

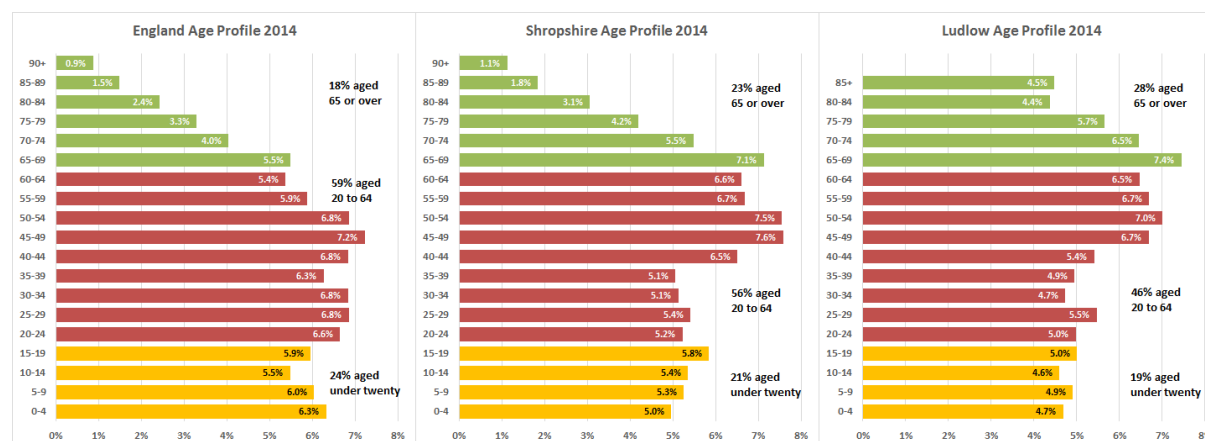
## Revised response to consultation on proposed customer service point changes

### Summary

I object to the proposal to reduce the opening of the Ludlow customer service point from four days a week to just two. Ludlow is a town with an elderly population and a significant number of vulnerable people. There may be a case for reducing daily opening hours in Ludlow but that case has yet to be made.

### A partial profile of vulnerability in Ludlow

Ludlow is a town with an elderly population.



Ludlow North, which I represent, is one of the oldest council wards in the country. In 2005, 188 out of the 7,655 council wards in England had an older population than Ludlow North. By 2014, just 118 wards had a more elderly population. With the opening of new accommodation for elderly people, the town is getting older quickly.

An analysis by House of Commons Library revealed that the Ludlow parliamentary constituency has the seventh highest level of dementia among the 533 English constituencies.<sup>1</sup>

According to the 2011 Census, 25.1% of households in Ludlow did not have access to a car or van, well above the Shropshire average of 15.8%. This is another indicator that our population is more vulnerable than average.

We lack data on disability in Ludlow, along with other vulnerabilities including mental health issues and learning difficulties.

We have no data on how many people are referred to the food bank from the Ludlow customer service point. We councillors do know that this is a vital and much valued service.

### Internet

I have no doubt that online access to information is increasing and will continue to increase. However, Shropshire Council has not been able to provide any data on the use of its online services.

Around 16% of adults in Shropshire have not used the internet in the last three months or have not used it all.<sup>2</sup> This is higher than the national figure of 10% and reflects the older age of our county's population and, to a smaller extent, the difficulty of accessing the internet in remote rural areas.<sup>3</sup> The

national trend is for internet use to increase to near 100% of the population but we are around 12 years away from achieving this in Shropshire.<sup>4</sup>

Not all queries can be resolved online. For online queries you usually need to have a clear idea of what you need before you start. Vulnerable people will also have greater difficulty in gaining access to online services.

## Call Centre

It has been suggested that more people are accessing information through Shropshire Council's call centre. That is not the case. Despite Environmental Maintenance taking highways calls from 2015/16, the call volume is currently lower than 2013/14.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
<b>Benefits</b>	6,948	984	489	75	-
<b>Blue Badge</b>	6,818	7,589	7,956	8,846	8,936
<b>Concessionary Travel</b>	3,919	2,755	2,646	6,854	3,860
<b>Environmental Maintenance</b>	5,967	5,102	13,704	16,601	17,189
<b>Housing Options</b>	5,427	6,902	5,594	6,080	6,240
<b>Licensing</b>	9,776	11,036	8,035	5,381	5,284
<b>Parking Services</b>	4,947	4,129	3,656	3,677	3,022
<b>Planning</b>	14,296	17,150	13,055	11,982	9,913
<b>Registrars</b>	19,491	20,256	16,781	16,997	15,518
<b>Revenues</b>	1,863	669	320	90	-
<b>ST&amp;R Housing</b>	8,444	5,868	2,395	1,932	1,121
<b>Waste Management</b>	28,452	30,783	28,101	36,144	31,462
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>116,348</b>	<b>113,223</b>	<b>102,732</b>	<b>114,659</b>	<b>102,545</b>

