

EQUALITIES CONSULTATION

The consultation described below is currently taking place and will conclude on the 1 November 2013. The findings from this, and the consultation on best value, will be included in 7 of this report to Cabinet and Council, when available.

Have your say on how you access our services

We're making changes to the way you can contact us and access our services, but before we make any final decisions, we'd like your views on our proposals. In order to modernise our services and reduce the running costs, we need to enable and encourage online and automated phone access to services wherever possible.

We recognise that these changes may not suit everyone; therefore we're keen to find out how these changes may affect you and others you know, in order to keep any negative impacts to a minimum. Please help us make the right decisions by completing a short questionnaire (link below) about access to our services. The deadline for entries is 1 November 2013.

Our proposals

Wherever possible we want to ensure that any contact with you is via our online and self-service facilities that do not require you to speak to a member of staff face-to-face or over the phone.

Changes to our website

We will need to make some improvements to our website and plan to introduce more online forms so you can request a range of services including applications for housing benefit and council tax reduction over the internet. We will also develop mobile-friendly web pages so you can access our website easily using a smartphone.

Many of our services can already be accessed online and more are becoming available all the time. Our proposed changes will improve the current online arrangements and expand the services on offer with the aim of making the internet the preferred method of access to services for most people. To help reduce costs and improve efficiency, paper forms will be significantly reduced and will only be provided in exceptional circumstances.

It is now commonplace within many organisations to expect customers to use the internet to purchase and manage products and services. We also know that the number of people who are able to access the internet has increased substantially over the last few years and this trend seems set to continue. We're therefore bringing ourselves up-to-date with this trend and are confident our online services will be more convenient for many customers. This approach has been adopted successfully for a number of central government services (for example car road tax and HM Revenue & Customs self-assessments) and in future other major services such as Universal Credit will be dealt with online.

Changes to our call centre

In addition to our online improvements, we will be making changes to our call centre to enable you to self-serve over the phone. Our switchboard will be automated and simple transactions will be carried out without the need to talk to a member of staff. However, please be assured that if our extended self-service menu options do not meet your needs; you will be able to speak to someone at the call centre.

Changes to Gateway, One Guildhall Square

Changes will also be made to our 'one-stop-shop' for services at Gateway. You will be encouraged to use the self-service terminals which are going to be installed, and a member of staff will be on hand to help if you're having difficulty with the system. If you require a service which you cannot access using our automated or online facilities, you will be able to meet a member of Gateway staff on an appointment basis only.

The consultation process and questionnaire

You may give your opinion on any aspect of the proposals, but we have set out some questions which may help guide you in an online questionnaire available here:

Changes to our customer contact arrangements online survey

Alternatively, you can submit your response in writing to:

Paul Medland
Project Manager
Lower Ground Floor
Civic Centre
Southampton
SO14 7LY

Please note the deadline for feedback to this consultation is 1 November 2013.

Our customer services

These customer services are provided on behalf of the council by Capita as part of a Strategic Services Partnership. The council's contract with Capita runs until 30 September 2017 but, to bring in these changes, reduce costs and secure flexible pricing in the future, the council is considering extending it by five years to 30 September 2022 (this extension was allowed for in the original contract). This is subject to a separate 'best value' consultation which can be found on the council's website [here](#).

Other services provided by Capita under the same partnership arrangement are:

- Local Taxes and Benefits
- Procurement Services
- Human Resources
- IT Services
- Property Services
- Print Services

We would like your views on proposals to extend the contract with Capita. The main alternatives would be to bring the services back "in-house" so that they are provided directly by the council; to enter a partnership arrangement with another council; or to retender the contract in full or in part.