



Connections Offices Rationalisation Project

Centralised Connections Office in Paignton

Trial Closure Results and Appraisal

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This project is part of the overall budget setting process for 2016/17.

In 2015/16 it was proposed that the Connections Service could centralise in PLAIC (Paignton Library and Information Centre). To accommodate the operating model and volume of customers at that time, the Connections Service would have required part of the ground floor Library space. Investigation as to the approximate costs of reconfiguring the office space and additional building work required was undertaken and the cost was in the region of £281,000

The decision was made to not to proceed in 2015/16 and to undertake further investigation during 2015/16.

During 2015/16 a new operating model within Connections was implemented to maximise the use of contact channels within the offices. Technology was introduced to reduce the volume of customers that were required to deal with their enquiry through a face to face transaction with a Customer service Advisor (CSA).

Based on this success it was proposed that a trial should be undertaken to identify the impact of a central office on customers, back office services and partner organisations and to explore if the new operating model would enable the service to operate from the existing space within PLAIC, thus reducing costs.

On 28 July 2015 the Executive Lead for Business published a record of decision:

- (i) That Torquay and Brixham Connections offices would close for a trial period of four weeks to understand the impact of a permanent closure on the community and service users; and
- (ii) That the four week closure of Torquay and Brixham Connections would commence on 10 August 2015 with a re-opening date of 7 September 2015. Consultation on permanent changes to the service would take place during and after the trial closure.

Reason for the decision

To understand the impact a permanent closure of the Torquay and Brixham Connections offices would have on service users and the community, which will provide evidence about the provision of this service. The evidence gathered and the results of consultation with service users will inform how the Council can better use its resources in light of future budget reductions.

The trial dates were subsequently amended to enable sufficient time for the arrangements to be put in place and to publicise the trial.

The trial closure was undertaken from 5 to 30 October 2015.

This report will provide:

- Brief overview of the new Connections operating model
- The volume of customers that visited PLAIC during the trial
- The impact on back office services
- The impact on other service providers within Torbay
- The impact and opinions of Connections customers
- The potential costs should the decision be made to centralise Connections within the existing space at PLAIC

2. Project aims and objectives

2.1 Aim

The project sought to trial a rationalisation of the 3 Connections offices into one location (Paignton) within the existing floor space for 4 weeks. The intelligence and information from the trial can be used to consider if Connections should rationalise on a permanent basis.

The purpose of the trial was to understand the impact a permanent closure in Torquay and Brixham would have on service users, back office services and the wider community.

2.2 Objectives

The projects main objectives were as follows:

- To rationalise the Connections offices into one location in Paignton – closing both of the Connections offices in Torquay & Brixham for a period of 4 weeks.
- To identify the increase in footfall at PLAIC whilst Torquay & Brixham Connections are closed.
- To establish what self service functionality can be provided in Torquay & Brixham offices and identify the volume of customers that use each facility
- To ensure that customer services functions to our back office Services are maintained and to identify the impact on our services.
- To identify if the service could be rationalised on a permanent basis.
- To establish the potential impacts for customers, back office and partners should Connections centralise in Paignton.
- To gather feedback from customers, back office and partners.
- Establish if the current space in PLAIC would be sufficient for a central office.

- Measure the impact for back offices that have currently undertake appointments within Torquay Connections.
- Identify issues for back office and customers offering appointments in alternative locations.
- To establish which channels of communication customers from Torquay and Brixham use

2.3 Constraints

The main constraints to the project are as follows:

- Staffing resources - this project was undertaken by existing Council staff
- Timescales - The trial was undertaken 5 to 30 October 2015
- Financial - the trial was undertaken using existing IT equipment.
- Some back office services were required to accommodate changes to location of appointments with customers

2.4 Interfaces and Critical Dependencies

Internal:

- Future plans related to the Town Hall building in Torquay
- Community Hub Project (Health, CCG & Social Care)
- Budget setting process
- Service departments i.e. Revenue & Benefits, Housing, Residents & Visitor Services
- Operation of the existing Town Hall Reception
- ICT services i.e. provision of adequate infrastructure/technology for the trial
- Availability of appropriate meeting/appointment rooms – specifically in Torquay. (ie Town Hall or other Torquay locations)
- Libraries i.e. staff were required to signpost customers
- Office Security i.e. to ensure that adequate security is provided in PLAIC
- HR/Staff issues

External

- The outcome of a consultation with the public
- The outcome of an Equality Impact Assessment
- Community Development Trust members
- Other third party partners
- There is a potential interface with the voluntary sector

2.5 Critical Success Factors (CSFs)

The CSFs for this project are as follows:

- To understand what channels customers would use when Brixham & Torquay Connections was not available
- To identify issues from customers travelling to a central location
- To ensure that the space within PLAIC was used effectively to avoid customers queuing for unacceptable periods of time
- To test the new operating model and ensure that the technology was sufficient to meet demand
- To ensure that processes within back office services have been modified successfully
- To identify the impact of demand for back office services from operating from a central location
- To ensure that a communications plan has been developed and that members of the public are aware of any potential changes in service and have been appropriately consulted
- To test the facilities provided in Brixham and Torquay to identify customer volumes for each channel.

3. Connections Offices - Prior to the trial

3.1 Operating model

The “Connections” offices are the main offices for Council services at the following locations

- Torquay: Town Hall (Dedicated office)
- Paignton: Located within the Paignton Library and Information centre
- Brixham: Located within Brixham Library

In November 2014 the operating models in Torquay and Paignton offices were changed to achieve the following:

- Introduce and promote the use of online services and telephones to customers as these channels cost less than a face to face transaction.
- To maximise capacity to the call centre (staff in the face to face offices now answer calls as well as dealing with the face to face customers)
- Improve performance to the call centre (answer rate is over 80% and waiting times are less than 1 minute).
- To bring the service into line with other organisations e.g. DWP, HMRC (pushing more self service and telephone support)
- To enable vulnerable customers to see a Customer Service Advisor (CSA) promptly to resolve their enquiry.

3.2 Demand

Torquay Connections

- 50 customers a week seen by a CSA on the counter
- 900 customers per week - triaged (Document scanning only, directed to online service, directed to free phone to the Call Centre, pre arranged appointment or low level enquiry)

Customer Services staff are available within the office to direct customers to the appropriate channel depending on their enquiry and assist customers with the use of online transactions.

Paignton Connections

- 50 customers a week seen by a CSA on the counter
- 450 customers a week at the Reception desk (Document scanning only, directed to online service, directed to free phone to the Call Centre, pre arranged appointment or low level enquiry)

Brixham Connections

- 90 customers per week. All enquiries are dealt with by a CSA.

3.3 Resources

The average staffing levels within the Connections offices are:

- Torquay: 3 CSAs, 1 Team Leader and a security presence
- Paignton: 3 CSAs and 1 Team Leader
- Brixham: 1 CSA and 1 Team Leader
- Town Hall reception: 1 CSA

In Torquay and Paignton the role of the CSA is to direct customers to the appropriate channel, assist them to self serve and undertake quick enquiries

To maximise capacity CSAs in the offices support the Call Centre until they are required to undertake a face to face enquiry.

A CSA is available to undertake face to face enquiries for enquiries that are unsuitable for any other channel and to assist vulnerable customers.

This flexible way of managing demand has allowed us to add capacity to the Call Centre to improve the percentage of calls answered to 80% and reduce average queuing times.

4. Connections Offices Trial

For the duration of the trial face to face enquires were centralised in Paignton at the Paignton Library and Information Centre (PLAIC).

Alternative arrangements were introduced in Torquay and Brixham for face to face customers who did not wish to travel to Paignton.