*No data is available for calls to Revenue & Benefits. ST&R also receives calls directly*

## Customer service points

Office	Opening hours 2014	Opening hours 2018	% reduction in opening hours	Footfall 2013-14	Footfall 2014-15	Footfall 2015-16	Footfall 2016-17	Footfall 2017-18	% reduction customer footfall 2014-18
Shrewsbury	42.5	37.0	13%	13,400	11,977	10,402	11,565	8,771	35%
Oswestry	40.0	35.0	13%	13,100	12,390	9,226	8,221	6,290	52%
Ludlow	40.0	30.0	25%	14,130	8,115	6,948	6,890	6,117	57%
Bridgnorth	40.0	34.5	14%	20,074	10,185	7,455	6,965	7,255	64%
Market Drayton	32.5	28.0	14%	7,676	5,434	4,161	3,265	2,409	69%
Whitchurch	30.0	25.0	17%	2,445	3,924	2,888	2,323	2,237	9%
Total	225.0	189.5	16%	70,825	52,025	41,080	39,229	33,079	53%

Data provided by Shropshire Council suggests that usage of the Ludlow customer service point has fallen 57% compared to 25% in Shrewsbury.

This is not based on a like on like comparison. One third of the drop in numbers in Ludlow was due to Shropshire Council's decision to move the customer service point into a public space in the Library when it sold Stone House. People with personal and sensitive problems do not want to be seen and heard discussing them in the full view of the town.

As the table below shows, like on like drop in footfall is 27% in Ludlow and 25% in Shrewsbury.

Office	% reduction customer footfall 2015-18	Proposed new hours per week	Proposed% reduction in hours per week	Customers per hour 2018 (50 week year)
Shrewsbury	27%	14.9	60%	11.8
Oswestry	49%	14.9	57%	8.4
Ludlow	25%	14.9	50%	8.2
Bridgnorth	29%	14.9	57%	9.7
Market Drayton	56%	7.5	73%	6.5
Whitchurch	43%	7.5	70%	6.0
Total	36%	74.6	61%	8.9

Information on proposed FTE levels at each customer service point is needed to fully understand the implications on the above table.

### Comments

I accept that the way we access information is changing. More information is being sought online, but not apparently through Shropshire Council's call centre. Without data on internet usage we are not able to understand why there are falling numbers of people using the customer service centres.

There is a modal shift in how we access services, especially for younger people. But it would be wrong to become overly reliant on the internet and phone services at this juncture. To do so, would discriminate against older and vulnerable people. It is notable that this consultation lacks an equality impact assessment (EQIA), despite customer service points dealing with a significant number of vulnerable people.

Much more information is needed before a decision on cutting back customer service point hours is made. At present, we are being asked to make judgements in the dark.

I am not opposed in principle to a reduction in overall hours at the Ludlow customer service point. But I am firmly opposed to a reduction in the number of days the customer service point is open. Reduced hours four days a week would be a more effective option than limiting the service to two days.

### Notes

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1. House of Commons Library. *Dementia: policy, services and statistics overview*.
  2. Source: ONS, [Internet users, UK: 2018](#). The survey estimate of 16% non-internet usage in Shropshire is subject to a degree of uncertainty. There is a 95% chance the true figure lies between 12% and 21%.
  3. Nationally, 56% of people aged 75+ have not used the internet in the last 3 months or have never used it. This compares to 20% for people aged 65-74 and less than 1% for those aged 16-24. The comparable statistic is 23% for people who identify themselves as disabled in the way it is defined in the Equalities Act.
  4. Nationally, internet use for all adults is increasing by 1.3% a year. That means near 100% use is seven years away across the UK. Applying national figures to Shropshire, we are 12 years away from near 100% use.