

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel

**DATE:** 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I**

#### **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

#### **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE UPDATE**

**1. Purpose of Report**

To update NCS Panel on the customer impacts of the decant of the main My Council customer face to face service from Landmark Place to three local community access points.

**2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

That the Panel considers and comments on the content of the report.

**3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

**3a. Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

**Priorities:**

**1. Starting Well**

Shifting customer service staff from dealing with drop in customer demand, supporting customers to self help digitally will free up resources. This will enable customer service advisors (CSAs) to concentrate on deeper financial advice and support for people in need. The more proactive and holistic support that SBC can give to families and households in the greatest need to help prevent financial crisis, should help the sustainability and stability of the family unit

**2. Integration (relating to Health & Social Care)**

As part of the Our Futures transformation work, the contact centre has been trained in giving a deeper service to customers who telephone in, passing fewer calls to back office services. With a programme of robust training and empowerment, this is enabling more first time resolution of customer telephone calls. This is a work in progress and will significantly grow and develop as part of the transformation programme with a whole system approach, links to the localities programme and the SBC new

operating model. The contract centre has been helping more adult social care customers in this way since January 2020.

### **3. Strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods**

We will be organising our local face to face offer around localities and communities. This will help us to be more engaged locally and therefore more understanding and responsive to what local people need. We will work with residents and communities to design services that work for them and regularly seek and act on customer feedback. SBC will also be strengthening commissioned services to provide more targeted support to the needs of the community in localities.

### **4. Workplace health**

Since Covid\_19 lockdown, which coincided with the closure of LMP, Staff were set up to, and continue to work from home. Performance is being managed daily, and there is increased workload with customer demand and also increased productivity. Council Access Points (CAPs) have now opened and Customer Service Advisors (CSAs) are now offering face to face interviews by appointments to customers in Britwell, Langley and Cippenham. These calls are being triaged by the contact centre. There has been considerable staff learning and development as part of this programme. This shift to the website, as the customer's primary point of access, will also help customers to self help with the programme that has just started of further developing our digital offer.

### **3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes**

**Outcome 1:** Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful. We are moving to an emphasis on prevention and early intervention and work with communities and partners to prevent people at risk of crisis falling into further crisis. We have procured a tool to do this, which will help to identify families and households that are under claiming wider benefit entitlements. As customers continue to self help digitally our CSAs will be freed up to proactively contact customers to encourage them to claim.

**Outcome 2:** Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs. By enabling and support people to 'self help' using digital service channels, and by seeking to design intuitive digital service channels, we are making it easier for customers to access us digitally. If customers are familiar with, and can trust our digital services before they have care needs, then they will then be more easily able to access our services if and when their circumstances change. We intend to offer a first class assisted digital offer, which enables people who don't or can't currently use digital to access services. This should also support them to access other available digital resources.

**Outcome 3:** Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay. We will organise our local offer around localities and communities. We have procured self scanning facilities for customers to use in the new council access points, which we will also pilot in a children's centre. We will shortly be working proactively with customers under claiming their wider benefit entitlements. This, combined with being located and available in localities will help us to be more engaged locally, therefore more understanding and responsive to what local people need. Our staff will be trained in all resources available in each locality and

therefore ensure that local people are signposted to additional or independent support and information where appropriate. We can use our local presence to work with residents and communities to feedback and redesign the services that we offer. The customer insight that we are currently developing will also improve how we bespoke services by locality in the future.

**Outcome 4:** Our residents will live in good quality homes. The work we will do on improving customer's financial resilience by helping people under claiming benefits entitlements will help support homelessness prevention. Maximising peoples benefit entitlements will help support families and households with the stability of their tenancies. We are working on taking a SBC single view of all debt owed to the council with a more holistic approach to collection. We are currently exploring technology options to help us to do this.

#### **4. Other Implications**

##### **(a) Financial**

There are no financial implications of proposed action

##### **(b) Risk Management**

This report is for information

##### **(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There are no Human Rights Act Implications.

#### **5. Supporting Information**

Summary of changes from March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020 and their impacts on the customer experience.

