

DRAFT - Supporting Information and Impact Assessment

Service / Policy:	Customer Services
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Version:	0.2	Date:	January 2016	Author:	Alison Whittaker
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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 and centralise the Connections service within the existing office in Paignton Library and Information Centre.</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 currently 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> <p>Housing Benefits Council Tax</p>

	<p>Business Rates Community Safety Elections Registrars Housing Options IER (Individual Electoral Registration)</p> <p>Customers can also access services via the Councils website.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>What options have been considered?</p> <p>Torbay Council has recently undertaken a trial closure of the Brixham and Torquay connections offices for a period of 4 weeks to identify the impact that a closure may have on users of the service.</p> <p>Results from this trial can be found at appendix one.</p> <p>Following this trial a consultation has been undertaken on the proposal to close Torquay and Brixham Connections offices and centralise the Connections service within the existing office in Paignton Library and Information Centre – results from this consultation can be found in section 11 below.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>How does this proposal support the ambitions and principles of the Corporate Plan 2015-19?</p> <p>Using reducing resources to best effect</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Who will be affected by this proposal and who do you need to consult with?</p> <p>Customers who would normally use the Torquay or Brixham offices may potentially be impacted upon by this proposal as there would no longer be a face to face service at these locations.</p> <p>If these customers still required a face to face service then they would need to travel to Paignton.</p>

	<p>Customers would however have the ability to use an alternative method of contact to resolve their enquiries: i.e. via using alternative customer access channels e.g. via the customer contact centre (telephone), accessing the Council's website (internet).</p> <p>It is proposed that self service 'pods' will be provided at Torquay and Brixham libraries where customers will be able to gain information and complete transactions on the Torbay Council website.</p> <p>Additional free phone facilities will be in place in Brixham and Torquay Libraries, as well as drop boxes.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>How will you propose to consult?</p> <p>As mentioned above Torbay Council has previously consulted with users of the Connections service during a trial closure of the Brixham and Torquay Connections offices (please see appendix one for the results of this consultation).</p> <p>Public consultation on the budget proposal to permanently close the Torquay and Brixham Connections offices has subsequently been undertaken.</p> <p>This Consultation started on 3rd December 2015 and closed on the 4th January 2016</p> <p>Torbay Council consulted on the proposal to close Brixham and Torquay Connections offices in the following ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A survey was developed for service users to complete – paper copies were made available in all Connections offices and all Libraries. 2. The survey was also available on-line during the consultation period.

Section 2: Implications and Impact Assessment

7.	<p>What are the financial and legal implications?</p> <p>There are no further financial and legal implications. The trial identified no significant increase in the number of travel warrants issued.</p> <p>The increase in postage for returning documents will be reduced when Risk Based Verification is introduced. (This framework will reduce the identification documents required to be submitted by low risk customers when making an application for Housing Benefit)</p>
8.	<p>What are the risks?</p> <p>Please refer to Risk Summary (appendix two)</p>
9.	<p>Public Services Value (Social Value) Act 2012</p> <p>Not applicable</p>
10.	<p>What evidence / data / research have you gathered in relation to this proposal?</p> <p>Torbay Council has consulted with users of the Connections service during a trial closure of the Brixham and Torquay Connections offices (please see appendix one).</p> <p>Torbay Council has now consulted with users of the Connections service on the permanent closure of the Torquay and Brixham Connections offices – please section 11 below.</p>

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

Torbay Council has recently undertaken a trial closure of the Brixham and Torquay Connections offices for a period of 4 weeks to identify the impact that a closure may have on users of the service.

Results from the consultation during this trial can be found at appendix one.

Public consultation on the budget proposal for the permanent closure of the Torquay and Brixham Connections offices. The Consultation started on 3rd December 2015 and closed on the 4th January 2016. The proposals were communicated to the Torbay community via local newspaper (Herald Express & Western Morning News), local radio, Twitter and Facebook and were detailed on the Torbay Council website. Emails were sent to key stakeholders and a range of opportunities were provided for people to contribute to the consultation, including a Budget Event held in Paignton. People were also able to send representations via email and post to Torbay Council.

Responses for this proposal were as follows:

Q) Connections:

To close Torquay and Brixham Connections Offices and Centralise the Connections service within the existing office in Paignton Library and Information Centre. Self Service Pods will be provided at Torquay and Brixham Libraries. Customers will still be able to access services via the Customer Contact Centre (telephone) and/or the Council's website.

