contact Centre and the Councils website. Additional free phone facilities are in place in Brixham, as well as drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay. Customers from Brixham and Torquay who prefer face to face contact can visit PLAIC while the trial closure is in place.</p> <p>Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs</p>		

13	Cumulative Impacts – Council wide (proposed changes elsewhere which might worsen the impacts identified above)	None anticipated at this time, this will be assessed throughout the trial closure period.
14	Cumulative Impacts – Other public services (proposed changes elsewhere which might worsen the impacts identified above)	There is the potential that there may be an impact on other organisations such as Age UK who currently hold a drop in service at Torquay. There is also the potential that there may be an increase in demand for other information, advice and advocacy services in Torquay and Brixham – this will be assessed throughout the trial closure period.

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