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EXTRAORDINARY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 26 July 2017 at 5.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor David Saunders (Chairman); Councillors G Coleman-Cooke, Ashbee, Campbell, Connor, Dexter, Martin, S Piper, Rusiecki, Taylor and Taylor-Smith

In Attendance: Councillors: K Coleman-Cooke and M Saunders

123. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The following Members have given their apologies:

Councillor Dixon;
Councillor Falcon;
Councillor Dennis;
Councillor Grove;
Councillor Parsons, substituted by Councillor Martin;
Councillor Curran, substituted by Councillor Taylor-Smith.

124. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

125. OSP CALL-IN OF KEY OFFICER DECISION - CLOSURE OF RAMSGATE DISTRICT OFFICE

Dominic Whelan, Director of Shared Services who leads East Kent Services (EKS) introduced the item for debate by providing a presentation on the rationale for the decision taken to close the Ramsgate District Office. Mr Whelan provided some background context in regard to the changing nature and demand for Customer Services and the financial drivers and technological considerations that had been taken into account when making the decision.

The aim is to use technology and telephone contact centre provision in a way that would deliver services to residents in an affordable and viable way but also recognise that a one size does not fit all' and the needs of the very vulnerable need to be taken into account.

Mr Whelan explained that EKS had reviewed its service delivery processes for all the partner district areas which led to the decision to close the area offices in Ramsgate, Whitstable, Herne Bay, Aylesham, Deal and Sandwich. The financial situation means that EKS has to find £834,000 of savings this year in order to ensure a balanced budget following reductions in the management fees and in order to contain growth in costs such as salaries and contract inflation.

A member of the public spoke on the item.

Andrew Stevens, Assistant Director (Customer Delivery) in EKS made additional comments to the presentation and advised the meeting that:

- The Ramsgate Office would be closed with effect from 1 September 2017;
- The office was currently operational on a part time basis with two staff who each worked part time making one full FTE;

- The main activity at that office was for residents to drop in forms and documents for processing benefits claims;
- EKS would still offer face to face service to residents at the main Gateway;
- EKS introduced a web chat and the uptake by residents has been encouraging;
- 82% of the residents who use the Ramsgate Office are working age;
- Visitor numbers to the office has been going down over the years;
- The uptake of council tax e-billing is 12,000 residents as at March 2017;
- EKS has been working with Age UK and hosting workshops for the elderly to provide them with skills to access on line services.

Mr Whelan said that moving forward EKS are planning to use existing Compliance Officers, who currently conduct Business Rates visits, to carry-out home visits to the elderly or individuals with disability and assist with requested customer services, in exceptional circumstances to assist those unable to access services.

In response to the officers' presentation, Members raised the following points:

- Residents would like assurances to be given that consideration would be given to the provision of a dedicated telephone line to attend to their queries;
- What would councillors do with queries that would be coming from residents once the Ramsgate District Office is closed?
- That there may be an increase in workload for Councillors as a result of this action;
- What is the total financial savings to be made by closing the Ramsgate Office?
- How the introduction of the new residents parking voucher scheme that will begin at the end of this month will impact? There has been a perceived lack of engagement with residents to advise them of the pending closure by EKS;
- EKS should engage with key members of the community such as residents association chairmen and secretaries to share information of the closing of the Ramsgate office;
- Ramsgate Town Council could be approached to take over some of the functions like collection of forms and documents from residents as there was a mail collection undertaken by the Council;
- Could a computer terminal be provided at the Town Council offices for customers to use? This point was also reiterated by a Councillor who noted that Broadstairs had done similar when the Council services were removed ten years ago;
- How will the office closure be communicated to residents and a request to ensure that the location of the Margate Gateway was made clear to the public, for those who do not know it at present;
- Are customer service centre staff trained to the same level in order to answer queries adequately across the districts?

In response to Member queries Dominic Whelan and Andrew Stevens made the following points:

- Call Centre staff were fully trained to respond to residents queries across the districts; the services provided currently at Ramsgate were the same as at all other
- The face to face changes across the whole of EKS would save about £200,000. The closure of Ramsgate office would bring in circa £30,000 savings within the overall figure.
- The closure of area offices across the districts is designed to reduce the expensive service provision and enable EKS to minimise impact to staff in other key areas such as Benefits and Telephone Contact.

Mr Whelan explained that if EKS were to maintain the small amount of staff at the outlying area offices, the impact would be felt in a disproportionate way in the

telephone contact centre, due to the fact that they handle a much greater level of work than the area offices. As the churn of staff in Customer Services is high, it is expected that the reduction in posts, which generate the savings, will not require redundancies, although this cannot be guaranteed.