This proposal is expected to save £76,000.

The Connections Service provides the main point of contact for Torbay Council.

Do you support this proposal ?	Number	Percent
Yes	135	54.9%
No	105	42.7%

		No answer	6	2.4%
		Total	246	100%
12.	<p>Amendments to Proposal / Mitigating Actions</p> <p>The impact of the trial closure was assessed (i.e. exit survey, monitoring demand, staff feedback, back office feedback) throughout to enable amendments to be put in place or action taken to manage customer demand, improve the customer experience or resolve any issues.</p>			

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Equality Impacts

13	Identify the potential positive and negative impacts on specific groups			
		Positive Impact	Negative Impact & Mitigating Actions	Neutral Impact
	Older or younger people		Older people may potentially be affected by this proposal as the drop in service for Age UK within Torquay Connections would cease. Customers will still be able to access Age UK services directly and Age UK may find an alternative location in Torquay.	Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced if this proposal was agreed i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website
	People with caring Responsibilities	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website		
	People with a disability		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.	Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced if this proposal was agreed i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the

		website
Women or men	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.	
People who are black or from a minority ethnic background (BME) (<i>Please note Gypsies / Roma are within this community</i>)	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.	
Religion or belief (including lack of belief)	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.	
People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.	
People who are transgendered	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.	
People who are in a marriage or civil partnership	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.	
Women who are pregnant / on maternity leave	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.	

Socio-economic impacts (Including impact on child poverty issues and deprivation)		Customers who wish to use face to face facilities or have an appointment in Paignton may incur travel costs	Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.
Public Health impacts (How will your proposal impact on the general health of the population of Torbay)	No differential impact – Alternative methods of contact introduced during the trial would be reintroduced i.e. Free phone facilities in Brixham & Torquay Library and drop boxes in Brixham and Torquay to enable customers to deposit documents. Customers will still have access to the contact centre and the website.		
14	Cumulative Impacts – Council wide (proposed changes elsewhere which might worsen the impacts identified above)	<p>During the trial closure the following feedback from other Torbay Council departments was gathered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing appointments were undertaken at PLAIC with few issues although some minor alterations would be required if the arrangement became permanent. • Children’s services shop had to signpost some customers to alternative facilities • Community Safety overall the impact has been minimal across the entire department. • Crisis Support - no significant issues but there was a reduction in the number of applications during the trial.whil • Security - no issues • Library Service - no major issues 	
15	Cumulative Impacts – Other public services (proposed changes elsewhere which might worsen the impacts identified above)	<p>During the trial closure the following feedback was gathered:</p> <p>A number of organisations in Brixham reported an increase in footfall due to the trial. Customers were sign posted to the facilities available in Brixham or to PLAIC.</p>	

Appendix One:

Consultation Data: Review of Connections Services

1. Review of Connections Services

1.1 Methodology

The consultation was conducted via online and paper surveys which were made available to the general public.

The online survey opened 5th October and closed on 11th November 2015.
39 responses were received.

Paper copies were made available in all of the Connections Offices, Harbour Offices and Torbay Libraries, from 5th October to 11th November 2015. 629 completed questionnaires were returned.

668 responses were received in total.

1.2 Results

The following set of tables show the results from of the “Review of Connections Services” survey.

The percentages in the data tables have been calculated using the overall number of responses received (668) as the denominator unless otherwise stated.

For free text (open ended questions) the responses have been categorised into popular themes with the most frequent listed first. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of responses in that category. Individual comments may be classified under more than one category.

Using the Connections Offices

Q1) How often do you visit the Connections Offices in Torbay?

	Number	Percent
A few times a year	366	54.8%
At least once a month	172	25.7%
Once a week	52	7.8%
No response	35	5.2%
Never	32	4.9%
Every day	11	1.6%
Total	668	100%

Q2) Which Connections office do you currently use most frequently?

	Number	Percent
Paignton	285	42.7%
Brixham	251	37.5%
Torquay	76	11.4%
No response	56	8.4%
Total	668	100%

Q3) Do you ever visit a different Connections office in Torbay?

