

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
10 SEPTEMBER 2018

CASTLE HOUSE UPDATE REPORT

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to appraise the Committee of improvements in customer experience one-year on from the move to Castle House.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Castle House opened to the public on 25 September 2017. Prior to the move to Castle House customers requiring a face to face service in Newark either visited the office in the Town Hall or had to visit Kelham Hall. Due to both the location and size of the offices these locations did not provided a pleasant experience for customers or visitors.

2.2 The majority of the enquires at the Newark Town Hall related to council tax, benefits or housing and tended to include those more vulnerable customers, often with complex needs and requiring support from a number agencies. The majority of the customer enquires at Kelham Hall were relating to development control.

2.3 Castle House has provided the Council with the opportunity for its customers and visitors to experience a more accessible and efficient service. The additional space has allowed for a digital area which means customers can use the computers to view or apply for Council and partner services online e.g. viewing a planning application, submitting a benefit application or requesting a bulky waste collection.

2.4 This report details how Castle House has improved the experience the customer receives and how many customers/visitors access it.

3.0 Current Situation

3.1 Eight partners have co-located to Castle House:

- Department of Work and Pensions – Jobcentre Plus.
- Citizens Advice Sherwood and Newark.
- Newark & Sherwood CVS.
- Newark and Sherwood Homes.
- Homestart Newark.
- Change Grow Live.
- National Probation Service.
- Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Community Rehabilitation Company.

In addition the YMCA utilise Castle House whilst working on the Sports Hub project.

3.2 Having these organisations located in Castle House has provided customers with a much more joined up service as they are able to access services in one location. Here are three examples of this:

Example One

Five men went to work at a kitchen manufacturing factory as usual one morning to find it all locked up and the locks changed. They had not been paid for three weeks and having tried to contact their employers received abusive texts from the owners. They visited Citizens Advice to obtain advice on the wages they were owed. Citizens Advice then passed them to the Council who gave them advice on claiming housing benefit and housing advice. They also liaised with Newark and Sherwood Homes regarding their rent and the DWP regarding claiming benefits and finding a job. Their contact with these organisations all happened at Castle House during one visit.

Example Two

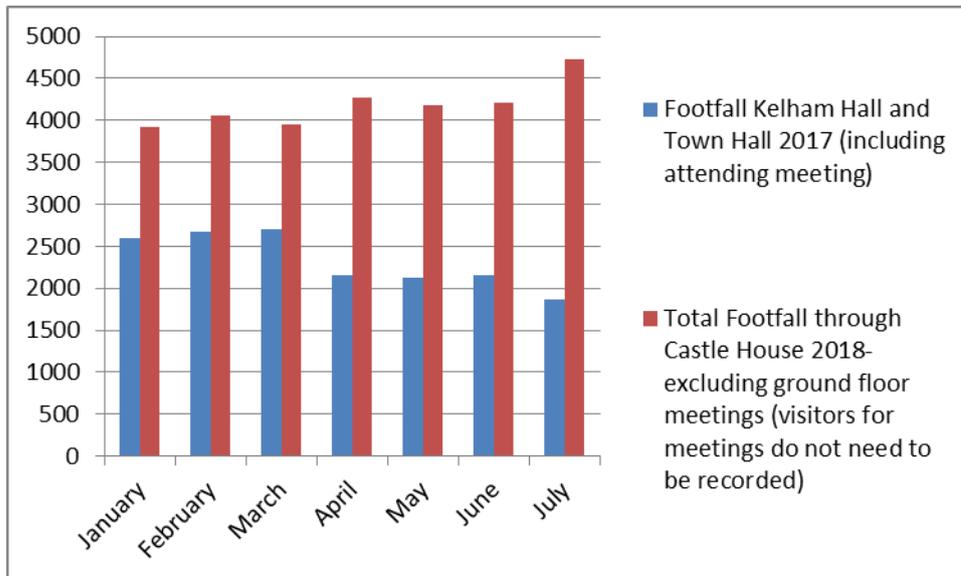
The National Probation Service was working with an offender who had drug and alcohol problems. Change Grow Live was already working with this customer and due to both organisations being located at Castle House they were able to work much easier together to support the client. The co-location of partners to Castle House has improved the networking between partners.

Example Three

A prison offender was released from prison homeless. Probation introduced him to the DWP who offered advice and support. The Council's Customer Service Team then assisted him with making a homelessness application. Probation also liaised with the Housing Options Team face to face, providing them with them an overview of the case.

Scenarios like these happen on a regular basis and the contact between the organisations is made much more efficient and effective by being able to actually go and talk to each other.

- 3.3 Castle House has eight self-serve digital areas. These computers are available for customers of either the Council or partners to access services online free of charge. Following the roll out of Universal Credit in the Newark area earlier this year, these computers enable the customers to manage their claim or make a new claim electronically. Support is provided to those customers who have limited digital skills and the Council is working in conjunction with the DWP to provide digital training to customers.
- 3.4 The graph below shows the total footfall of customers and visitors to Castle House for the period January – July 2018 and for the same period during 2017 for the Town Hall and Kelham Hall. Due to how figures were collated at the Town Hall and Kelham Hall these figures due include those visitors attending meetings. The figures for Castle House do not include visitors attending meetings on the ground floor as due to the ground floor being a secure area these visitors do not need to be recorded and those attending larger meetings are directed straight to the meeting rooms without going to reception.



3.5 The footfall at Castle House during January – July 2018 was 29,339 compared to 16,295 at the Town Hall and Kelham Hall during January – July 2017. This is an increase of over 13,000 customers, an 80% increase. Many of these customers see more than one organisation.

4.0 **Next Steps**

4.1 Ongoing discussions are taking place with partners to discuss how the customer experience can be improved further. These include improving the digital offer provided to customers and working in conjunction with the DWP to deliver further employability sessions.

4.2 The ongoing rollout of Universal Credit has the potential to increase the number of customers accessing. Regular liaison meetings take place with partners to ensure that our services meet the needs of our customers.

4.0 **Equalities Implications**

5.1 As this report is for information only an equality impact assessment is not required. A full assessment was completed prior to the move to Castle House.

6.0 **Impact on Budget/Policy Framework**

6.1 As this report is for information only there is no impact on the budget.

7.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS** that:

- (a) **Members note the content of this report, and**
- (b) **an annual update report is presented to this Committee.**

Reason for Recommendations

This report is to keep Members informed on the success of Castle House and how the services delivered from it, supports both the council's and partners' customers.

For further information please contact Jill Baker, Business Manager - Customer Services & External Communications on ext. 5810.

Matthew Finch
Director – Customers