

Northern Outreach Call In – Minute *HC 15: Northern Outreach

**15 It was then RESOLVED that the outreach service at the Ockment Centre be withdrawn as of 31 July 2019 and that an option appraisal on the future of Tavistock Reception be presented to the Hub Committee meeting on 5 November 2019.*

To ensure that the withdrawal of the service has as minimal an impact as possible the following steps be implemented:

- Clear Communication: that all residents, agencies based at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton Library, Okehampton Town Council and local parish councils be advised of the withdrawal and given clear guidance on how best to contact the Council;*
- Vulnerable Customers: in instances where customers are not able to engage with the Council online or over the telephone, that Mobile Locality Officers be on hand to assist these customers;*
- Improved Customer Service: that the Council remain committed to improving customer satisfaction levels in line with its adopted Action Plan.*

We undersigned members Cllrs Ball, Kemp and Ratcliffe, would like this decision taken at the Hub Committee meeting on Tuesday 16th July, to be called into the Tuesday 3rd September meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

There are primarily two reasons for this call in. However, we wanted to provide some background first.

When the outreach service for the northern part of the Borough was set up, no publicity was done, and we, as local Members, were discouraged from advertising the service. This meant that in effect the service was “set up to fail.” This makes us feel very uncomfortable; in effect, we provided a service, didn’t promote it and then have suggested it should close it because no one uses it. We think that we should be serving our residents in a better way.

Although this is underpinning information, it is also important. The minutes do not reflect this point.

We think that we could use this reason to call in the decision, using the principle **(g)**

reasonableness and proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome) and a presumption in favour of openness.

However, the main two reasons we would like to use are as follows:

1. There wasn’t sufficient consultation prior to making the decision to close the outreach, hence making the decision to close a flawed process. While we concede the previous O&S committee through a task completed some consultation and finish group chaired by Cllr Cheadle, and good work was done by this, our understanding is that only organisations such as CAB and CVS in Okehampton were approached. Other key northern communities, who use Okehampton as a hub, weren’t consulted. As a result, the conclusions lacked appropriate qualitative or quantitative data.

This isn't a criticism of the members that conducted this work, however the brief should have been wider but this links back to the point about publicity above.

Our understanding is no further consultation of impact on the northern community has occurred. Our understanding that notification only went to Okehampton Town Council just prior to the Hub meeting and no notification went to Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council at all.

We believe that this impacts on **(d) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers and/or appropriately qualified consultants.**

2. Within the notes of the minutes, there is a record of the discussion around "engagement of stakeholders." However, this isn't what the northern outreach is about. Engagement is mainly, although not exclusively, about communication from the authority outward. As the quote says, usually to stakeholders.

Those stakeholders are usually, again not exclusively, parish councils, organisations, interest groups etc., and not necessarily individuals. What the northern outreach was about was community access – i.e. the ability of a WD resident having access to information, a service or a person to help their need.

This important point hasn't been reflected. For me this falls under our corporate strategy of "the council."



Under this strategy, we talk about:

- Good customer service
- Listening & responsive
- Open minded
- Transparent & accountable

As already indicated above, we feel that this decision bring up issues around these four bullet points and for that reason the decision impacts on **(f) consideration of the Council's Corporate Strategy and Themes;** and

(g) reasonableness and proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome) and a presumption in favour of openness.

We would like the O&S Committee to consider the recommendation of:

Firstly, to recommend referring this decision to full council, as the impact isn't just about the north it is about the borough wide accessibility of our residents.

Secondly for full council to consider a borough wide review of how we as an authority, enable residents access especially those who may be vulnerable or who have poor connectivity.

Until these points are properly debated, the decision to close the northern outreach will be delayed.

Cllr Kevin Ball Okehampton North, Cllr Clare Kemp Hatherleigh and Cllr Barry Ratcliffe
Exbourne