



South Holland District Council

Review of

Printing and Postage of External Items

An Overview and Scrutiny Review undertaken by the Reduction of Paper and Postage Task Group on behalf of Policy Development Panel

13th February 2017

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1. Introduction.

- 1.1 South Holland District Council is undergoing significant change through the commissioning of a Moving Forward (Transformation) Programme. This is looking at all aspects of the Authority to identify ways of becoming more efficient.
- 1.2 A considerable amount of resources is spent each year distributing electoral registration letters, council tax and business rate bills.
- 1.3 The South Holland Centre produces a significant amount of printed material to promote activities at the centre.

2. Scope of the Review.

2.1 The scope and therefore terms of reference were defined as:

- To review the use of printed materials produced by the South Holland Centre.
- To review the use of printed materials produced in relation to electoral information, council tax and business rates.
- To make recommendations for reduction in use of printed materials.

The Task Group also looked at Committee Reports/other internal printed material, but these are considered in separate reports.

3. Membership of Task Group.

- 3.1 The task group comprised of Councillors J Astill (Chairman), H Drury, M Pullen and A Woolf. The lead officer was Andy Prior and the Task Group was supported by Democratic Services.
- 3.2 Councillor J McLean withdrew from the task group and was replaced by Councillor M Pullen.

4. Background to Review.

- 4.1 The review was conducted following a request from the Moving Forward (Transformation) Programme review of the way printed material is used to communicate with residents.

5. Method of Review.

- 5.1 The Task Group met several times between 24th October 2016 and 6th February to consider the printing of agenda packs.

5.2 Information was sourced from:

- Compass Point Business Services in relation to council tax and business rates.
- Democratic Services in relation to electoral information.

- South Holland Centre Manager and Andy Prior in relation to the South Holland Centre.

5.3 The Task Group also investigated the current provision for viewing council tax and business rate bills online and the potential for e-billing in the future.

6. Summary of Findings.

6.1 Electoral Information.

6.1.1 As the distribution of information relating to elections is heavily legislated, the Task Group has de-scoped this from our investigations.

6.2 Council Tax.

6.2.1 There are 40016 live accounts registered on Compass Point systems.

6.2.2 The payment method for these accounts are:

- 26303 (65.73%) who make payment via direct debit.
- 13713 (34.27%) who make payment via cash or cheque.

6.2.3 The bills are generated electronically by Compass Point, but sent to an 3rd party organisation for printing and posting, the cost of this is £20000.

6.3 Business Rates.

6.3.1 There are 2709 live accounts registered on Compass Point systems.

6.3.2 The payment method for these accounts are:

- 1079 (39.83%) who make payment via direct debit.
- 1630 (60.17%) who make payment via cash, cheque or online.

6.3.3 The bills are generated electronically by Compass Point, but sent to an 3rd party organisation for printing and posting, the cost of this is £894.

6.4 Viewing Council Tax Bills Online.

6.4.1 Members of the task group found they could:

- Register an online account via the ecitizen.sholland.gov.uk service.
- Request their council tax account be included within their online account (provided they could answer additional qualification questions).
- Register for e-billing (provided the above step had been completed).

6.4.2 Members of the Task Group found they could not register their Council Tax account if they didn't qualify to be asked the additional security questions.

6.5 South Holland Centre.

6.5.1 On target to save 10% from each of 16/17 and 17/18 budgets.

6.5.2 Residents are encouraged to sign up to electronic mailing, but there is no option to remove them from the print list.

6.5.3 Digital marketing accounts are currently circa 50% of the total marketing database. Approximately 2500 on separate digital marketing list, potential duplication with email addresses held for other purposes.

6.5.4 Administration of room hire now done via email as bookers are using the “application to hire” and “Ticket Agency” forms from the website.