	Number	Percent
No response	339	50.7%
Paignton	166	24.9%
Brixham	140	21%
Torquay	23	3.4%

Total	668	100%
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Q4) What form of travel do you most regularly use when visiting a Connections office?

This is a multi-choice question. 612 people responded to this question but percentages have been calculated using the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (668).

	Number	Percent
Walk	350	52.3%
Car	200	29.9%
Bus	182	27.2%
Cycle	17	2.5%
Taxi	6	0.8%
Train	4	0.5%

Q5) What services have you used at Connections in the last two years? (Please tick all that apply)?

This is a multi-choice question. 588 people responded to this question but percentages have been calculated using the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (668).

	Number	Percent
Housing Benefit	440	65.8%
Council Tax /Support	374	55.9%
Bus Passes	115	17.2%
Crisis Support	77	11.5%
Devon Home Choice	70	10.4%
Homelessness Advice	69	10.3%
Parking	54	8%
Other	43	6.4%
Planning	36	5.3%
Housing Standards	28	4.1%
Community Safety	17	2.5%
Licensing	10	1.4%
Business Rates	9	1.3%

Other comments provided:

- Schools
- Beach Huts
- Environmental Health
- Elections
- Tree Cutting
- Anti Social Behaviour.

Q6) During recent visits to a Connections office, have you used the self service computers in the office to make your enquiry?

	Number	Percent
Yes	132	19.8%
No	454	67.9%
No response	82	12.3%
Total	668	100%

Q6a) You answered 'Yes', has this given you more confidence to use a computer at home?

This is a multi-choice question. 130 people responded to this question but percentages have been calculated using the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (668).

	Number	Percent
Yes	51	7.6%
No	36	5.3%
No facility at home	43	6.4%
No response	2	0.2%

Q6b) If you answered No, what are your reasons for not using the computer?

Responses to this question have been categorised into the most popular themes. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of responses within those themes. Individual comments may have been classified and counted under more than one category.

Category	Comments made by respondents
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<p>Not experienced using computers (71)</p>	<p><i>"Lack of 'computer savvy'. No confidence"</i></p> <p><i>"Don't know how to work computers"</i></p> <p><i>"Do not have a computer and never used a computer"</i></p>
<p>Prefer to talk to someone (69)</p>	<p><i>"Prefer face to face communication"</i></p> <p><i>"As a disabled person I prefer human contact"</i></p> <p><i>"Rather talk to a person."</i></p>
<p>Not needed to (49)</p>	<p><i>"Have never needed to...."</i></p> <p><i>"Haven't needed to."</i></p> <p><i>"Only handing in paperwork for scanning."</i></p>
<p>Only needed to scan documents (23)</p>	<p><i>"No need to only come in to scan wage slips."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm bringing in my payslips for scanning."</i></p> <p><i>"Document scanning only"</i></p>
<p>Have got a computer at home (22)</p>	<p><i>"Have a home computer"</i></p> <p><i>"Have internet at home"</i></p>

	"No interest"
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Q7) Did you attempt to visit Torquay or Brixham Connections during the trial closure period?

	Number	Percent
Yes	272	40.7%
No	329	49.3%
No response	67	10%
Total	668	100%

Q7a) How did you resolve your enquiry?

This is a multi-choice question. 268 people responded to this question but percentages have been calculated using the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (668).

	Number	Percent
Connections	128	19.1%
Phone	74	11%
Other	55	8.2%
Web	11	1.6%

Q7b) If you visited Paignton Connections how did you travel?

This is a multi-choice question. 207 people responded to this question but percentages have been calculated using the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (668).

	Number	Percent
Bus	81	12.1%
Car	76	11.3%
Walk	41	6.1%
Other	7	1%
Cycle	2	0.2%
Train	0	0.0%

Q7c) If you visited Paignton Connections were there any issues in getting to Paignton?

Responses to this question have been categorised into the most popular themes. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of responses within those themes. Individual comments may have been classified and counted under more than one category.