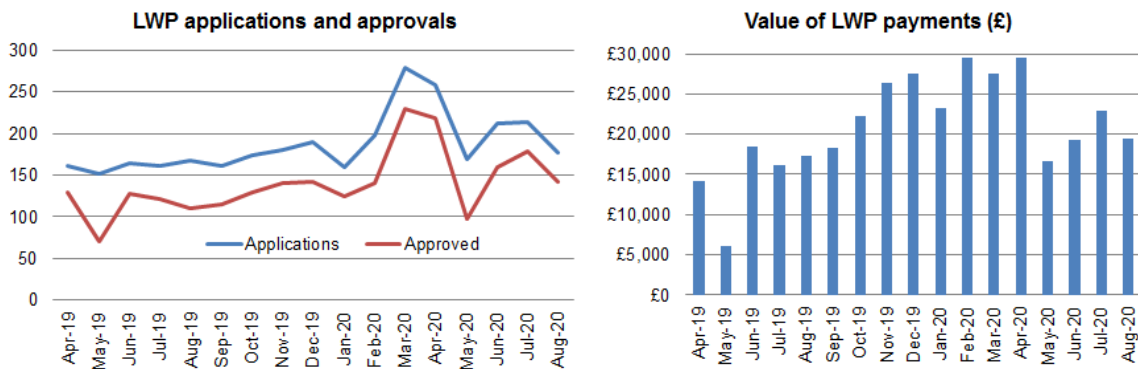
**5.1** Landmark Place (LMP), the main and most central point from where My Council services had been offered closed on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. The lease was due to expire in May 2020. Extensive customer insight work including geographical mapping, had been undertaken to understand who the customers were using LMP and where they lived. This customer insight work informed the new Locality strategy. COVID-19 lockdown measures brought this LMP closure forward by a few weeks.

**5.2** The council had previously made a decision in October 2018 to "Go Cashless" (see background papers no 2 below). The closure of LMP meant the closure of the council's main face to face cashier function. The earlier closure due to Covid-19 accelerated this change. Payments made via the council's automated telephone payment line, and via the council's website have increased by 20% between April 2020 and August 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.

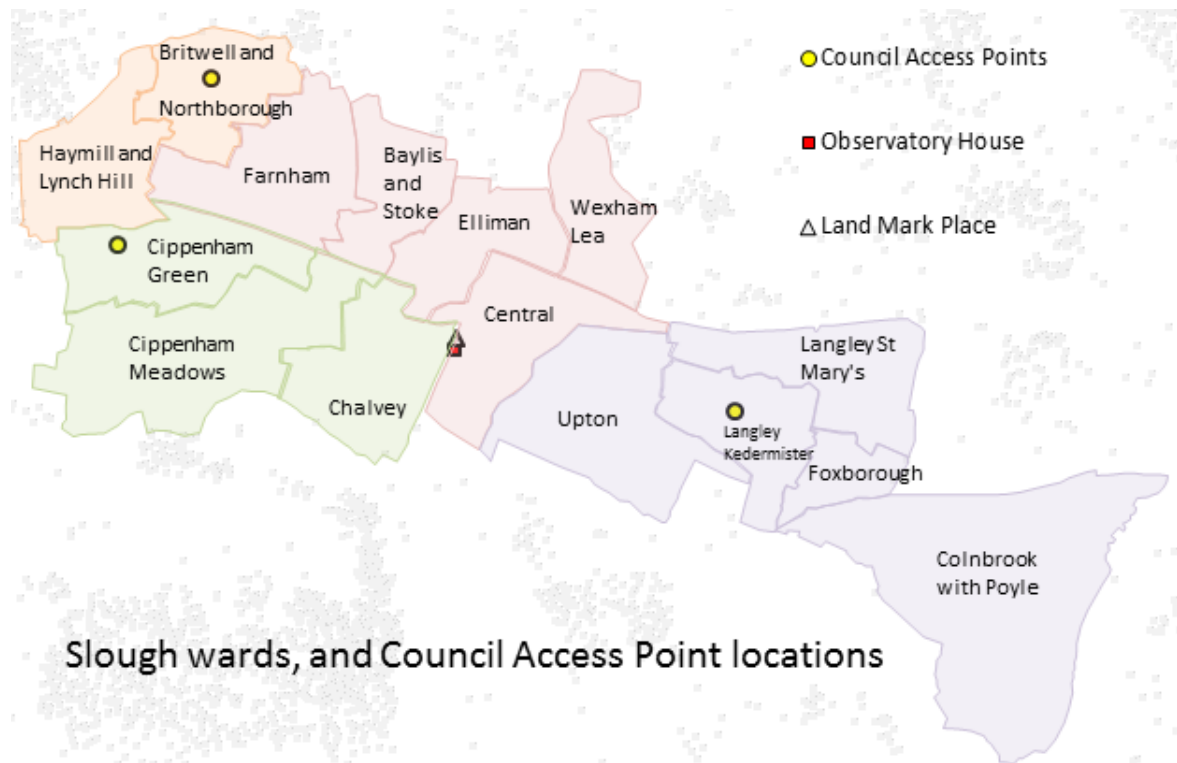
**5.3 Local Welfare Payments** (see background papers no 5) For paying out money to customers, we now have a PayPoint contract in place which will go live on October 1st, providing an improved and automated process, and better customer journey for those in need. Customers will be able to collect urgent payments to them at more than 70 shops distributed across Slough and receive automated credits to their utility company when awarded.