Mr Whelan thereafter agreed to carry-out the following action points that:

- EKS were working with TDC Communications Team on a planned engagement of residents regarding the closure of the Ramsgate office and would seek views from Ramsgate Town Council staff on ideas for communicating with residents;
- Liaison would take place with Ramsgate Town Council with a view to installing a dedicated telephone line for Ramsgate residents to channel their queries to Customer Services;
- EKS will engage Ramsgate Town Council to work out what arrangements could be made to enable the Town Council offices to take up some of the provision for items, such as waste collection bags and possibly even an internet portal attending to residents queries;
- EKS would attend neighbourhood engagement meeting to advise residents on the office closure;
- EKS would engage Ramsgate ward councillors to provide them with information that they could use moving forward, to address likely queries from residents once the Ramsgate office has been closed and in order to ensure that Councillors knew where to direct queries to, so they could inform residents;
- EKS would engage with Parking Enforcement regarding logistics for the sale of vouchers for the new residents parking voucher scheme.

Councillor Campbell proposed the following steps to mitigate the impact of the closure of the Ramsgate District Office; Councillor Taylor-Smith seconded and Members agreed the following recommendations that:

1. Officers liaise with Ramsgate Town Council to formally agree the best way to continue to offer services to residents in Ramsgate;
2. Officers attend neighbourhood engagement meeting in Ramsgate in August to advise residents' associations on the pending Ramsgate office closure.

Mr Whelan agreed to carry-out these recommendations.

Meeting concluded: 5.55 pm

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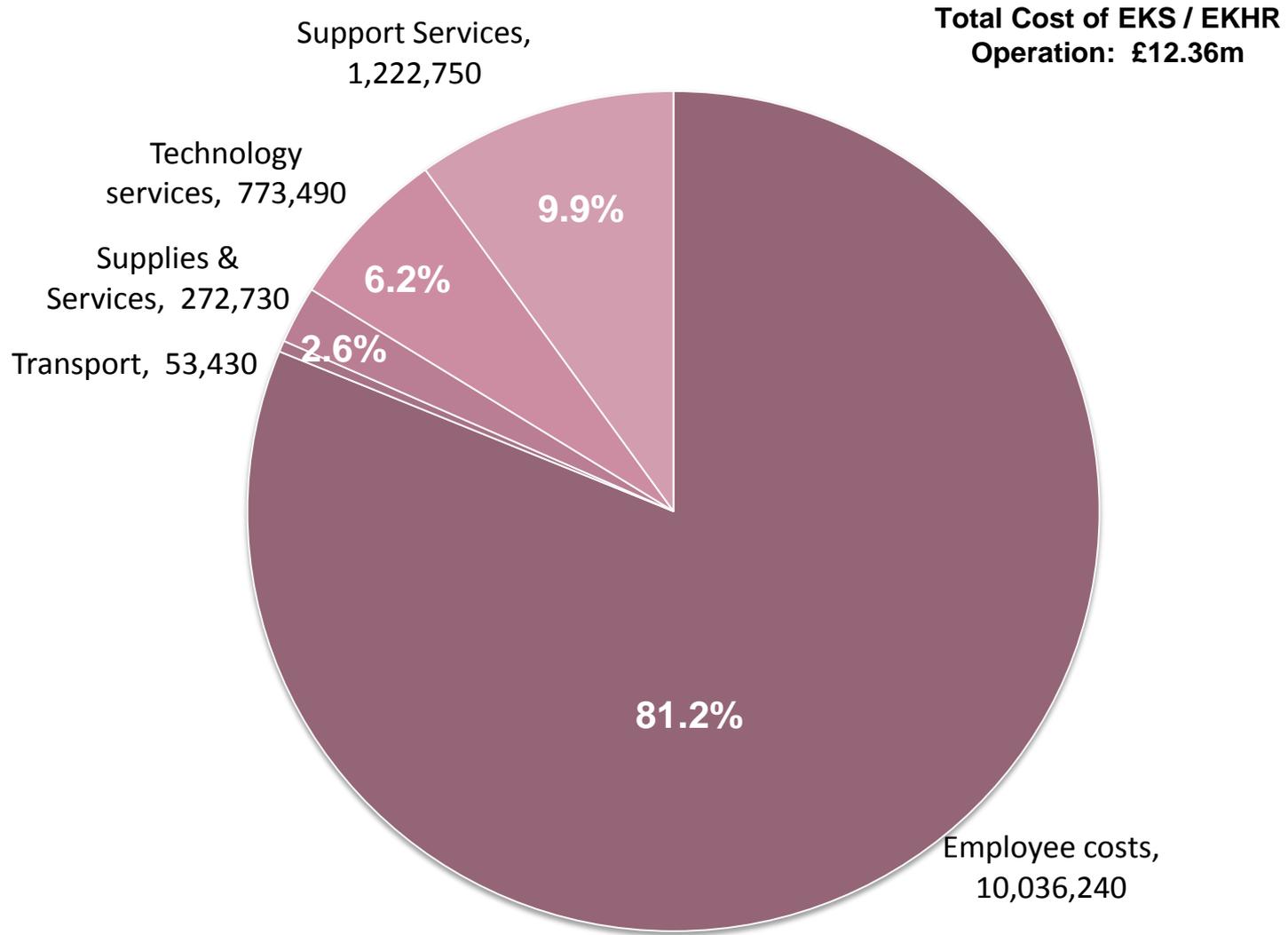
Ramsgate District Office



