AGENDA ITEM

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COMMITTEE: **DISABILITY ACCESS AND ADVISORY FORUM**

DATE: **9TH APRIL 2009**

SUBJECT: **PAYING THE COUNCIL**

REPORT BY: **IAN MARRIOTT**

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IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL		**COMMUNITY SAFETY**	
EQUALITIES	✓	**ENVIRONMENT**	
FINANCIAL		**CONSULTATIONS**	
STAFFING		**OTHER**	

WARDS AFFECTED: All

PURPOSE

1. To seek views of the Forum on the possible equality, social inclusion and community cohesion impacts of proposed change to the ways that people make payments to the Council

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. The Disability Advisory and Access Forum is recommended to note the proposals and comment as appropriate.

BACKGROUND

3. Luton Borough Council is reviewing how to Improve customer access whilst reducing costs to the council, with regards to receiving payments from citizens.

4. The reasons for this include;

   - o many other comparator councils have reported improvements in customers access and efficiency savings through improving payment channels and methods of payment,
   - o a number of external councils had reduced and removed their cash office functions creating a significant cashable saving, and
   - o LBC's experienced cash officer is due to retire in November 2008 creating a risk and an opportunity to review how we want to deliver the service moving forward.

5. A review was commissioned using a lean six sigma approach that first identified the causes of issues that negatively impacts upon access and costs.

6. The project has produced a strategy document and a number of supporting solutions, these are summarised in this report.

REPORT

7. This payments project aims to:

- improve access for citizens making payments to the council.
- increase Council revenue position by improving how we take payments from customers.
- support local businesses.

By 2012 we will have

- A Greater ability to make payments where citizens want and when they want.
- Taken away confusion from different approaches required when making pay to the council. This will be achieved by providing a clear and consistent approach from the council on how to pay.
- Reduced the councils cost of payment method and channel collection by 33% per annum, by making the way we deal with payments more efficient and effective.
- Reduced employee and customer risks from mediated payment activities.
- Helped people not get into debt through de-promoting high cost credit facilities.
- Supported the local economy through moving allowing more payments to be made at local outlets, including shops and post offices.
- Reduced activity in the town hall, making it more pleasurable for those needing to come to the town hall.

8. These aims will be **achieved through a coordinated combination of seven activities:**

(i) Increase number of community outlets that accept payments on behalf of the council. This will to help

support local businesses through increased footfall, whilst significantly improving face-to-face/phone payment options and opening times.

(ii) Develop better and/or automated options for payments and balance enquiries.

(iii) Simplify and standardise the method of payment and outlets to pay.

(iv) Coordinate efforts with council and partners to promote the most effective methods of payment and channels, and de-promote other payment options.

(v) Reduce duplication within, and between sections of the council.

(vi) Reduce in-person payment options in the council, to only those assessed as necessary or commercially desirable to maintain.

(vii) Charging in line with other local and central government bodies for expensive methods of payment options.

9. The anticipated outcome of these seven activities will be a clear, simple, consistent and effective payment framework to enable citizens to pay the council when they need to.

In summary we will;

- Open up a greater range of opportunities and more convenient locations via which customer can make payments.
- Enable customers to move away from using council owned payment points and expensive methods of payment.
- Support local businesses, reduce customer contact with the council for simple queries and open up access to pay across a much wider time-span.

10. The Council is at the stage of trying to assess the equalities, cohesion and social inclusion impacts of this Payments strategy and is seeking information to assess the impact on people.

11. The Forum is asked for it's views on the strategy and particularly if there any areas where the Forum thinks there may be negative or positive impacts. For example, we have identified that for some disability groups such as physical and long standing illness there may be a positive impact through providing local access rather than people coming into the Town Hall.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12. This report seeks to identify where there may be an impact on any of the equalities target groups.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scope stage document – Paying LBC
DMA Exec summary – Paying LBC
Paying LBC – Improving access whilst reducing costs (Strategy)