4.1 Facilities Available During the Trial

Location	Facility
Brixham Connections - Closed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Free phone available during Library opening hours ▪ Secure post box located within the library to submit documents (Collected daily) ▪ Free 1 hour use of computers for Library members (Non members can join or pay £2) ▪ Free wifi within the Library (Code available from Library staff) ▪ Customer Services consultation ▪ Travel warrants will be issued by Library staff for Crisis Support if required
Torquay Connections - Closed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Free phone available during Library opening hours ▪ Licensing appointments in Tor Hill House ▪ Secure external letterbox for documents to be scanned (originals returned to the customer by post) ▪ Secure external letterbox for Crisis Support documentation ▪ Customer Services consultation in Torquay Library and Town Hall main reception ▪ Additional staff at Town Hall main reception to signpost additional footfall as a result of the trial. ▪ Free wifi with Torquay Library ▪ Customer Services consultation within Torquay Library ▪ Customer Services consultation within Torquay Connections 2 to 11 November 2015 ▪ Crisis Support payments made at the Children's Services shop (travel warrants arranged by the team) ▪ Housing travel warrants issued at Leonard Stocks for their clients. Temporary accommodation providers will be

	<p>supplied with travel warrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Security response for Town Hall and Children’s Services shop
Paignton Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional free phones for customer use ▪ Additional computer pods (Transferred from Torquay Connections for customer use) ▪ Meet and greet facility at the entrance ▪ Customer Support to assist and direct customers ▪ Customer Service Advisor available for complex enquiries and vulnerable customers ▪ Customer satisfaction exit survey ▪ Housing Appointments undertaken. ▪ On site security presence ▪ Document scanning facility ▪ Travel warrants issued for Crisis Support appointments ▪ Free wifi for Library members

4.2 Resources during the trial

Town Hall Reception

- 1 CSA to respond to calls to main switchboard (201201)

In addition to the CSA who currently manages the visitors to Main Reception and the calls to switchboard, a Team Leader was present to identify and resolve any issues. They also managed and recorded the volume of customers that visited Main Reception as a result of the Torquay Connections being closed.

Brixham Connections

- No CSAs were present.

Customers had use of a free telephone line within the office during the library opening times.

There was a facility for customers to deposit documents for scanning.

Customers who were library members could book the use of a computer. There is a small charge for non library members.

Paignton Library and Information Centre

- 2 Team Leaders

- Scanning Assistant
- 4 CSAs

The staffing level was reduced by 1 FTE during the trial due to the level of demand.

4.3 Communication

Communication - Prior to the start of the trial

A communication plan was undertaken to advise as many members of the public and organisations that the trial was taking place.

The purpose of the communication was to make customers and other organisations aware of the arrangements and facilities in place, to ensure that organisations had the opportunity to raise any issues during the trial and feedback any increase in enquiries that directly related to the closure of Torquay and Brixham Connections.

The following actions were undertaken prior to the commencement of the trial:

- Posters were displayed at Torquay and Brixham Connections advising customers of the alternative methods of contact during the closure.
- Leaflets were available for customers who visited Brixham Library and Main Reception. These detailed the arrangements and provided contact information.
- Torquay and Brixham Job Centre received a supply of the leaflets and staff were informed to ensure that customers were not signposted to either office during the closure.
- Social media and twitter were used to inform customers of the trial and any feedback was captured.
- Our website www.torbay.gov.uk was updated to inform customers of the closure
- A page on the intranet was created enable Torbay Council staff to access information and reports.
- The plasma screen in the window of Torquay Connections was updated
- Council Tax documentation was updated to inform customers of the trial.
- Back office services were informed of the trial and arrangements were put in place to deal with enquiries from Paignton or other locations in Torquay.
- The Community Development Trust communicated the details of the trial to its members.
- All landlords with a portfolio of more than 10 housing benefit claims were written to advising them of the trial.
- 40 other organisations that were identified by staff were also written to advising them of the trial.

Communication - During the trial

During the trial any issues were captured and resolved.

A weekly report was created detailing footfall, issues and feedback from customers visiting Paignton Connections.

A corporate consultation was undertaken between 5 October and 11 November

4.4 Operating model in PLAIC during the trial

Many factors were considered when creating the operating model for the centralised Connections Office, these included:

- Predicting the increase in demand
- Increasing the number of free phones available
- Increasing the number of self serve computers by relocating the computers in Torquay Connections
- Meeting room requirements for Housing
- The increase in customers requiring documents to be scanned
- Ensuring that the Reception desk did not become a pressure point
- Ensuring that Registrars customers were not affected by the trial
- The preferred flow of footfall
- Ensuring customers were signposted to the appropriate facility
- Customers were supported to complete online transactions where appropriate
- Customers with complex enquiries were able to discuss enquiry with a CSA face to face
- Maximising staff resources - staff were able to add capacity to the Call Centre when demand permitted
- Regular reviews of the operating model to resolve any operational issues

Operating model during the trial

Customers were greeted by a member of staff as they entered PLAIC. The nature of their enquiry established. The customer was then advised of the appropriate contact channel and assistance given where required.

Services available

Quick enquiries (Directions, issuing of forms, quick advice that does not require a back office system) - dealt with at this first point of contact

Scanning of documents - the customer hands the documents over and is given a numbered ticket. The customer is advised to wait in the seating area. The Scanning Assistant located in the office scans the document and returns the original documents to the customer.

Freephone - the customer is directed to a free phone to enable them to speak to a CSA in the call centre or contact the appropriate department to resolve their enquiry.

Computers - the customer was directed to a PC to complete the transaction online and given assistance where required.

Appointments - the customer is directed to the Reception to be checked in for a Housing or Registrars appointment. The appropriate officer is informed that they have arrived and the customer is directed to the correct location.

Reception Desk - undertook a range of enquiries:

- Bus Pass applications
- Parking permits
- Parking dispensations
- Overseas Pensions verification
- Appointments (Registrars & Housing) customer was checked in and directed to the correct meeting room
- Radar Keys
- Quick advice that required use of a back office system

Complex enquiries or enquiries not suitable for any other channel - A CSA is taken off Call Centre support to deal with the enquiry.

A CSA was available at all times to support customers.

Security

There was a Security Officer present within the Paignton office during the trial to support all staff.

As the Housing Appointments transferred from Torquay Connections to PLAIC for the duration of the trial, security was required to ensure safety of staff and customers as a number of customers are known to be high risk. During the four week trial there was one incident involving a customer arriving too late for a Housing appointment. The security team managed and resolved the situation.

Security at the Town Hall was maintained by an officer on call who is based within the CCTV office.

5. Trial results and analysis

In order to meet the objectives of the trial the following information has been collected:

1. The increase to the number of calls to the Call Centre
2. The footfall total within Paignton Connections
3. The volume of customers that visited Main Reception Torquay
4. Where customers that visited Main Reception were signposted to
5. The volume of customers that used the free phone facilities in Torquay and Brixham Libraries
6. The volume of documents delivered to the post boxes in Torquay and Brixham and the costs associated with posting these documents back to the customer.

7. Customers visiting Paignton Connections were asked:
 - a. What transport they used to travel to Paignton
 - b. The enquiry type
 - c. Channel used to resolve their enquiry
 - d. Any additional comments that the customer wishes to provide

Call demand to the Call Centre

The table below details the volume of calls to the Call Centre and Main Switchboard for week commencing 28 September 2015 (before the trial started) and the four weeks of the trial. There are normally some fluctuations due to scheduled Council Tax recovery runs and the posting of documents.