6.5.5 Online booking of tickets costs £1.50 per order (which covers cost of booking system and postage at 1st class).

6.5.6 Unique monthly website hits increasing from average of 6765 (Oct to Dec 2015) to 8010 (Oct to Dec 2016).

6.5.7 Average monthly e-newsletters sent to customers 2269 times (Jul to Dec 2016), with an average open rate of 41% for the same period. Note the industry average open rate for e-marketing is 23%.

6.5.8 Online ticket sales steadily increasing from 12% in 2014/2015 to 17% in 2016/2017, with value of income from online sales increasing from 14% to 22% for the same period.

6.5.9 What’s On Live Guide – Produced 3 times a year.

- Total production down from 11000 in Spring 2013 to 7500 in Spring 2017.
- Issued by post to 6205 residents in Spring 2013 to 3893 in Spring 2017.

6.5.10 Film Guide – Produced 4 times a year.

- Total production down from 9000 in April 2013 to 6700 in February 2017.
- Issued by post to 5295 in April 2013 down to 3893 in January 2017.
- Cost of production largely covered by sponsorship from Broadgate Builders.

6.5.11 Correspondence Sent to Previous Customers (not booked in 2 years) asking if they wish to remain on mailing list:

Year	No Letters Sent	No Responses	Customers Removed
2013	1149	0	1149
2014	1113	18	1095
2015	1125	213	912
2016	1404	281	1123

7. Conclusions and Recommendations.

7.1 Conclusions Reached:

7.1.1 Council Tax / Business Rates:

- The current e-citizen service is clunky:
 - The signup process only works for users who are directed down the additional security question route.
 - The user ID field can contain capital letters, which can lead to issues during the logon and password reset processes.
 - If you attempt to reset a password for a user who does not exist, the system still attempts to validate account by asking security questions.
 - Where multiple adults are liable for Council Tax (i.e. named on the bill) the e-billing process does not cope
- That significant savings could be made in the production of paper bills.

7.1.2 South Holland Centre:

- The return rate on of customers indicating they wish to remain on mailing list is low (11%).
- The current online booking facility has limited functionality in terms of account management, and does not work properly on Apple products (e.g. seat map does not display on iPad or iPhone).

7.2 The task group reached the following recommendations:

7.2.1 Non-cash:

- That South Holland District Council actively pursues an online/paperless approach for council tax and business rate bills.

7.2.2 Cash:

- Further investigation is required on how the eCitizen service can be configured to provide a more positive user experience.
- Further integration is required between the My Council and eCitizen service to provide a single customer logon.
- That the South Holland Centre investigate implementing an up to date online booking system that offers better reporting/customer management and works across all types of web browser or device.

8. Financial Implications of Recommendations.

8.1 Cost:

- At the time of compiling this report the costs for improving the current eCitizen service or new South Holland Centre online booking system were not known.

8.2 Potential Savings Per Year:

8.2.1 Council Tax / Business Rates.

Item	25%	50%	75%
Reduction in C/TAX bill printing and distribution cost for those Direct Debit customers signing up for e-billing.	£3250	£6500	£9750
Reduction in B/RATES bill printing and distribution cost for those Direct Debit businesses signing up for e-billing.	£87	£174	£261

Note: The savings shown are the percentage of the total cost of bill printing and distribution, apportioned to those who pay by direct debit:

- Council Tax: 65% of residents pay by DD, this relates to £13000 of the total production cost of £20000.
- Business Rates: 39% of businesses pay by DD, this relates to £348 of the total production cost of £894.

8.2.2 South Holland Centre.

- Across the period 2013 to 2016, an average of 1197 letters were posted to residents, this translates into estimated savings of:
 - Consumables and Paper (£0.009 per letter): £11.
 - 2nd Class postage (£0.37 per item): £443.

9. Main Sources of Information and individuals contacted during the review.

9.1 The main sources of information were provided by the departments referred to in paragraph 5.

10. Abbreviations.

Abbreviation	Description
CPBS	Compass Point Business Services
C/TAX	Council Tax
B/RATES	Business Rates