Category	Comments made by respondents
None (49)	<p><i>"No"</i></p> <p><i>"None"</i></p>
Travel (25)	<p><i>"Cost & travel"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes - the bus fare is costly and considerably the financial difficulties I am having making me upset."</i></p> <p><i>"Long bus ride."</i></p>

<p>Needed to get a lift (9)</p>	<p><i>"Yes, I don't drive; I had to get a lift."</i></p> <p><i>"Needed a lift from daughter who came up from Cornwall."</i></p> <p><i>"I could only come over when my husband wasn't at work as I can't drive."</i></p>
<p>Lack of parking and parking costs (9)</p>	<p><i>"Parking / cost of parking twice."</i></p> <p><i>"Parking costs."</i></p> <p><i>"Inconvenient and lack of parking."</i></p>
<p>Mobility Issues (4)</p>	<p><i>"Too far due to disability and pain."</i></p> <p><i>"Lots of issues for someone of limited mobility, when will you lot actually listen to what we tell you."</i></p> <p><i>"Disabled parking is not close by."</i></p>

Section 2: Future customer services facilities

Q8) In the absence of a Connections office in Torquay or Brixham would you travel to a new centralised office at Paignton Library and Information Centre?

	Number	Percent
Yes	318	47.6%
No	157	23.5%
Don't know	119	17.8%
No response	74	11.1%
Total	668	100%

Q9) If a self service computer and a freephone to various council services was available for you to use at a location in Torquay or Brixham, would you use these to make your enquiries?

	Number	Percent
Yes	220	33%
No	193	28.9%
Don't know	188	28.1%
No response	67	10%
Total	668	100%

Q9a) If Yes, what would you use? (Please tick all that apply)

205 people responded to this question but percentages have been calculated of the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (668)

	Number	Percent
Freephones	153	22.9%
Internet	127	19.9%
Web Chat	32	4.7%

Q10) How likely are you to use each of the following methods of contact with us?

Respondents were asked to choose one answer per method of contact percentages have been calculated using the total number of respondents to this questionnaire (668).

	Very likely		Fairly likely		Not very likely		Never	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
In Person	473	70.8%	91	13.6%	21	3.1%	12	1.7%

Telephone	352	52.6%	169	25.2%	40	5.9%	22	3.2%
Internet	175	26.1%	129	19.3%	122	18.2%	100	14.9%
Postal	161	24.1%	146	21.8%	122	18.2%	74	11.1%
Email	161	24.1%	114	17.0%	126	18.8%	115	17.2%
Text	86	12.8%	76	11.3%	146	21.8%	168	25.1%
Web Chat	38	5.6%	51	7.6%	143	21.4%	226	33.8%

Q11) Would you like to be able to access your council records (e.g. Council Tax, Housing Benefits records) yourself via the internet?

	Number	Percent
Yes	345	51.7%
No	148	22.1%
Don't know	119	17.8%
No response	56	8.4%
Total	668	100%

Q11a) If you answered No, please explain why in the box below:

Responses to this question have been categorised into the most popular themes. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of responses within those themes. Individual comments may have been classified and counted under more than one category.

Category	Comments made by respondents
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Security Issues (23)	<p><i>"Security is a huge feature and your intranet security is poor."</i></p> <p><i>"Security issues."</i></p> <p><i>"Internet can be hacked have you not learnt anything, plus I don't have a computer, sorry not everyone can afford one."</i></p>
Do not have a computer or the internet (21)	<p><i>"No internet."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't use internets have no wish to."</i></p> <p><i>"No computer"</i></p>
Not confident on computer (21)	<p><i>"Not very good with computers. Also they are not always accurate."</i></p> <p><i>"Not confident enough on computer."</i></p> <p><i>"Not competent on internet."</i></p>
Prefer to speak to somebody (8)	<p><i>"I would like the personal experience of talking in person, as technology can often be difficult and temperamental (especially for the elderly)"</i></p> <p><i>"As before I prefer to see a real person."</i></p> <p><i>"I prefer someone to explain to me face to face as I have difficulty understanding."</i></p>

Q12) If you had to submit documents for scanning which of the following alternative options would you use to provide your information? (Please tick all that apply)

This is a multi-choice question. 566 people responded to this question but percentages have been calculated using the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (668).