Overall, the table demonstrates that there was little increase in demand to the Call Centre or main switchboard during the trial. There was an increase in volume of calls during the week after the trial ended. This was partly due to the issuing of Council Tax recovery documents and Benefits notifications issued during that week.

Date (Week Commencing)	Calls Taken - Call Centre	Calls Taken - Switchboard
28/09/2015 (Week prior to trial)	2476	1484
05/10/2015	2524	1469
12/10/2015	2539	1534
19/10/2015	2416	1402
26/10/2015	2346	1494
02/11/2015 (Week after trial)	2680	1534

Footfall at Paignton Connections

Prior to the trial the average footfall was 500 customers per week. As expected, the footfall increased during the trial. The operating model was designed to accommodate 100% of footfall from Torquay and Brixham travelling to Paignton.

Mondays and Fridays were generally the busiest days during the trial. This is consistent with general demand.

Feedback from customers was gathered and there were no significant queues.

Date (Week Commencing)	Total Weekly Footfall	% Increase
28/09/2015 (Week prior to trial) *	598	N/A
05/10/2015	703	40
12/10/2015	784	56
19/10/2015	738	47
26/10/2015	742	48
02/11/2015 (Week after trial)	529	N/A

* The increased footfall in Paignton may have been customer's perception that Torquay and Brixham Connections were already closed, as the average footfall for these offices was lower than average

Volume of customers at Main Reception Torquay

Prior to the trial any customers were sign posted to Torquay Connections. The volumes of customers that visited Main Reception reduced steadily during the trial.

Customers were signposted to other facilities and consultation forms were promoted during the trial to capture customer opinion.

There were no incidents at Main Reception during the trial that required security.

Week commencing	Total Weekly Footfall
5 October 2015	192
12 October 2015	156
19 October 2015	134
26 October 2015	117

Signposting of customers visiting Main Reception in Torquay (data not collected in the first week of the trial)

The PDG members requested information to identify where customers that visited Main Reception were signposted to.

The majority of customers were signposted to facilities in Torquay (Letterbox, free phone and website) only a small percentage were signposted to PLAIC.

Main Reception Breakdown

Service	Week commencing		
	12/10/2015	19/10/2015	26/10/2015
Town Hall Letterbox	63	58	65
Phone	46	43	27
Website	19	17	12
Paignton Connections	6	4	3
Other Services	22	12	10
Total	156	134	117

Free phone usage during the trial

An additional free phone was installed within Torquay Library to enable customers in Torquay to contact the Council. This facility already existed in Brixham Library.

This facility enabled customers to contact the following services:

1. Housing
2. Highways
3. Planning
4. Parking
5. Registrars
6. Adult Social Care
7. Council Tax
8. Housing Benefits
9. Business Rates
10. Licensing and Community Safety
11. Elections

Use of this facility was greater in Torquay than Brixham. The overall use of this facility was lower than expected. Feedback from Library staff and Brixham Does Care identified that some customers (Particularly in Brixham) were reluctant to use this facility for privacy reasons.

There is a free phone facility in Torquay and Paignton Connections. These have been utilised since the new operating model was introduced and there have been few complaints regarding privacy within the offices.

Week commencing	Torquay Library Freephone	Brixham Library Freephone
5 October 2015	24	13
12 October 2015	36	5
19 October 2015	24	4
26 October 2015	14	1

Documents delivered to the post boxes

Two additional post boxes were created at the Town Hall to enable customers to deposit documents for scanning and Crisis Support applications/documentation. In Brixham a box was available within the Library for customers to deposit documents. Documents were scanned by the corporate scanning team and originals were returned to the customer by post. The additional cost of returning the documents from Torquay and Brixham were recorded to identify the postage charges.

The scanning assistant in Torquay worked in Paignton Connections for the duration of the trial.

Week commencing	Crisis Support Documents	Non Crisis Support Documents in Crisis Support Post Box	Torquay Town Hall Post Box	Brixham Library Post Box
5 October 2015	4	1	125	13
12 October 2015	5	9	143	3
19 October 2015	9	2	142	6
26 October 2015	4	5	134	7
Total	22	17	544	29

Postage

All original documents were returned to the customer.

Location	Documents returned	Postage cost
Torquay	79	£33.21
Brixham	13	£6.51

Paignton Connections Customer Feedback

During the trial 444 Paignton Connections customers completed a questionnaire to identify the following:

Where customers visiting Paignton connections had travelled from

The table below reveals that around a third of customers during the trail travelled from Torquay and a tenth from Brixham. "Other" relates to customers from outside of Torbay.

Area	Volume	% of customers
Torquay	144	32%
Paignton	250	56%
Brixham	42	10%
Other	8	2%

What transport customers used to visit Paignton Connections

Travelling by car was the most popular mode of transport. A third of customers walked to the office.

Mode of transport	Volume	% of customers
Car	195	44%
Bus	98	22%
Walk	147	33%
Cycle	4	1%
Taxi	2	Less than 1%

Train	1	Less than 1%
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What customer's enquiries related to

Benefits, Housing and Council Tax are our highest volume enquiry types. The results reflect the percentage of enquiries prior to the trail. The enquiry types did not change significantly during the trial.

Enquiry Type	Volume	% of customers
Benefits	216	37%
Council Tax	99	17%
Crisis Support	15	15%
Housing	229	39%
Bus Passes	5	1%
Parking	3	1%
Other	21	4%

Customer Services staff collected information on the channels used to resolve all customer enquiries (2967 enquiries)

The operating model enabled customer demand to be spread over a number of contact channels.

Enquiry Channel	Volume	% of customers
Reception/Front Desk	213	7%
Appointments	383	13%
Quick Enquiry	824	27.7%
Pod/Web	202	7%
Telephone	221	7.5%

Scanning	1119	37.7%
CSA Counter	5	0.1%

Volume of customers that visited Paignton Connections that attempted to visit Brixham or Torquay Connections during the trial.

This data not collected in the first week of the trial.

Week commencing	Brixham	Torquay
12 October 2015	10	27
19 October 2015	6	21
26 October 2015	5	20

Other increases in demand

During the trial it was identified that there was an increase in the volume of customers contacting the revenues email address.

Date (Prior to trial)	Volume	Date	Volume	Date	Volume	Date	Volume
28-Sep	50	05-Oct	84	12-Oct	65	19-Oct	73
29-Sep	39	06-Oct	65	13-Oct	55	20-Oct	56
30-Sep	34	07-Oct	66	14-Oct	64	21-Oct	58
01-Oct	53	08-Oct	65	15-Oct	55	22-Oct	54
02-Oct	42	09-Oct	62	16-Oct	49	23-Oct	42

6. Feedback

6.1 Feedback from customers who visited Paignton Connections during the

trial

Customers that completed feedback forms within Paignton were given the opportunity to add any comments. All the comments are listed in Appendix 1.

Key themes were:

Customers received a good service

There were no issues with waiting times

Some customers who would normally have used Torquay or Brixham would have preferred to use an office closer to home.

6.2 Individual feedback from a member of the public

Customer is aware of the good transport links to PLAIC

Customer stated that anyone travelling from Brixham or Torquay to Paignton would incur travelling time.

6.3 Feedback from Torbay Council departments

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.

Security - no issues

Library Service - no major issues

6.4 Feedback from Unions

Unison reported that staff had no issues with the trial.

GMB has concerns around the impact of centralising particularly for elderly or vulnerable customers.

6.5 Feedback from other organisations

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.

6.6 Feedback from Corporate Consultation

Public consultation on the budget proposal 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%

7. Financial appraisal

7.1 Financial investment - Capital

The trial has identified that it is possible to centralise in the existing Connections space within PLAIC. Associated costs if the decision is to centralise in PLAIC on a permanent basis are:

Room 5 Ground Floor Paignton Connections.

