

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR  
TO THE EXECUTIVE  
7 DECEMBER 2007

**Payments Strategy**

**1.0 Introduction and Report Summary**

- 1.1 This report proposes the adoption of a Payments Strategy for the Vale.
- 1.2 The 2007/08 agreed budget proposals, (service prioritisation plan number 52X) requests the provision of better payment alternatives for cash payment facilities. The attached Payments Strategy shows there are opportunities for the Vale to use alternative payment solutions that have the potential to increase customer access and in some cases bring immediate cost benefits. The strategy compliments the Council's Access to Services Strategy and is based on extensive research and examination of the options.
- 1.3 A number of milestones are set out that can move the Vale to this position, and it is recommended that each be implemented on its merits only where the business case for each milestone can prove that customer access will increase and costs be reduced.
- 1.4 It is your officers' view that the opportunity for immediate cost reduction is limited, and that encouraging customers to use electronic payment methods will likely have to be implemented in parallel before users migrate in sufficient numbers to enable reduced transaction costs to be secured.
- 1.5 The Contact Officer for this report is Helen Bishop, Deputy Director Organisational Development & Support, 01235 540372.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- (a) *that the Executive approve in principle that the draft strategy to implement the payments policy be recommended to Council;*
- (b) *that the following policy which underpins the payments strategy is recommended for adoption by Council:*

*"The Council will adopt and implement a Payments Strategy which will deliver the following policy:-*

- Cost effective channels will be developed and marketed to encourage as many customers as possible to self-serve or use our call centre services*
- Customer service will be, as far as is practicable, coordinated and process managed to ensure a quality consistent service*
- Opportunities will be taken through process and workflow re-design to create cashable and non-cashable efficiencies.*
- The Council will continue to develop access channels which reflect the changing preferences of our customers"*

**3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies**

The report supports the Council's Vision Statement objectives C and E.

This report relates to the Customer Contact Strategy.

This report complies with existing policy.

#### 4.0 **Background and Supporting Information**

4.1 The draft Payments Strategy is attached to this report.

#### 5.0 **Equality and Diversity Considerations**

5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this strategy. It concluded that its aims and objectives are not likely to have a significant or negative impact on local residents because of their disability, ethnicity, gender or age. This is because of the following:

- The payment channels proposed in this strategy are varied and include telephone, internet and face-to-face (encouraging debit and credit card payments in the Local Services Points, and payment by cash and cheque in banks and payment network outlets including Post Offices). They expand on the current payment channels available to service users and provide people with opportunities to pay for Council services both from their home and in their local community.
- The payment methods proposed in this strategy are varied and include cash, cheque, debit/credit card, direct debit and standing order.

5.2 Furthermore, this strategy will promote equality of access to the payments service by doing the following:

- Any leaflets produced for the public about payment channels and methods will be offered in alternative formats as required, for example in another language or in larger print;
- In order to monitor how the payment channels are working, they will be reviewed at various stages as part of the implementation of this strategy. Equalities information will be collected and analysed according to disability, ethnicity and gender;
- Wherever possible, external pay-points will be accessible for disabled people, and these will be highlighted in relevant publicity material.

#### 6.0 **Consultation**

6.1 Consultation with staff likely to be affected has taken place over the last 3 weeks, and a verbal report will be given at the meeting.

HELEN BISHOP  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

TIM SADLER  
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR