

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

From: Joint Member Integration Board	Report Number: P44
To: Strategy Committee Executive Committee	Date of meeting: 11 September 2014 15 September 2014

OFFICE CLOSURES OVER THE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR PERIOD

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To determine the opening and closing arrangements for the Councils' main offices over the Christmas and New Year period.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That for 2014/15 the Councils' main administrative offices be closed from Christmas Day to the New Year's Day bank holiday inclusive.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 If the recommendation is adopted, there will be some savings with regard to utilities and other costs.

4. Risk Management

- 4.1 This report is not linked to any significant business risks.

5. Consultations

- 5.1 The Councils' unions have been consulted in relation to the use of the extra-statutory leave days and are in favour of the recommendation. They have raised some operational issues and these can be dealt with.

6. Equality Analysis

- 6.1 Not applicable.

7. Shared Service / Partnership Implications

- 7.1 The report seeks to develop shared arrangements for both Councils and the single integrated workforce.

8. Key Information

- 8.1 Members are asked to consider the opening and closing arrangements of the Needham Market (NM) and Hadleigh offices over the Christmas and New Year period.

- 8.2 Historically, if Christmas Eve fell on a weekday, the NM office closed and this was covered by an extra-statutory leave day. The NM office was open for the remainder of the Christmas / New Year period, other than bank holidays. Generally the NM closure followed the pattern of Suffolk County Council closure – primarily because of the customer services link through the CSD contract.
- 8.3 The Hadleigh office was open Christmas Eve when it fell on a weekday, and was closed from Christmas Day to New Year's Day bank holiday inclusive. This closure was covered by bank holidays and three extra-statutory leave days.
- 8.4 Now that the CSD link is not there, there is an opportunity to consider the opening and closing arrangements for the two offices over the Christmas and New Year period.
- 8.5 The Hadleigh office has had its closure pattern for over twenty years and generally the public are aware of this; and are reminded through notices, website alerts etc. There are very few reports of anyone attempting to visit the office over the Christmas period. There is no record of the number of attempted phone calls, but it is known that for Christmas 2013, 36 voice mail messages were left over six weekdays. Any emergency calls were dealt with through the SARH out-of-hours contract.
- 8.6 The NM office received and dealt with 184 council tax and benefits telephone enquiries and 177 housing repair enquiries. There were 7 other calls covering the remainder of the Council's services. 122 people came into the office. For both phone calls and visitors, this is about a quarter of the normal volume.
- 8.7 The Joint Member Integration Board considered this matter and felt that for this year, as a trial, both offices should be closed to the public and staff from Christmas Day to New Year's Day inclusive, with the arrangements promoted and published widely. Any emergency calls would be dealt with by the SARH out-of-hours contract. This would bring about a consistency of service across both Council areas and to the workforce, and give some savings with regard to utilities and other costs.
- 8.8 This closure would require three days absence to be taken by staff and this would be covered by the two extra-statutory leave days that form part of the joint employment terms and conditions; and through staff taking a day's annual leave, TOIL or other appropriate absence arrangement. If a member of staff wished to only take the two extra-statutory leave days, then they would be permitted to work from home; or to make other arrangements that were suitable for the member of staff and the business area.

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