This room was previously used by the Registrars service that relocated to another room within PLAIC for the duration of the trial. If the room was to be allocated to Housing on a permanent basis they would require the following alterations:

- Removal of the frosted privacy film on the current glass to ensure staff and customers are visible.
- Replace the current door lock to ensure staff safety

Total cost to be identified.

Computers

During the trial the self serve computers were relocated from Torquay to Paignton Connections. Although still functioning they are coming to 'end of life' and require resource from IT on a regular basis. This would be the ideal opportunity to upgrade the existing technology and ensure it is fully functional.

There is also an opportunity to site the same technology within Brixham and Torquay Library.

Initial cost of 10 pods (hosted solution) including broadband in 3 locations (Torquay, Brixham and Paignton), site surveys, installation and software - £25,000

Year 2 onwards broadband networking, extended warranty, maintenance and hosting £7,200 per year.

Exit costs/dilapidation

Torquay Connections, Town Hall - to be identified

7.2 Financial savings - Ongoing plus additional expenditure

Cashable staff savings from centralising the Connections service in one location £76,000.

Potential income from the leasing of the Torquay Connections space: The income would depend on the length of lease and type of occupation.

8. Strategic benefits and dis-benefits

Benefit Title	Type (Tangible, Intangible, Dis-benefit)	Description	Measure/ Other Information
Budget reduction	Tangible	Revenue reduction in Customer Services (£76k)	£76k revenue saving within Customer Services
Potential additional income for the Council	Intangible	Dependant on strategic direction	
Supports the concept of the future development of the Town Hall and surrounding area	Intangible	Supports Local Plan	
Potential Revenue Budget increase in other services: Housing Services Postage	Dis-benefit	Revenue budget increase : Additional postage costs approx £500 per year Additional cost of travel warrants approx £500 per year	Postage costs based on £40 for the trial (4 weeks) Travel warrants issued to enable customers to attend appointments were minimal but additional cost may be incurred if permanent
Additional customer demand to other agencies	Intangible	Organisations particularly in Torquay and Brixham may see an increase in customer demand as a face to face Connections service is no longer available	Would need to be monitored. Feedback from the trial indicates that it is predominantly signposting to Paignton Connections or the facilities

Benefit Title	Type (Tangible, Intangible, Dis-benefit)	Description	Measure/ Other Information
			available within Torquay and Brixham Library
Use of PLAIC	Intangible	PLAIC is a modern community space. Centralising the Connections service in PLAIC compliments the funding bid and the community space ethos of the building. (Community Hub)	Potential to increase the use of other services within PLAIC e.g. coffee shop, Health watch and Library Services
Potential increase in demand to Library Services	Intangible	Increase in the number of customers visiting Torquay and Brixham Library	Would need to be monitored. This was minimal during the trial. Any increase in footfall may result in additional Library membership
Fully integrated customer service	Intangible	Ability in the future to provide a fully integrated customer service from one location, with the potential of this becoming extended into a Community Hub (Including Health, Social Care etc)	Increased coverage of information and advice.
Better use of limited Customer Services staff resources.	Intangible	Customer Services staff resources will be better utilised and shared between the Call Centre and Customer Service Connections Office.	Improved Call Centre response times.
Improved website enabling increased self service facilities for customers irrespective of device used.	Intangible	An improved website and transactional services will enable more of our customers to “self serve”, thus reducing Connections demand on offering a 24/7 service.	Increase in Web usage. Reduced Connections demand

Benefit Title	Type (Tangible, Intangible, Dis-benefit)	Description	Measure/ Other Information
Potential negative impact on some customers – especially vulnerable groups	Dis-Benefit	Self service provision may be provided at satellite locations i.e. Brixham/Torquay, however some customers may need to visit Paignton PLAIC for a face to face visit which may not now be their most convenient location	Customer satisfaction
Opening hours of Torquay & Brixham Library	Dis-benefit	Although facilities for customers will be available in Torquay & Brixham Libraries, both Libraries open half days 2 days a week and therefore customers would not have access to the facilities when the library is closed.	Corporate complaints Increased call demand when facility unavailable
Loss of meeting room space used by partner agencies	Dis-benefit	Agencies such as NHS Depression & Anxiety, Age Uk and Careers Advice currently use meeting rooms in Torquay & Paignton for meetings with clients. Due to the reduction in meeting room due to centralisation this facility will be withdrawn.	Agencies will have to find alternative venues (possibly chargeable)
Meeting rooms	Dis-benefit	No additional meeting room available in Paignton for Customer Services customers as Housing would require meeting rooms 5& 6 Community Safety would need use of a meeting room longer term Registrars will need room 16 PLAIC that was leased by Age UK (Loss of potential income)	

Benefit Title	Type (Tangible, Intangible, Dis-benefit)	Description	Measure/ Other Information
Increased demand on other organisations	Dis-benefit	Customers in Brixham and Torquay may visit other organisations rather than travel to PLAIC.	Customers would require signposting to the PLAIC or other contact channels.

9. Risk Summary

Risk is a major factor to consider during the implementation of any project. Risks can be defined as uncertainty of outcome (whether positive opportunity or negative threat).

PROBABILITY	4 (Probable)	4	8	12	16
	3 (Likely)	3	6	9	12
	2 (Possible)	2	4	6	8
	1 (Unlikely)	1	2	3	4
		1 (Minor)	2 (Moderate)	3 (Significant)	4 (Major)
		IMPACT			

Key - by multiplying the probability score by the impact score a risk score is obtained. The risk score equates to a risk rating:

- 1 to 4 is a low risk (green);
- 6 to 8 is a medium risk (amber);
- 9 to 16 is a high risk (red).

Risk	Proba- bility (1 – 4)	Impact (1 – 4)	Risk Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Controls in place and actions to improve control

Risk	Probability (1 – 4)	Impact (1 – 4)	Risk Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Controls in place and actions to improve control
Paignton Connections design cannot cope with the customer footfall.	1	2	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.	1	2	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 CSA assistance.	1	3	Medium	Customer satisfaction, complaints monitoring and feedback from Library staff. Use of the free phones in Torquay & Brixham Library was minimal during the trial. The new website (December 2015) will enable additional transactions to be undertaken.
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.	1	2	Low	There was no significant increase in call demand during the trial or the week immediately after the trail.

Risk	Probability (1 – 4)	Impact (1 – 4)	Risk Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Controls in place and actions to improve control
Delays in application processing (particularly Crisis support) may be created due to reduction in distributed scanning facility's currently offered in Torquay; Brixham & Paignton.	1	3	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>
Taxi Licensing – appropriate locations for renewals and inspections cannot be found	1	2	Low	<p>Adequate facilities will be provided (December 2015 an on-line taxi licensing system is being introduced)</p>
Housing options/Homelessness – appropriate location for a meeting room located in Torquay is either too expensive or unsuitable for purpose.	2	4	Medium	<p>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.</p>
Other agencies may have insufficient capacity to manage any increase in demand that results from the centralisation.	2	2	Low	<p>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.</p>

Risk	Probability (1 – 4)	Impact (1 – 4)	Risk Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Controls in place and actions to improve control
Customers that did not contact during the trial – might see increase if closed permanently	2	2	Low	<p>The operating model introduced within Paignton Connections has the capacity to deal with an increase in footfall.</p> <p>Crisis Support reported that demand reduced during the trial and increased briefly when the offices reopened.</p> <p>Monitor and react to increases in demand.</p>
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	2	2	Low	<p>During the trial the volume of customers steadily reduced.</p> <p>Monitor and react to increases in demand.</p>

10. Conclusion

The evidence from the trial proves that Connections could centralise in Paignton Library and Information Centre within the existing space with minimal additional costs.