Drivers for Digital Change

- Society and Customer expectations
 - Simplicity
 - Easier Access (self serve, mobile and appointments)
 - Clear, timely and accurate information
 - Managing Demand better
- Financial
 - cost reduction in back office process
 - Shifting from expensive service provision to lower cost channels
- Technology
 - New systems reduce mundane process & enable staff to focus on work that best utilises human talent
 - Innovation and alignment across the sector
 - Improve compliance and resilience (e.g: PCI DSS, Cloud solutions)

EKS Operating Costs



Proposal

- Ramsgate District Office to close from 1st September 2017
- Current transactions to be moved to alternative channels / methods
- Transition plan put in place

Current situation

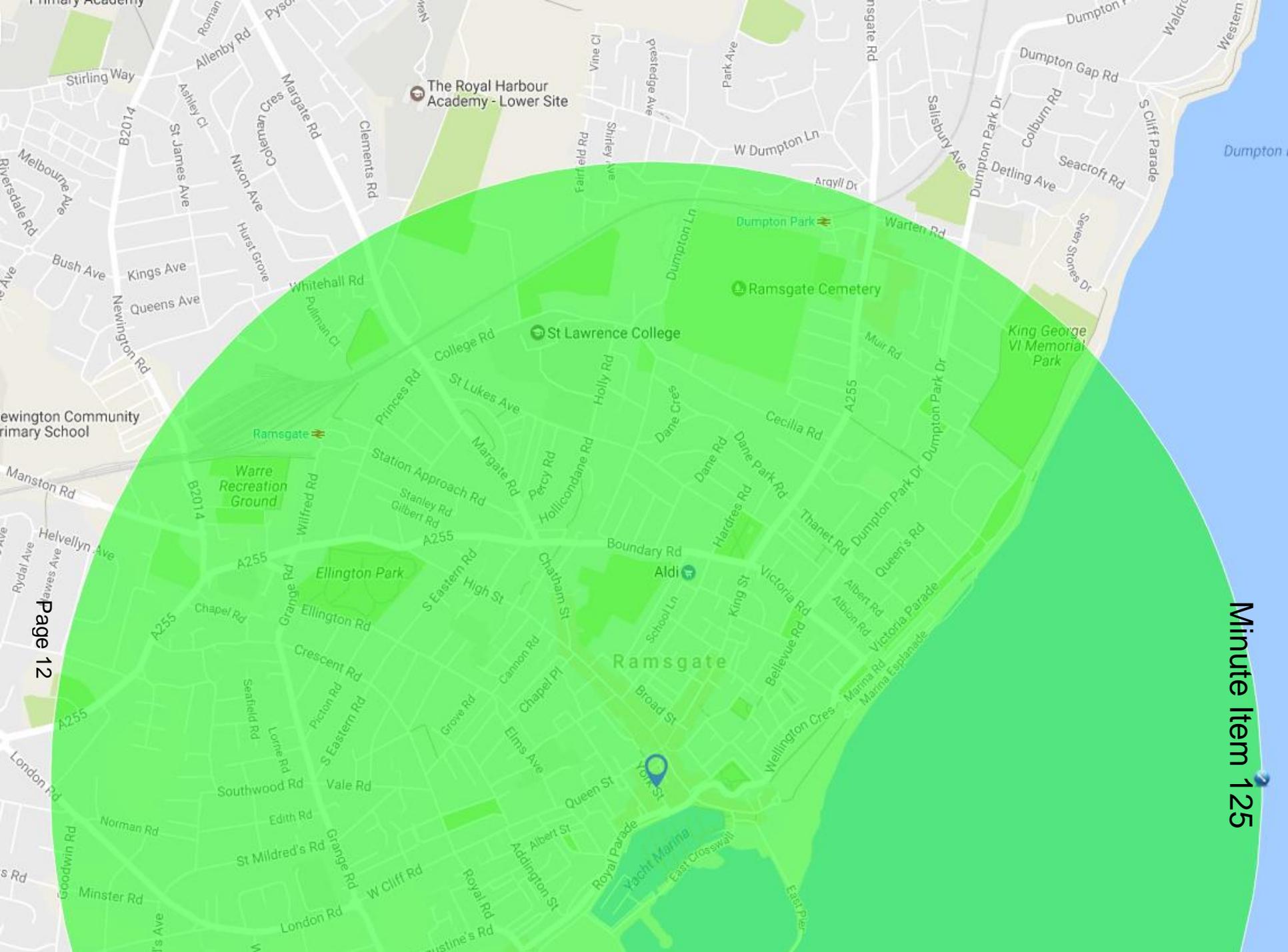
- Open 8.45am to 12.30pm – weekdays
- Resourced by 2 x staff
- 36% of transactions handing in documents
- Reducing footfall (14% year-on-year)
- Customer insight work
- Digital initiatives