Prior to this, in the run up to lockdown, we have worked with Finance to ensure money was quickly transferred into customer's bank accounts for emergency food and fuel payments. E-vouchers were also put in place. Sainsbury's are now accepting e-vouchers issued for food assistance. We are gradually phasing out the existing paper vouchers scheme via the council access points. Argos e-vouchers are now also issued to assist with the purchasing of essential white goods such as fridges freezers or cookers During April to August we issued 407 Sainsbury's vouchers – an increase of 57% on the same period one year previously, representing an additional spend of £16,276. The same period saw a total of 101 Argos orders or vouchers: a 388% increase on the same period in previous year, representing an additional spend of £38,898

**5.4** The demand for Local Welfare Payments (LWP) in relation to COVID-19 has continued, although this has reduced substantially from its peak immediately following COVID-19 lockdown. In the period April to August 2020 we saw increased spend of £35,510 (a 49% increase) compared to the same period during 2019. The service has continued to working successfully with the Green Doctor making referrals for fuel assistance. These are being turned around in 24 hours.



**5.5** The **Locality strategy** was agreed on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Closure of LMP was on 23<sup>rd</sup> March (earlier than scheduled due to lockdown). Now the first 3 locality council access points (CAP) are open, in Britwell & Northborough, Cippenham Green and Langley Kedermister wards. Britwell CAP opened on 13th July and Cippenham and Langley CAPs opened 4th August. The location of the current Council Access Points is displayed below.



**5.6** Customer services are seeing customers face to face by appointment, as are Housing officers. Homelessness officers are interviewing customers by appointment in Britwell after receiving an on-line referral; this scheme is intended to be expanded to cover both other CAPs. Licensing is also planning to be based in Britwell.

Customer services are offering a bus pass service in Britwell, to be rolled out to Cippenham and Langley as soon as the technology is delivered. This face to face service will essentially allow for customers to have their photos taken and then for passes to be processed in the back office

To be seen for holistic face to face customer service advisor advice, customers now make an appointment and receive a timed, more in-depth interview. This means colleagues are able to prepare in advance therefore offering higher quality customer services advice and problem solving. This is a shift from drop in where there were a high number of repeat callers and customers chasing progress. By ensuring customers are triaged first, this enables us to better manage demand and prioritise customers who most need a face to face service and support. The majority of the triage is via the contact centre, but customers are also triaged if they just turn up at a CAP. We also offer reception service at each of the access points where we take in documents / application forms where customers face challenges of not being able to do so online. Those who turn up without an appointment are advised to call the Contact Centre. Those who are not able to for whatever reason(s) - no phone access, internet, vulnerability - are giving additional guidance and if an appointment is required – they are given one.