Equally, the service could be centralised within Torquay Town Hall (Torquay Connections office). However, this would jeopardise any short term plans for leasing out the current Torquay Connections space or medium-long term plans to redevelop the Town Hall site and adjacent area (Local Plan).

A SWOT analysis was undertaken on all options considered see Appendix 7.

The trial has not revealed any major issues for back office services or partners.

Customer Services would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their efforts and support during the trial.

Appendix 1. Feedback from customers who visited Paignton Connections during the trial

- Forced to use phone when need face to face advice, ridiculous
- Great service
- Staff were friendly and helpful
- Very quick response
- Very helpful
- If Brixham and Torquay close and Paignton only is available this will lead to more congestion and impatience in Paignton
- Downloaded documents online & brought in - met at counter and fast/easy. Docs printing now - so I can have them straight back. Ideal as the docs are originals.
- Very friendly helpful staff
- I waited to discuss a Council Tax query on behalf of my 90 year old brother who has sight difficulty. I have lasting power of attorney and this had to be scanned to the office. I find the procedure time consuming and impersonal having to speak on a phone.
- Advisor was very helpful and friendly. Offered me good advice in regards to housing and what I would need to do.
- Excellent service by front desk staff
- A good service
- Had to pay on bus/too early for bus pass
- Very Pleasant staff
- Absolutely wonderful to speak to a tremendous human being. You cannot beat the human touch
- Would rather Torquay Connections back as it is a pain to come to Paignton as sometimes from work don't get time off if busy as I do hotel work and need the hours I can get
- I used the internet online service and then brought the paperwork to the office in person
- Friendly and efficient service thank you
- Having to come from Torquay to show ID documents
- Very fast and efficient
- Don't close Brixham
- Not the best idea in the world put back as was please I am a wheelchair user & I could not get here on my own Brixham is best for me

- Very inconvenient as I live in Torquay
- Dealt with by a very nice polite lady who greeted me when I entered very pleased with the service
- Girls were very helpful
- Quicker the old way
- Today was quick but on other occasions you are waiting for up to 40 mins. Brought document and date and time recorded, hand written letter of evidence in July (JSA for son). Found evidence was not scanned when checked in Oct 15. My account is now in debt.
- OK
- Wouldn't have been able to get here without family
- I always submit info by email other than the occasional need to scan a wage slip, which I leave with reception
- Yes it's a pain having to come to Paignton
- Took too long on the phone waiting
- Very helpful but the Torquay office is a lot easier to access!!
- The support service was excellent
- Useless as much help as you could expect
- It was such a shame that Brixham Connections has been closed down - the bus is expensive and it is very time consuming
- Pleasant and courteous, quick and easy
- Not really a problem but could do with onsite parking
- Fast and sufficient/friendly
- I rather have an office at Torquay more accessible and it's also nice if I am dealing my enquiry at the person in charge
- Details on system did not seem relevant to my change of circumstances so came to Connections to see an advisor. We would prefer to speak to an advisor one to one
- Always very helpful and efficient service :o)

- Nope
- Please continue with the office in Brixham for convenience of the Brixham people as not everyone has transport to get to other office
- I understand if they close Brixham and Torquay as it is financial benefit to have just one office
- Didn't there was a connections in Paignton waste of my fuel
- I'll be glad when the Torquay office is open again its expensive in bus fares to get over here
- Quick and friendly help :o)
- Seen to on arrival
- Very efficiently very friendly
- Very helpful
- Great service thank you
- I am finding it very frustrating being suspended from Housing Benefit every time there is a change of circumstances
- Very quick service
- Happy, helpful staff member. Dealt with needs efficiently
- Assistance was excellent
- Found it difficult getting here on bus as I have 3 small children
- Came into Paignton library
- Staff (Tom) very helpful
- Very friendly
- Can't see an advisor face to face for my enquiry was just asked what query was about and scan items
- Very poor service. I prefer to go to Connections in Torquay and deal with a human being as I always have in the past.
- Being disabled it was quite a trek to have documents photocopied especially as it was pouring with rain
- I live in Plymouth till 31/10/15. I have come here to put my Housing Benefit form for my house in Torbay Paignton
- None
- Very helpful
- Service has been very good very friendly lady Carol has been most helpful
- Very quick and efficient

- No - none - as was just a quick scan for my housing benefit claim in Torquay (Connections closed at Torquay)
- Please keep the Brixham Connections open. It really is handy just to pop in, get things done quicker, plus if you haven't brought all the relevant info you can just come straight back in
- Excellent
- Very distant. Feels like a conveyor belt not good
- Polite, friendly and efficient
- Very informative and helpful thank you
- Much better place than Torquay
- Very helpful
- Quick service very good
- Quick helpful service
- Polite, friendly and helpful

Appendix 2. Individual feedback from a member of the public

When funding is being drastically reduced by the government, it is hard to make drastic decisions about reducing any local service, whatever is cut is bound to affect a section of the local population to some extent.

The Paignton Library Connections office is ideally sited in a ready-made centre-hub for all of Torbay, very conveniently situated opposite Paignton Bus Station, which operates many bus routes throughout The Bay. The Library is also adjacent to the Main Line Railway Station from Torre and Torquay, and the Steam Railway Station from Churston and Kingswear. There are three street-level Car Parks close by, with a multi-story car park in Hyde Road, and the major multi-story car park over the level crossing and adjacent to Lidl's store. On top of this there is also street parking in Torbay Road, Queens Road, and Hyde Road.

Brixham Connections office is just across the road to the Brixham bus terminus, with the most frequent Torbay Bus Service the No.12 to Paignton Bus Station and Library, with a 15 to 20 minute journey time, on a 10 to 12 minute frequency. The same can be said with regard to Torquay Connections office at Castle Circus, which is also served by the main No.12 Bus Service, which is boosted by the additional No.12A service, with normally a 20 minute journey time into Paignton Bus Station, and the Library.

In short, the majority of persons who currently visit either Brixham or Torquay Connections offices could catch a frequent Bus Service into Paignton Bus Station and the Library, there is a pedestrian operated crossing between the Bus Station and Paignton Library, and for those passengers with a Concession Bus Pass there would not be any additional fare to pay. The additional return travelling time by bus, from either Brixham or Torquay current Connections offices into Paignton, would normally be in the region of 45 minutes to one hour.

If and when any future Connections office closures are decided upon, I sincerely hope that at the end of this painful ordeal of draconian cuts to local services, that the situation is reviewed to re-instate any forced closures.

I have been a local resident of Torbay for over 40 years, living in both Paignton and Brixham.

Appendix 3. Feedback from Torbay Council departments

Feedback from School Admissions & Transport Team

Transport has not reported any concerns over the 4 weeks.

The issue I've had is that many parents have ended up going in the CS reception and I've been asked on numerous occasions to go down and speak with them. After speaking with the parents I would then advise the people working on reception that we do not see parents in person and that the parent would need to either call us or go to Connections in Paignton - the problem though is that different people share the reception duties and this message never gets passed on. Also, there have been issues where parents have wanted to pick up a CAF (particularly last week when it was too late to send one in the post). We really do need and value the support from all of the Connections offices.

There were quite a few parents wanting to fill out In-Year and pry to sec forms and also wanting to hand in completed forms and evidence of address, they were not happy bunnies when they were told to go to Paignton. Unfortunately I did not keep any notes on how many this was.

We have had several people calling at the Children's Services reception opposite Electric House asking for advice about School Admissions and Chaperone Licences etc. I personally have asked reception staff there to direct people to Connections in Paignton or to phone us, because it is not acceptable that we should keep going down to reception to deal with people face to face, we do not have the time or the correct reception facilities.

