
By: Tanya Oliver, Director of Strategic Development & Public Access
To: Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 14 January 2010
Subject: Reception Closure Programme
Classification: For Information

Summary: In August 2009, Chief Officer Group discussed the issue of closing receptions in KCC office buildings and agreed in principle to take this forward, both to make savings, and as part of the modernisation of front-line services, linked to Gateway and Contact Kent.

In December 2009, a coherent programme for closing receptions was agreed by Chief Officer Group, beginning with Headquarters (excluding Sessions House), Thistley Hill and Bishops Terrace, and subsequently rolling out as and when locations benefit from nearby Gateways.

This report sets out the rationale behind the programme, which is attached as an appendix, and provides initial indications of changes in access arrangements at sites affected.

The issue falls within officer delegated responsibilities, and this paper is therefore provided to the Committee for information only

Introduction

1. (1) In the light of the current financial situation, it is essential that we translate potential savings from traditional, back-office-centric, front-of-house and related services, into investment in the new generation of customer-centric provision.

(2) Our office buildings across the county have traditionally provided reception services, but these are typically in poor quality environments, and often in relatively inaccessible locations. In many cases, only a limited number of services can actually be provided in these locations. We continue to have them for historic reasons, rather than because they meet service users' expectations.

(3) To this end, in August 2009, Chief Officer Group discussed and agreed the principle of closing reception facilities in office buildings across the county, and redirecting telephone and in-person enquiries to Contact Kent and Gateways respectively.

(4) As a result of that in-principle discussion, the Programme Manager – Office Transformation has worked confidentially with colleagues in Facilities Management, KASS Area Support and Property Group to develop a phased closure programme. This Programme is attached as an appendix.

(5) The logic for the phasing is primarily based around the availability of nearby Gateways in locations that are at least as convenient to the majority of service users as the office receptions they will effectively replace. More details are provided in the next section of this report.

(6) The programme was agreed by Chief Officer Group on 2 December 2009, and work is already well under way in respect of Headquarters receptions and Thistley Hill, and will begin this month in respect of Bishops Terrace.

(7) Whilst the issue was discussed at Cabinet Scrutiny Committee in December, it should be noted that the issue of receptions in office buildings falls well within officer delegated responsibilities, and this paper is provided by way of information for Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Programme Phasing

2. (1) **Phase One** encompasses:
- Headquarters – closing Brenchley House, Cantium House and Invicta House receptions (all managed by Facilities Management) and redirecting the limited public access to the Maidstone Gateway, and access for meetings via Sessions House Reception
 - Thistley Hill, Dover – closing reception (managed by Facilities Management) and redirecting public access to the Dover Gateway, meetings access via intercom to meeting organisers, and switchboard to Contact Kent. This new site (opened in September 2009 – on the outskirts of Dover) was not intended to have a reception, however one was provided at the request of some occupants. Funding only exists for reception staff until March 2010, and has been “stepping down” since the building opened, as reception provision was not originally envisaged as part of the “offer” at Thistley Hill. The Dover Gateway is in the very centre of the town, so will offer improved public access.
 - Bishops Terrace, Maidstone – closing reception (managed by KASS) and redirecting public access to the Maidstone Gateway, meetings access via intercom to meeting organisers, and switchboard to Contact Kent. This will be the pilot for receptions at established office locations with a nearby Gateway. Whilst the Programme table specifies a March 2010 closure, April/May is a more likely outcome, to allow for an appropriate consultation period.
- (2) **Phases Two onwards** will be subject to a full scoping exercise in the period January to March 2010, to ensure lessons are learnt from Phase One, and that the lead-in time is better used to improve relationships between directorates and Gateway/Contact Kent.
- (3) **Phase Two** encompasses:
- Croft House, Tonbridge
 - Montague House, Tunbridge Wells
 - St Peter’s House, Broadstairs
 - Clover House, Whitstable
 - Kroner House, Ashford
- All have a Gateway nearby, or in the case of Clover House, will do ahead of the reception closure.

- (4) **Phase Three** will be less time-specific, as reception closures will coincide with the opening of the relevant nearby Gateway:
 - Joynes House, Gravesend
 - Queens House, Folkestone
 - Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne
- (5) **“No Action”** refers to office locations which will close ahead of the opening of a Gateway in the vicinity. If the Gateway programme changes, these three sites may be rephrased. In the meantime, the scoping exercise mentioned at 2. (2) will examine the potential for other sites in the area to be used for transition purposes.
 - St Lawrence House, Darford
 - Tricon House, Sevenoaks
 - 17 Kings Hill Avenue
- (6) **Uncertain** refers to office locations where the reception is wholly or partially controlled by a partner organisation. The scoping exercise mentioned at 2. (2) will examine the potential for work with those partners to allow closure in the medium term.
 - Brook House, Whitstable (joint KASS/PCT)
 - Cairn Ryan, Dover (joint KASS/PCT)
 - Civic Centre, Ashford (Ashford Borough Council)

Financial Implications

3. (1) Work carried out by Property Group earlier in 2009 established the total cost of running these receptions (in terms of staff salaries) to be in excess of £400k per annum.