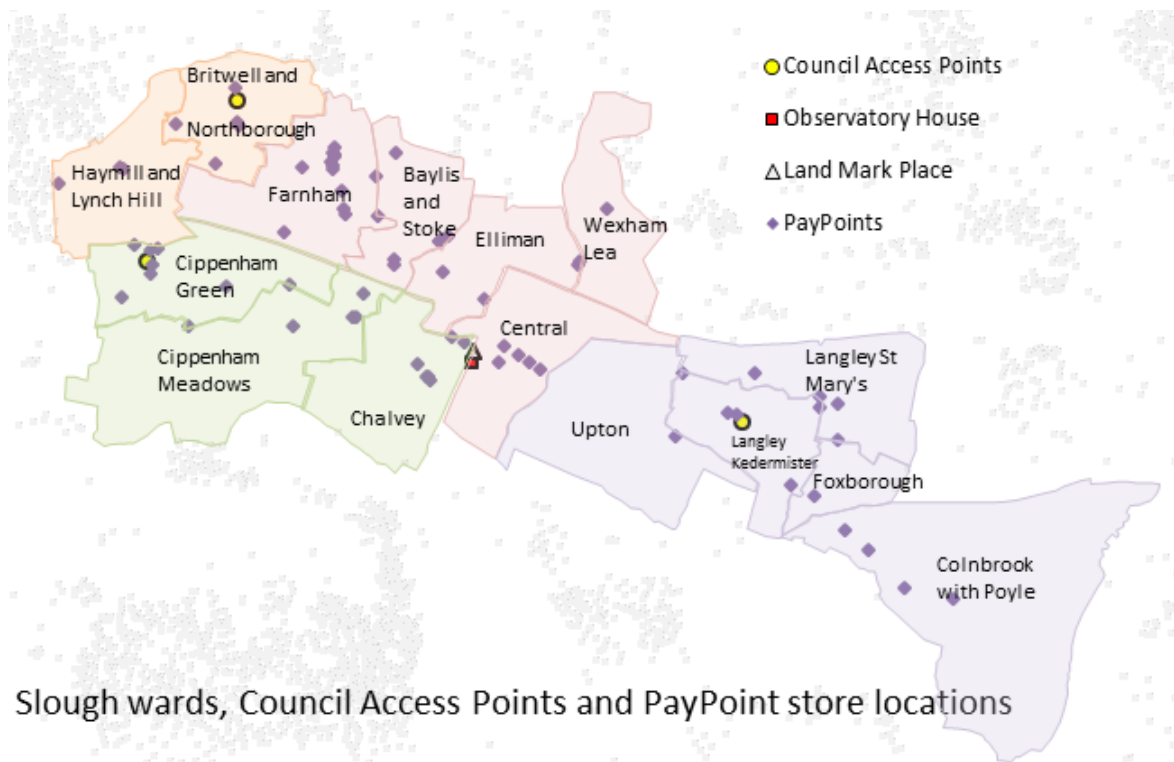
Analysis completed from w/c 17th August to w/c 07th September shows that 60% of customers go on to make an appointment after a triage conversation. Around 95% of these customers subsequently attend their allocated appointment. This is a good turnout.

65% of appointments were booked by telephone through the contact centre; the others were made after triage at the CAPs.