If we are definitely not going to have a Connections then the Children's Services Reception staff need to have a selection of forms that they can hand out and they would need to be trained on which ones are for which situation. People would have to be told to phone us as we cannot come down to their reception on demand to speak with people.

Regarding chaperone licences:

Some people have expressed concern at not being able to deliver original documents for verification. They are extremely reluctant to deposit them in the council post box and are sending through post which means we then have original documents lying around in the office and have to post them back by recorded delivery, with associated time and cost.

Connections Evaluation Report - Community Safety

This report has been compiled to assess the impact on service delivery both positive and negative of the trial closure of the Torquay Connections office in October. It encompasses the impact on the entire Community Safety team including licensing and Housing Options. Both teams have been identified as been most affected by any changes.

General Feedback

Overall the impact has been minimal across the entire department.

- The business support team have not experienced an increase in call
- No impact has been experienced by the ASB, Neighbourhoods or Housing Standards team as the majority of client integrations are done over the phone or in person.
- The licensing team have made alternative arrangements for appointments which have worked, other than that no issues.
- The wider Commercial team have had no issues.
- Generally things have worked for the Housing Options team with some minor operational changes, however some alterations would be required if this was a permanent arrangement. There have also been some specific changes in clients behaviours:
 - There was no reduction in the level of service provided by the team with regards to appointments of which there were 74 per week.
 - There was an increase in the number clients not turning up for appointments. This rose to 35%. On average this is 21%. The reasons behind this are not known, however it is considered with time that this would rectify itself and hence not significant.
 - Very few bus tickets were issues so that clients could access the service. The distribution of the tickets is more problematic than the actual cost associated with them.
 - Operational changes were put in place to reduce the need for clients to attend Paignton to sign paperwork associated with their temporary accommodation. The contract providers of the accommodation have assisted with this.

Departmental Operation Changes:

- Bus tickets will no longer be issued to Housing Options clients to attend appointments.
- New working practices will be established with our temporary accommodation providers to assist with the signing of paperwork, reducing the need for clients to attend appointments.
- Ability for CSA to attend dual interviews.
- Permanent scanning arrangements would need to be put in place as this was of great assistance.
- Regular access to the meeting rooms on the Mez in Torr Hill would be required for licensing appointments.

Risks and suggested mitigation measures identified:

- Housing Options dual interviews are sometimes required due to the level of risk. There is no longer the ability to resource this from the back office in Torquay. The offer of providing CSA staff has been offered to mitigate the risk and is appreciated.
- The largest risk is associated with any permanent move would be around the Housing Options team not being able to accommodate any emergency

appointment due to the inability to move resources from the back office immediately, i.e. 4:30 Friday afternoon. This may impact on the Local Authorities ability to meet its statutory requirement. This is not a daily occurrence, but when required is important. Access to a public facing appointment room in Torquay would mitigate this. It is felt that the Housing Options team would use this emergency appointment room approximately 5 times a week. It would also be useful for the wider department where appointments are required that are often of a contentious nature. Upton Vale House is not an appropriate location.

- Two rooms were utilised by the Housing Options team. Room 6 in Paignton - This is not covered by CCTV. However this will and has been used for low risk meetings. If CCTV could cover this room then that would be advantageous.
- Room 5 (Registers room) due to its locations was a good interview room and it would be requested that this would be required on a permanent basis. However the following requirements would be required:
 - Replace the frosted glass with clear glass so any interview could be observed from a safety perspective.
 - That the maglock on the door be turned off. There had been a number of occasions when clients slammed the door which caused the door to flex due to the lock at the top. There is a significant possibility that it would therefore break.

No significant costs were experienced by the departments and as long as alternative appointment space could be provided would not impact on operational resources to any significant level based on current staffing levels.

Feedback from Customer Services Team Leader

I was based in Paignton for the four week trial period and from a connections point of view it was a big success. The new operating model we adopted in Paignton during the trial worked really well. Customer flow improved; there wasn't any queue build up at the front desk. Customers weren't kept waiting to see an advisor and the pods and free phones were in frequent use. We really pushed the consultation surveys so it will be interesting to see the feedback as verbally we didn't have complaints about the trial closure. We had a lot of comments from customers who thought Paignton was a much nicer environment than the Torquay office.

In Torquay, the office is right by Leonard Stocks and the job centre. It is very open plan and we seem to get more confrontation in there and I personally put that down to the fact that customers have more of an audience and there are often groups of people congregated outside. We didn't have any issues with housing customers during the trial even though they were coming over for their appointments.

The only face to face enquiries we do now are bus pass photos, issue parking permits, RADAR keys and overseas pension verification. We managed to carry out all of these from the front desk in Paignton so were able to keep the other advisors logged on to the

contact centre which helped with call demand.

Library Service

There were no major issues. Staff were able to answer many of the enquiries received, and signpost to the relevant department. At Torquay they felt a bit more information for staff about homeless customers would have been helpful. There were also concerns at Torquay about the telephone that was installed - particularly the noisy and heated conversations (swearing etc) that could be overheard and suggestion that some kind of sound proof booth would be good in terms of privacy and general impact. A few extra bus passes were issued.

Crisis Support

We did have 19.5% reduction in average applications made during the 4 week trial closure of Connections. The Monday that Connections was reopened was particularly busy with 22 applications being made to us on that day alone. The application levels did return to normal for the rest of that week though.

We also found that there was an increase in telephone calls made to our free phone number during the trial. Prior to the trial we received on average 39 calls per week and this increased to 49 per week whilst Connections was closed. This was an increase of just over 20%, with calls returning to the 39 average for the week after Connections opened again.

Although the calls increased, this did not increase the number of applications made to us. I suspect that the reason for this is that we were able to triage the customers and avoid an application being made where it was clear that no award could be made.

We did not have any specific complaints regarding Connections being closed, rather we had more general concerns such as where they could go to make an application. Throughout we advised our customers that it was an online application and this could be completed either at home, on their smartphone, at the Paignton Connections office, in Torquay Library or by visiting a local help agency such as CAB, Coalition of Disabled people or Hele's Angels etc. We also advised them that we would send a copy of our paper form to their support worker if they had one, or they could collect them again from the Paignton Connections office. We did not offer any telephone applications and no applications we completed over the phone with any customers.

We had one issue arise at the Children's Services Shop. Initially we asked that they hold a stock of Paper applications for us so that we could direct our customers there to collect a copy. One of our customers visited the office to do this but wanted the staff there to complete the form for him. He became agitated when they advised him that they could not do this and he was eventually asked to leave. The staff in the CS shop raised concerns with this type of customer being allowed to remain in their shop to complete forms. They advised that they regularly have vulnerable children in their shop to attend meetings etc and it would not be a safe environment for them to be in if our customers are there also.

Following this incident we removed all paper forms from the CS shop and reverted to signposting our customers elsewhere. We had no further incidents raised after this.

The post box worked well for Torquay and we were able to get requested supporting evidence in a timely manner in order to complete our applications. The same could not be said for Brixham though unfortunately.

One case that we had was for daily living expenses (Food, Gas & Electric etc) and the customer was reporting that she did not have sufficient funds to pay for these. The customer had declared that she had unexpected expenditure leaving her with nothing to live on for the next week. We requested bank statements but as she was in Brixham and we were close to our cut off time, she could only deposit them in to the Brixham library scanning box. We made an award based on the information she told us and had to await the bank statements. We received them the next day and found that she did actually receive a payment that same day and had sufficient remaining funds to cover her daily expenses. Had we received the bank statements within our usual timescales, we would not have made an award.

