

## INFORMATION BULLETIN

### Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021



#### Face to Face customer services since April 2021.

From April 2020 our face-to-face services were predominately suspended due to the COVID-19 lockdowns. We provided emergency appointments for customers where needed and only received approx. 5 requests during this time. We did not receive any complaints regarding this change during this period and the approach was consistent with other Councils across Suffolk.

Face to face services have resumed for Babergh and Mid Suffolk from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 from Sudbury Library and 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021 from the Customer access point in Stowmarket. The Sudbury library service is a change for customers from accessing services at the Town Hall previously and both Babergh and Mid Suffolk services have been open for 2 days a week in both locations.

The opening of the services has been in line with Government guidance, and we have implemented several measures to ensure both staff and customers felt as safe as possible. These have included appointment booking wherever possible, Perspex screens, social distancing, and cleaning measures.

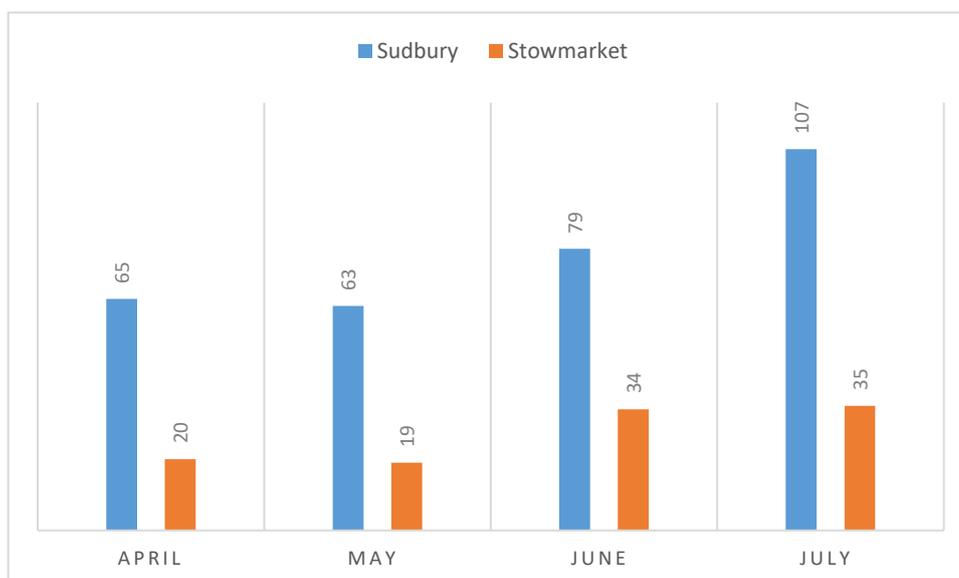
We have liaised with the Citizens Advice managers across Babergh and Mid Suffolk to ensure they were aware of the offer and could signpost people to us if they needed a face-to-face appointment.

Our library offer also provides access to a phone, so customers can gain support when we are not present, as well as access to an i-pad so customers can upload documents and complete forms online, 7 days a week.

Since opening from April- July we have seen:

- Stowmarket: 108 customers
- Sudbury: 314 customers.

**Fig 1: Face to face figures by month, by location.**



The main reasons people have attended is to support with the upload of information for online forms, support with completing forms and housing and waste enquiries.

The breakdown is as follows:

**Stowmarket:**

Help completing online forms (predominately Council Tax and benefits and housing reviews): 47% (51 customers)

Uploading evidence: 34% (37 customers)

Gateway to homechoice application support: 8% (7 customers)

Planning enquiries (looking at planning applications): 2% (2 customer)

Proof of life stamp: 9% (11 customers)

**Sudbury:**

Uploading evidence/scanning paperwork: 25% (79 customers)

Council Tax and benefits enquiries predominately online forms support and evidence upload: 38% (119 customers)

Gateway to homechoice (support with online forms): 9% (28 customers)

Housing (repairs, providing evidence for tenancy and rent enquiries): 17% (53 customers)

Not Babergh District Council (highways, blue badges, and Town Council): 6% (19 customers)

Waste Services (enquiries about paying for brown bin or ordering bins): 5% (16 customers)

From the data 90% of the queries could be answered at the first point of contact. The reasons for people attending were predominately due to not being able to complete the information online as they do not have access to a computer or tablet to be able to upload information or they did not know they could upload information through our online forms themselves, so we can provide self-service assistance.

In Stowmarket, we have noticed that several customers have opted to have a telephone appointment where possible, so the customer services officer has been able to support the customer over the phone, rather than coming into see us, these appointments usually last between 45 minutes to an hour and we do call the customer back.

We will be shortly launching the first iteration of our digital skills support and access offer across our Districts. We have recently asked our tenants to complete a digital skills survey to understand specifically about the digital skills and access needs of our tenants to help shape our future digital skills offer.

We will continue to monitor the service and look to commence our pop-up delivery from Hadleigh and Shotley late September.