Staffing numbers are currently fluid and are based on resilience, “bubbles” and customer demand. Currently there are 2 customer service advisors (CSA) in the public areas based in Britwell and 1 each in Cippenham and Langley, with capacity to expand each CAP by 1 further CSA. There are also security guards and library staff. As above, in Britwell, housing staff are also available via appointment invitation. Staffing levels are adequate in line with demand, but will remain under review should demand change. Services provided at Local Access Points include in depth advice and assistance on matters relating to Housing Benefits, Council Tax, School Admission and Housing Services i.e. rent account. This staffing is under continuous review and there are weekly operational meeting of managers of all services in Hubs to review and revise.

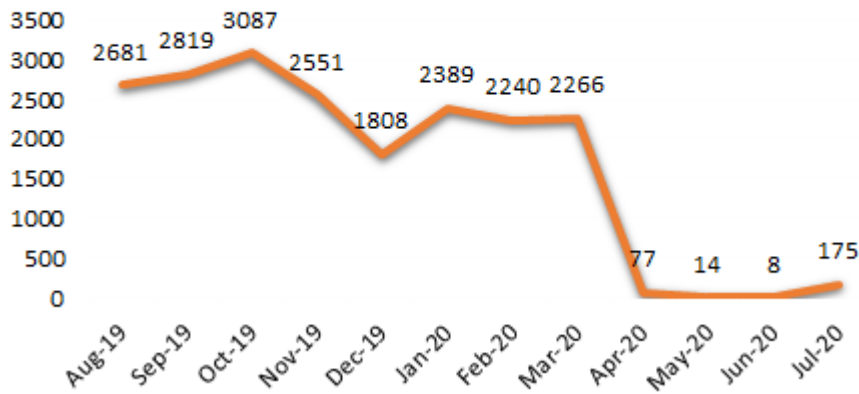
**5.7** Our Futures – the transformation programme has meant that more training and development has been given to customer service advisors on specialist services. This is to reduce the number of telephone calls that have to be passed on to another person and to increase the number of telephone calls resolved first time. This training was completed for Adult Social Care in January/February and is currently being rolled out for all of the Housing services. 40 CSAs have received around 18 hours training each in housing and enforcement advice and legislation over a 4 week period.

**5.8 Digital access** – customers have been accessing services digitally and via the contact centre. Digital access for Local Welfare Payments should be in place in many shops operating within the PayPoint network across Slough from October 1st. This will make it easier for customers in crisis to access cash locally. It also means that any crisis help that is awarded for fuel bills is, in the main, paid directly to the utility companies.

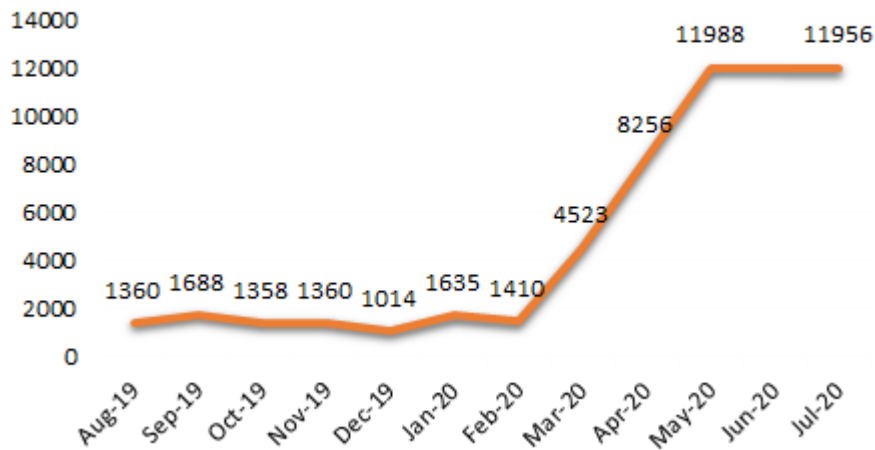


Increase in digital access, and corresponding decrease in face to face customer access shown below