We would usually suggest that the customer take the documents to Paignton Connections, however if we are close to our 13:00 cut off when we request this then the customer would not have time to do this. If this happens on a Friday and we do not make an award then we risk leaving potentially vulnerable customers or children with nothing to live on for 3 days. Due to this we would always have to accept the customers word and make an award anyway, although as above this could lead to awards being made where they are not necessary. It is also not consistent and fair for those customers living in Paignton or Torquay where the supporting evidence would have to be supplied.

This being said though, Brixham is the quietest of the three areas for applications to us, so it would likely be the exception that there is an issue rather than the rule.

We carried out our payments at the CS shop as we used to previously and we experienced no issues with this. We made the payments in pairs as suggested by the Security team and there no issues as a result of this. There could be a potential for an issue with no security presence, however during the length of the scheme we have had no problems so far. During times of annual leave and sickness we may also need members of staff from other service areas to accompany us with payments, to ensure there are still two people present.

Other than the issues outlined above, the impact was not high and we were able to put measures in place to carry on the service with limited hardship to our customers.

Appeals

In appeals there were a few customers who commented about the closure but then the mail box was available to drop documents in and occasions when we would need to see someone in person are extremely rare. I've only seen someone on the counter two or three times in the whole time I have been doing this job. In the main with the exception of a few Dep/RIA, DHP cases it is unusual that we need to turn appeals or DHP cases around the same day and so you would expect less issues with the closure

arrangements for DHP and appeals anyway

Security

In regards to the trial all the security staff were very pleased with how it ran. They felt it ran a lot smoother and easier than it does at Torquay Connections. Staffing levels were much better in PLAIC which helped with customers and delivering the service.

The extra security was provided at the beginning as a preventative measure. It was monitored on a daily basis and discontinued because the situation never developed. This may not be the case if it were a long term solution and extra security was required.

Appendix 4. Feedback from Unions

Feedback from Paul Raybould GMB Torbay Branch Secretary

Having spoken at Overview and Scrutiny on behalf of Low Paid and Retired members of the GMB and other Trade Unions that Torbay and South Devon Trades Union Council on the Call In Procedure. It was of little impact as Councillor Haddock Executive Lead for Himself it appears to many took no notice at all and pressed ahead with the Trail Closures at Torquay and Brixham.

1. The timescale for a Trail Closure is debatable as to short to gain a meaningful analysis - 3 months would show a clearer picture and produce better findings.
2. The use of footfall visits as an accurate measure of Connections visits can be misleading and the actual time spent with each service user differs ,as does the Officer Time spent on each enquiry .Old fashioned time and motion but updated to Time and Value is not being measured in this exercise.
3. There are rumours that the Torquay Connections Office has already been promised to be let to a Commercial Purpose.
4. The original facts of removing a service for the poor elderly, in firmed and sick and make then travel by Taxi, Bus or even walk from TORQUAY or Brixham to Paignton is clearly unfair but merely a cost cutting and Political choice due to Government Grant reductions only to save £76,000 .this can also be added to now as the Council intends to close its Social Fund to ensure less footfall. Times maybe hard but the closure of these premises The council will close both offices in my opinion anyway

Feedback from Clair Quinn Unison Torbay Branch Secretary

Having initially contacting affected members via email asking if they had any concerns or questions they would like to raise regarding the above trial closure. I can confirm that to date, Unison Branch Office members have not raised and concerns.

Overall, general feedback I have received is that appears to be better for members as they were only covering 2 offices (Paignton & Call Centre) instead of 4 (Paignton, Brixham, Torquay & Call Centre) which in some cases has reduced travelling time to and from work and therefore saved on cost.

Appendix 5. Feedback from other organisations

Brixham Does Care reported an average of 3 customers a day contacting them with enquiries relating to the trial. The majority of these were signposted to PLAIC or the facilities in Brixham.

Record of visits by the Members of the Public to Brixham Town Council Offices in relation to Torbay Council Matters following the closure of the Connection Offices

Week: 5th October 2015 to 9th October 2015

Week: 12th October 2015 to 16th October 2015

Date	Enquiry	Time taken
5/10/15	MoP Loose Slabs on Pavements	5 mins
5/10/15	MoP Council Tax Inquiry	5 mins
6/10/15	Grass cutting not being carried out	5 mins
8/10/15	MoP looking for Connections Office	5 mins
8/10/15	MoP (elderly) Problems with Blue Badge (very upset/confused)	15 mins
9/10/15	MoP Council Tax Inquiry	
12/10/15	MoP Fly Tipping and Green Waste issues	10 mins
15/10/15	MoP Bus Pass Renewal (very unhappy customer)	5 mins
15/10/15	MoP Planning and Council Tax advice	5 mins
15/10/15	MoP Parking Ticket	5 mins

These figures are in no way exhaustive, but are produced as an indication of the additional workload faced by officers of Brixham Town Council since the closure of the Brixham Connections Office. Reports have also been received from Brixham Does Care that its workload has increased since the closure of the office.

Appendix 6. Feedback from Corporate Consultation

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%

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%

	Number	Percent
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
Not experienced using computers (71)	<p>“Lack of 'computer savvy'. No confidence”</p> <p>“Don't know how to work computers”</p> <p>“Do not have a computer and never used a computer”</p>
Prefer to talk to someone (69)	<p>“Prefer face to face communication”</p> <p>“As a disabled person I prefer human contact”</p> <p>“Rather talk to a person.”</p>
Not needed to (49)	<p>“Have never needed to....”</p> <p>“Haven't needed to.”</p> <p>“Only handing in paperwork for scanning.”</p>

Only needed to scan documents (23)	“No need to only come in to scan wage slips.” “I’m bringing in my payslips for scanning.” “Document scanning only”
Have got a computer at home (22)	“Have a home computer” “Have internet at home” “No interest”

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>“No”</p> <p>“None”</p>
Travel (25)	<p>“Cost & travel”</p> <p>“Yes - the bus fare is costly and considerably the financial difficulties I am having making me upset.”</p> <p>“Long bus ride.”</p>
Needed to get a lift (9)	<p>“Yes, I don't drive; I had to get a lift.”</p> <p>“Needed a lift from daughter who came up from Cornwall.”</p> <p>“I could only come over when my husband wasn't at work as I can't drive.”</p>
Lack of parking and parking costs (9)	<p>“Parking / cost of parking twice.”</p> <p>“Parking costs.”</p> <p>“Inconvenient and lack of parking.”</p>

Mobility Issues (4)	<p>“Too far due to disability and pain.”</p> <p>“Lots of issues for someone of limited mobility, when will you lot actually listen to what we tell you.”</p> <p>“Disabled parking is not close by.”</p>
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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%
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
Security Issues (23)	<p>“Security is a huge feature and your intranet security is poor.”</p> <p>“Security issues.”</p> <p>“Internet can be hacked have you not learnt anything, plus I don't have a computer, sorry not everyone can afford one.”</p>
Do not have a computer or the internet (21)	<p>“No internet.”</p> <p>“Don't use internets have no wish to.”</p> <p>“No computer”</p>
Not confident on computer (21)	<p>“Not very good with computers. Also they are not always accurate.”</p> <p>“Not confident enough on computer.”</p> <p>“Not competent on internet.”</p>

Prefer to speak to somebody (8)	<p>“I would like the personal experience of talking in person, as technology can often be difficult and temperamental (especially for the elderly)”</p> <p>“As before I prefer to see a real person.”</p> <p>“I prefer someone to explain to me face to face as I have difficulty understanding.”</p>
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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%
25 – 34	108	16%
35 – 44	114	17%
45 – 54	117	18%
55 – 64	118	17.6%
65 – 74	73	11.1%
75+	28	4.1%
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%

159 people responded to this question. Percentages how 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
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%

Appendix 7. – Other Options considered – SWOT Analysis

Three options have been considered, (1,2,3), which have the potential to **achieve savings and maintain service levels** for the delivery of Connections Office functions in Torbay and one option (4.) which will maintain the current service but not realise any cashable savings.