- (2) The intention is to use the money saved in the following order of priority:
 - Redistribution of kit (security, telephone, access systems, etc)
 - Covering costs of increased demand at Gateway and Contact Kent
 - Re-use of Reception space (as Breakout, meeting space, etc) – at the majority of sites, this will involve very small amounts of money
 - Remainder to be taken as net savings
 This will be the case for all money currently spent on receptions, regardless of the directorate currently funding the expenditure

(3) Whilst Facilities Management and KASS will look to place staff appropriately wherever possible, a number of redundancies are likely. These will be funded from the Workforce Reduction Fund.

(4) The potential gross savings in respect of Headquarters receptions would be in the order of £60k

(5) Funding for the reception at Thistley Hill has been found by KASS and CFE, the only occupants of that building, for the period to March 2010. Thereafter, reception will close, and Facilities Management will provide a more limited service, to an agreed standard, with a caretaker and Facilities Support Officer on site.

(6) The potential gross savings in respect of Bishops Terrace would be in the order of £37k.

(7) The costs and savings anticipated in respect of Phases Two and beyond will be detailed during the scoping exercise mentioned at 2. (2)

Headquarters Receptions

4. (1) Chief Officer Group on 17 November agreed with the Chief Executive's proposal to move forward with the closure of three of the four Headquarters receptions by the end of 2009, as set out in 2. (1) above.

(2) The staff affected have been notified, and appropriate P&D processes are now under way. The consultation period ended after the deadline for this report, so an oral update can be provided to Committee as appropriate. Meantime, Facilities Management have been engaging with contractors to ensure that relevant infrastructure is transferred to Sessions House reception, with minimal disruption, with a view to complete transfer in late January.

(3) Invicta House Atrium will then be reworked to provide meeting and breakout facilities appropriate to the whole of Headquarters. This will, in turn, contribute to our ability to maximise the use of that building as part of *Better WorkPlaces*' Maidstone Strategy.

(4) Given the attention this element of the closure programme has already received, the communications strategy will be a critical success factor. Chief Officer Group has already expressed its willingness to assist with this issue.

(5) A global communication to staff will be sent as from Chief Officer Group, explaining the rationale and new *modus operandi*. At the time of writing, this was on hold pending the end of the consultation period – it may have been sent prior to Committee meeting.

(6) The Programme Manager – Office Transformation has convened a small working group, consisting of representatives appointed by Managing Directors, to ensure post-closure arrangements are in place. More information on its initial outcomes can be found in 5. below.

New Access Arrangements at Headquarters – Provisional information

5. (1) The following information is based on initial discussions between directorate representatives, Facilities Management, The Meeting Place, and the Programme Manager – Office Transformation. Final arrangements will be communicated in advance of reception closures.

(2) Likely arrangements:

- a) **Staff based at Headquarters** – staff based at Headquarters will be able to access other buildings on campus, as at present, with their swipe cards. Telephones in the lobby areas will allow them to contact the people they are due to meet, in the eventuality that they do not know where to find them.
- b) **Staff based at other sites** – staff at other sites who regularly visit Headquarters may be issued with Headquarters passes, at the discretion of their Managing Director, in which case a) will apply. Occasional visitors will sign in at Sessions Reception and receive a day pass, which will afford them access to the relevant buildings.

- c) **Visitors attending pre-arranged meetings** – improved joining information and preparation, to be provided by the meeting organiser, will be the key here. Visitors will initially sign in, and be issued with passes, at Sessions Reception. They will then proceed, using their pass, to the Atrium (for Invicta), or the lobby area (for Brenchley and Cantium) whence they will be collected when all attendees have assembled. Colleagues will be encouraged to hold meetings involving external visitors in Sessions or Invicta Houses wherever possible: in Sessions, most meeting rooms can be easily and directly accessed within the secure areas; in Invicta, the refurbished Atrium will provide an appropriate waiting/networking area. In all cases, Sessions reception can notify the meeting organiser as and when visitors arrive.
- d) **Visitors arriving for ad-hoc meetings** – this is not currently a significant feature at Headquarters. Any such visitors will need to speak to staff at Sessions reception, who will contact the appropriate officers or Members, and proceed as appropriate.
- e) **General public** – again, not a significant feature at Headquarters. In the vast majority of cases, enquiries are better suited to Gateway, and members of the public are already redirected there.

(3) Other responsibilities relating to Receptions – including fire, health & safety and the like – will be transferred either to Sessions Reception, to other Facilities Management staff, or to agreed individuals in the buildings affected. All appropriate risk assessments have been, or are in the process of being, carried out by Facilities Management.

(4) Arrangements at other sites will be developed over the next few months, and are likely to follow a similar pattern to the points indicated in 5. (2) above – with a heavier emphasis on timely redirection to Gateway locations for the general public, and efficient meeting planning. All locations will have a telephone-based intercom system in the lobby area (before the secure area), defaulting to the Contact Centre but providing key contacts within the building.

Recommendations

6. (1) Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to NOTE the report and the programme phasing.

Background Documents: *Better WorkPlaces* Vision Map (featuring Gateway locations), for sites of current and future front and back office locations (available on KNet)

6. Author Contact Details

Thomas Molloy, Programme Manager – Office Transformation

✉ thomas.molloy@kent.gov.uk

☎ 01622 221310