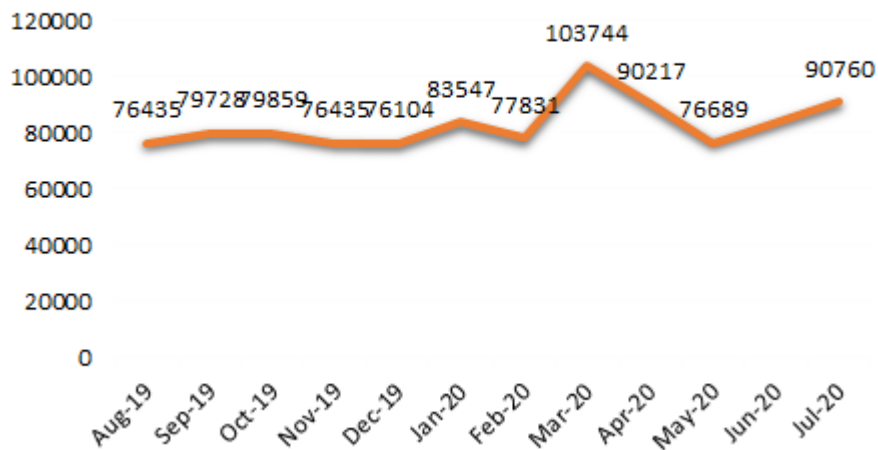
### Number of face to face contacts by customer services



### Number of webforms completed



### Unique monthly website visitors



**Digital inclusion** – support is available for people who need to fill in online forms but do not have computers/ online access. There are specialist officers in Benefits who help customers to do this over the phone, for new benefit claims and discretionary housing payments. Council Access Points also assist with new claims for benefits by appointment. Extra resources of 1.5 CSAs have also been built into the contact centre to help customers apply digitally for Local Welfare Provision and Blue Badges. CSAs can book an appointment at Council access points if a customer requires additional support.

**5.9** Language inclusion – the service receives requests from customers who only speak Urdu / Punjabi who we can support over the phone or face to face. Otherwise – the service uses the translation line Bigword (link below) to support those customers who cannot speak English. Both of the specialist benefit officers helping customers with new benefit claims and discretionary housing payments, speak Urdu and Punjabi.

**5.10** Complaints – there have been no complaints raised by customers regarding the LMP decant or the new appointment arrangements.

**5.11** Other than those staffing the CAPs, the majority of Customer Service staff continue to work from home, with performance being vigorously managed daily and increased productivity being seen.

**5.12** Finally, Chalvey Centre construction delay (due to Covid-19) has left a geographical gap in the centre of the borough which has led to a small number of customers presenting at Observatory House who do not have easy phone or internet access. Facilities management, homelessness and customer services work together on signposting and supporting these customers.

## **6. Comments of Other Committees**

NA

## **7. Conclusion**

Covid-19 lockdown has had a bigger impact on our customers, their needs and their behaviours than the closure of LMP and opening of CAPs. Therefore it is not possible to understand the exclusive impact of LMP's closure on customers. We are therefore running a customer satisfaction survey in October to better understand our customer's perspective on current services. This will inform future services. This will be run over the phone, online and in person across the 3 current CAPs which will give us a direct understanding of customer preference and impacts.

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant many of our customers have had to shift to online and phone services. These services have been able to effectively support a large percentage of our customers from the comfort and safety of a location of their choice.