Option 1 - Reduced Opening Hours

Continue to operate from all three locations, reducing the opening hours.

Strengths

- May encourage channel shift where available.
- Retains a Customer Services Connections presence in the three towns.
- Does not impact on elderly or disadvantaged groups
- Possibly more acceptable for customers than centralising in one location

Weaknesses

- Customers may not find the new opening hours convenient
- May cause issues for the Security Team
- All current locations will need to be maintained and staffed but will not be fully utilised.
- Back office services that offer appointments in Connections would have to schedule appointments within the reduced opening hours. This may cause difficulties as back office services would need to amend the number of appointments available.
- Customer confusion from changing the opening hours
- Effort required informing customers of the change.
- Alternative contact channel required when office is not open (this could be access to PC's in libraries). Cost approx 30k
- Difficult to manage staff time and may incur wasted resource through travelling time.
- Library staff in Paignton and Brixham may be required to provide customers who visit when the office is closed details of the opening information.
- In Torquay, customers who find Torquay Connections closed may visit the Main Reception for information.

- Staff rotation/planning would prove difficult and may result in wasted resource.
- It costs more to operate three locations.
- Demand may be unmanageable during the new opening hours.

Opportunities

- May be possible to re-direct some staff resource to the Contact Centre functions (call centre) due to reduction in Connections face to face service.

Threats

- Potential increase in demand when offices are open.
- Torquay Connections meeting rooms may need to remain open to facilitate Housing Appointments and other appointments.
- Reduction in staff hours or different work patterns will impact on staff retention

Savings

Estimate 20k (1 CSA post)

Costs

Approx 30k investment in computer pods is required to provide customers on-line access to Council services when the offices are closed. The location of the computer pods would be identified once the decision is made.

Option 2 - Centralise main Connections Offices in PLAIC.

Paignton Library and Information Centre (PLAIC) would become the central Connections office and Torquay and Brixham Connections would be closed. A trial was undertaken of this option and it was established that it is possible for the Connections service to operate from the current location within PLAIC.

Strengths

- PLAIC is ideally located with good transport links - bus station, train station, parking etc.
- The proposed Connections office space in PLAIC is suitable for the new operating model and additional self service functions
- Centralising in PLAIC supports the concept of a Community hub. Customers can also utilise the other services within PLAIC whilst visiting Connections.
- Would maximise the use of meeting rooms within PLAIC with the potential to add additional meeting rooms if required
- No additional security is required. PLAIC would benefit from the security currently provided within Torquay Connections. Security from the Torquay Connections office would be transferred to PLAIC.
- Maximise the use of Customer Service staff to cover Call centre; Connections office and Town hall reception. Reduced staffing issues relating to staff scheduling due to reduction in office locations..
- Feedback from the trial from customers who used the central service was positive.
- Paignton Library would benefit from a security presence within the building.
- This is a low risk option as the concept of a central office in PLAIC has been proved.
- The Housing Service operated from PLAIC during the trial and had no issues.
- The Housing Service reported that there was no significant increase in the volume of travel warrants issued during the trial.
- Opportunity to generate income from potential lease of Town hall Connections accommodation.

- Could encourage Connections customers to use Library resources.

Weaknesses

- Call Centre and Connections offices would no longer be co-located, so Call Centre staff will not be easily transferrable at short notice to Connections office duties.
- Customers unable to travel to PLAIC will have to choose another contact method. During the trial free phones were installed within Brixham and Torquay Libraries to enable them to contact various departments during the Library opening hours

Opportunities

- Torquay Connections could be leased to generate income
- Promote Channel Shift via new operating model and additional self service capabilities to reduce demand.

Threats

- Public consultation does not support the concept of centralisation.
- It would require a significant communication to notify customers and stakeholders of the changes.
- Customer may contact other organisations for assistance rather than travel to PLAIC. (Feedback from other organisations during the trial identified a low level of increased demand. The majority of these customers were sign posted to other facilities)

Savings

76k staff savings

Costs

Approx 30k investment in computer pods is required to provide customers on-line access to Council services when the offices are closed. The location of the computer pods would be identified once the decision is made.

Option 3 - Centralise main Connections Offices in Torquay.

Torquay Connections office would become the central Connections office and Paignton and Brixham Connections would be closed.

Strengths

- Torquay Connections currently has the highest level of demand out of the three offices
- The Torquay Connections office has 7 meeting rooms
- The majority of Council Staff are based in Torquay. (staff would not have to travel to meet with customers)
- Appointments are currently undertaken with Torquay Connections could continue.
- Connections staff would be located in the same location as the Call centre staff. This would enable some flexibility to manage demand
- Security would continue to support Connections at the current location

Weaknesses

- No trial of centralising in Torquay has been undertaken.
- The potential footfall to a central office in Torquay has not been established and therefore there is a risk that the office may not be suitable as a central location.
- Customers have not been consulted on this option.
- Connections staff currently manage the Reception at PLAIC. It may not be feasible to continue if the Connections Service was withdrawn from Paignton
- Customers unable to travel to Torquay will have to choose another contact method.
- Customers travelling from Brixham would be impacted most.
- No future use for the existing space currently occupied by Connections in PLAIC has been identified.
- A review of the current meeting room requirements in Torquay may result in some partner organisations having to find alternative locations for drop in surgeries.
- No opportunity to explore a potential income stream from leasing the current Torquay Connections space.

- Centralising in Torquay may limit the future opportunities for Torquay Town Hall.

Opportunities

- The space currently occupied in PLAIC and Brixham Library would be available for other uses. Potential income generation.

Threats

- Possible non compliance of the terms of the lottery grant at PLAIC (ie we are not providing a Customer Services function).
- Any change of use within PLAIC e.g. Connections space used by another organisation would need to comply with the lottery conditions.
- Significant communications prior to centralisation would be required. This would include customers and stakeholders
- Public consultation may not support the new approach
- The vacated spaces in PLAIC and Brixham Library may remain unoccupied if it cannot be utilised by other Council departments/organisations
- Potential increase in customer dissatisfaction leading to an increase in the number of complaints if customer demand is not dealt with effectively within Torquay Connections
- Centralising in Torquay may not be achievable by 1st April 2016 as consultation will need to be undertaken.

Savings

76k staff savings

Costs

Approx 30k investment in computer pods is required to provide customers on-line access to Council services when the offices are closed. The location of the computer pods would be identified once the decision is made.

Option 4 – Continue to offer a Connections Service in all three locations

Strengths

- No change to the current service
- Customer will be able to continue to visit an office that is most convenient for them.

Weaknesses

- No savings are achievable from Customer Services budget
- 76k savings will need to be found from an alternative source
- Intelligence and customer feedback gathered will not be utilised
- Operating from three locations may not be financially viable in future years and options 1 – 3 will need to be reconsidered. Customer and partner consultation will need to be undertaken again.
- Channel shift to cheaper channels of communication will be limited
- No opportunity to generate additional income from office space

Opportunities

- To maintain the current service to customers

Threats

- Face to face customer demand may continue to reduce and operating from three locations may become unviable.
- No security presence will be provided in Paignton and Brixham Connections

Savings

None

Costs

An investment of 30k may still be required to upgrade the existing computer pods