	Number	Percent
Visit Paignton Connections	354	52.9%
Deposit documents in a secure box at an office location in Torquay or Brixham, where the originals would be returned by post without charge	180	26.9%
Post via Royal Mail to the Town Hall in Torquay	125	18.7%
Submit documents via a picture / scanned image from your own device	117	17.5%

Q13) Do you support the proposal to centralise the Connections Service at Paignton? (Please tick one box only)

	Number	Percent
Yes	221	33.1%
No	368	55.1%
No response	79	11.8%
Total	668	100%

Respondent Profile

Q14) Gender

	Number	Percent
Male	232	34.7%
Female	365	54.7%
No response	71	10.6%
Total	668	100%

Q15) Age

	Number	Percent
0 – 15	0	0%
16 – 24	61	9.0%
25 – 34	108	16.0%
35 – 44	114	17.0%
45 – 54	117	17.5%
55 – 64	118	17.6%
65 – 74	73	10.9%
75+	28	4.2%
No response	49	7.3%
Total	668	100%

Q16) Disability – Do you consider yourself to be disabled in any way?

	Number	Percent
Yes	165	24.7%
No	393	58.9%
Don't Know	6	0.9%
No response	104	15.5%
Total	668	100%

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159 people responded to this question. Percentages have been calculated out of the total amount of respondents (668).

	Number	Percent
It affects my mobility	103	15.4%
It affects me in another way	62	9.2%
It affects my hearing	27	4%
It affects my vision	16	2.3%

Q17) How would you describe your ethnic origin?

	Number	Percent
White	575	86%
Black or Black British	6	0.8%
Mixed ethnicity	2	0.2%
Chinese	0	0%
Asian or Asian British	3	0.4%
Other	5	0.7%
No response	77	11.5%
Total	668	100%

Q18) Postcode

	Number	Percent
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	Number	Percent
TQ3 (Preston/Paignton)	152	22.8%
TQ1 (Torquay)	136	20.3%
TQ2 (Torquay)	129	19.3%
No response	105	15.7%
TQ5 (Brixham)	80	12%
TQ4 (Paignton)	66	9.9%
Total	668	100%

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Appendix Two:

Risk	Risk Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Controls in place and actions to improve control
Paignton Connections design cannot cope with the customer footfall.	Low	Based on the evidence of the trial, the operating model was successful and the existing Connections office was of sufficient size to accommodate the additional footfall
The demand for “Face to face” enquiries in the long term does not continue to reduce and actually increases.	Low	Trends established over a long period of time. Technology would assist in responding to the increase in demand.
Self Service functions in Torquay & Brixham library are proving difficult to use by our customers without Customer Service Advisor assistance.	Medium	<p>Customer satisfaction, complaints monitoring and feedback from Library staff.</p> <p>Use of the free phones in Torquay & Brixham Library was minimal during the trial.</p> <p>The new website (December 2015) will enable additional transactions to be undertaken.</p>
Call Centre cannot cope with extra call demand from the new free phones offered in Paignton, Brixham and Torquay library’s and from other customers contacting the Call Centre rather than a Connections office visit.	Low	There was no significant increase in call demand during the trial or the week immediately after the trail.
Delays in application processing (particularly Crisis support) may be created due to reduction in distributed scanning facility’s currently offered in Torquay; Brixham & Paignton.	Medium	<p>A post box was introduced at Torquay Town Hall to receive documents and customers in Brixham were able to submit documents within the Library</p> <p>During the trial the number of applications reduced by 20%</p>

Risk	Risk Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Controls in place and actions to improve control
Taxi Licensing – appropriate locations for renewals and inspections cannot be found	Low	Adequate facilities will be provided (December 2015 an on-line taxi licensing system is being introduced)
Housing options/Homelessness – appropriate location for a meeting room located in Torquay is either too expensive or unsuitable for purpose.	Medium	A suitable meeting room in Torquay is being researched. Only alternative would be to use meeting rooms available in PLAIC which operationally is not effective.
Other agencies may have insufficient capacity to manage any increase in demand that results from the centralisation.	Low	The trial has identified that some customers are visiting other organisations rather than travel to PLAIC. During the trial these customers were signposted to PLAIC or other contact channels. This may reduce as customers become aware of the new arrangements.
Customers that did not contact during the trial – might see increase if closed permanently	Low	The operating model introduced within Paignton Connections has the capacity to deal with an increase in footfall. Crisis Support reported that demand reduced during the trial and increased briefly when the offices reopened. Monitor and react to increases in demand.
Demand at Main Reception may not reduce – Staff resource may need to be allocated to Main Reception until the volume of additional customers seeking Connections service reduces	Low	During the trial the volume of customers steadily reduced. Monitor and react to increases in demand.