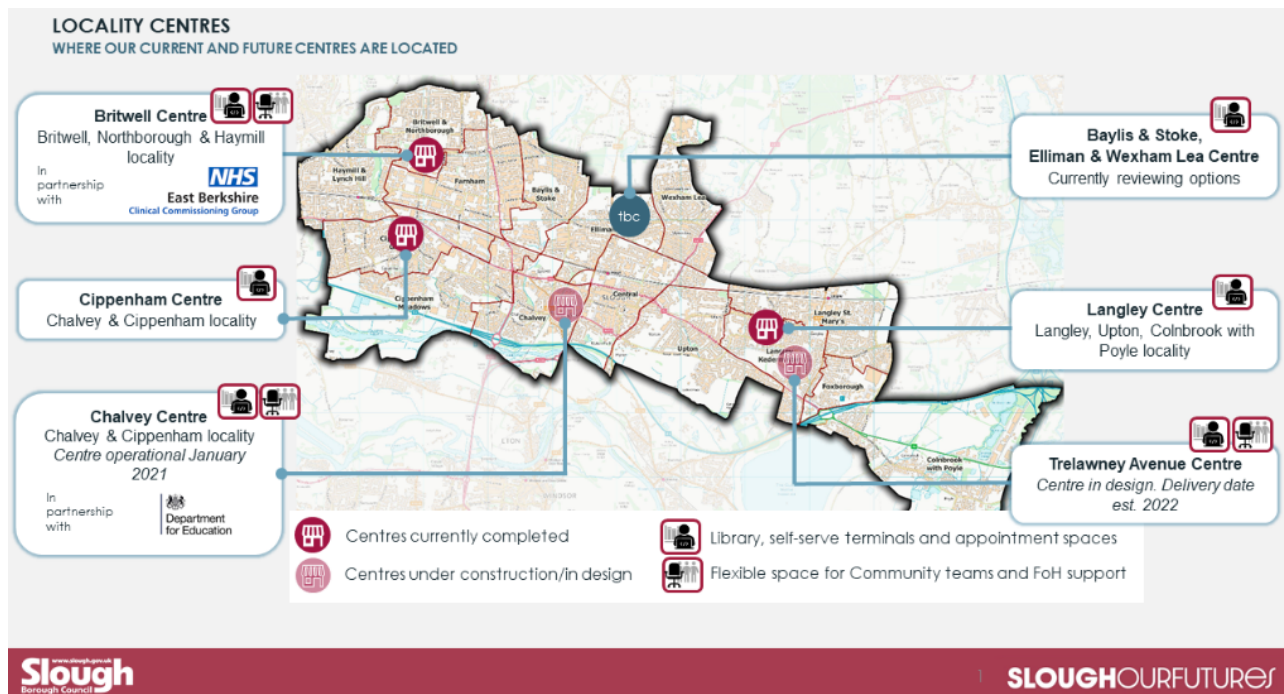
There have been key developments to support our customers further over the phone and online for example:

- Going Cashless and the imminent roll-out of PayPoint
- Changes to the way we have paid LWP pending PayPoint
- Digital inclusion telephone support from both the benefits team and the customer services teams
- New digital channel to accept Blue Badge payments and the digitalisation of that service
- Procurement of self scanning facilities to be shortly rolled out in the first 3 CAPs plus a children's centre
- Training for staff deployed to the 3 CAPs to ensure they can better help customers
- Additional training for contact centre to enable them to answer more queries at the first point of resolution
- Launch of the Homeless application portal
- More digital capabilities will be coming in the coming months

For those that cannot access phones or internet, our CAPs are available and still serve customers face to face. If people do turn up and they are in need, they do not get turned away.

## 8. Appendix

### Locality Plan



## 9. Background Papers

'1' Locality Strategy -

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=109&MIId=6295&Ver=4>

'2' Cabinet report on Going Cashless

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/ielistDocuments.aspx?CId=109&MId=6050&Ver=4>

3 The Bigword translation service - <http://www.slough.gov.uk/help/interpretation-and-translation-service.aspx>

4 Equality impact assessment for Going Cashless -

<X:\Shared-SEDNA\Transactional Finance\Cashless Project 2020\EIA CASHLESS V5 Final 20.05.20.docx>

5 SBC Local Welfare Provision

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwin1\\_2SvYTsAhXFrHEKHVRCATYQFjACegQIARAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.slough.gov.uk%2Fdownloads%2Fflwp-2020-21.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3br9Wlzy6nNUAHpB\\_muRho](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwin1_2SvYTsAhXFrHEKHVRCATYQFjACegQIARAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.slough.gov.uk%2Fdownloads%2Fflwp-2020-21.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3br9Wlzy6nNUAHpB_muRho)