How Customer Service is already changing

- Afternoon appointments
- Review of face-to-face in East Kent
- Web chat
- Floorwalkers
- Assisted digital service

“Average” Ramsgate D.O. customer

- Female
- Aged 35-44
- Not disabled
- Travels 1.3 miles
- Bringing in paperwork



The Royal Harbour Academy - Lower Site

St Lawrence College

Ramsgate Cemetery

King George VI Memorial Park

Warre Recreation Ground

Ellington Park

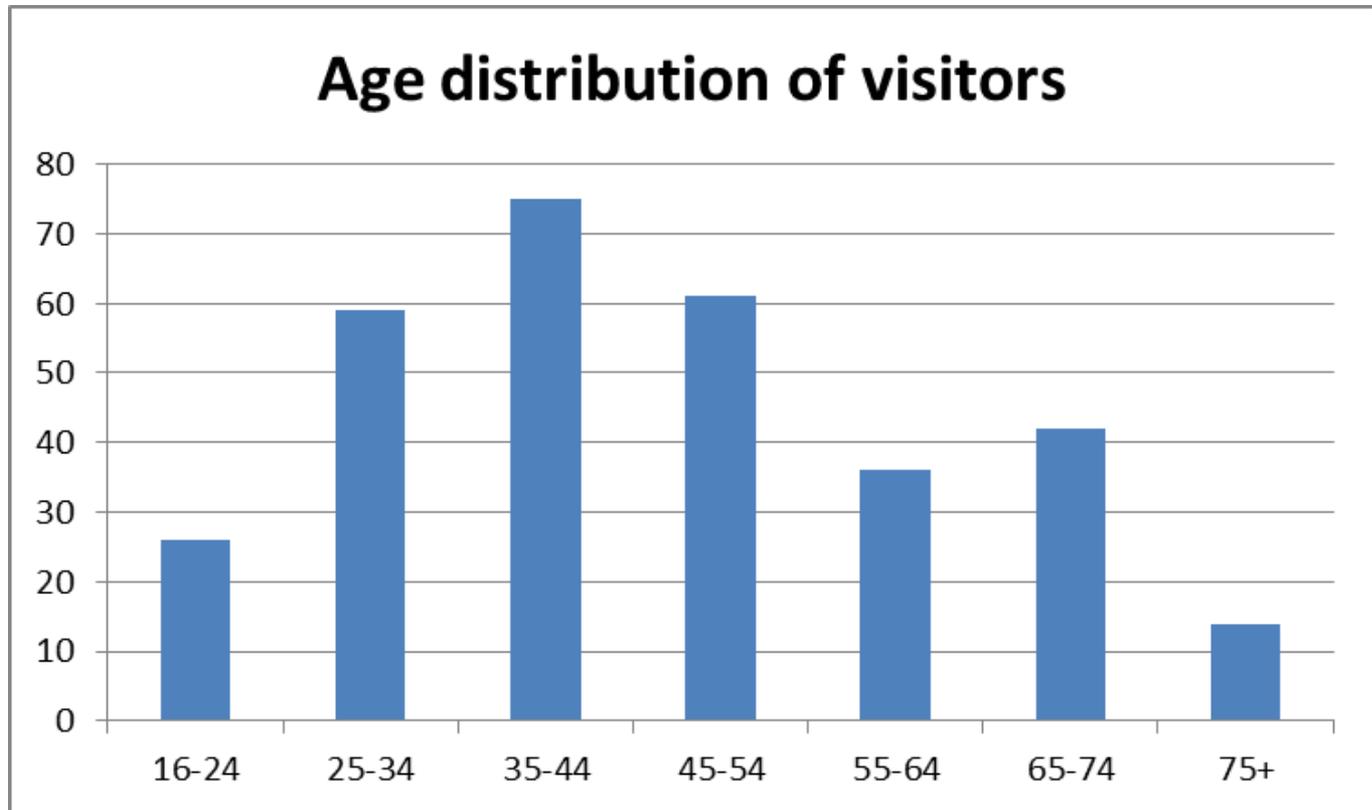
Ramsgate

York St

Minute Item 125

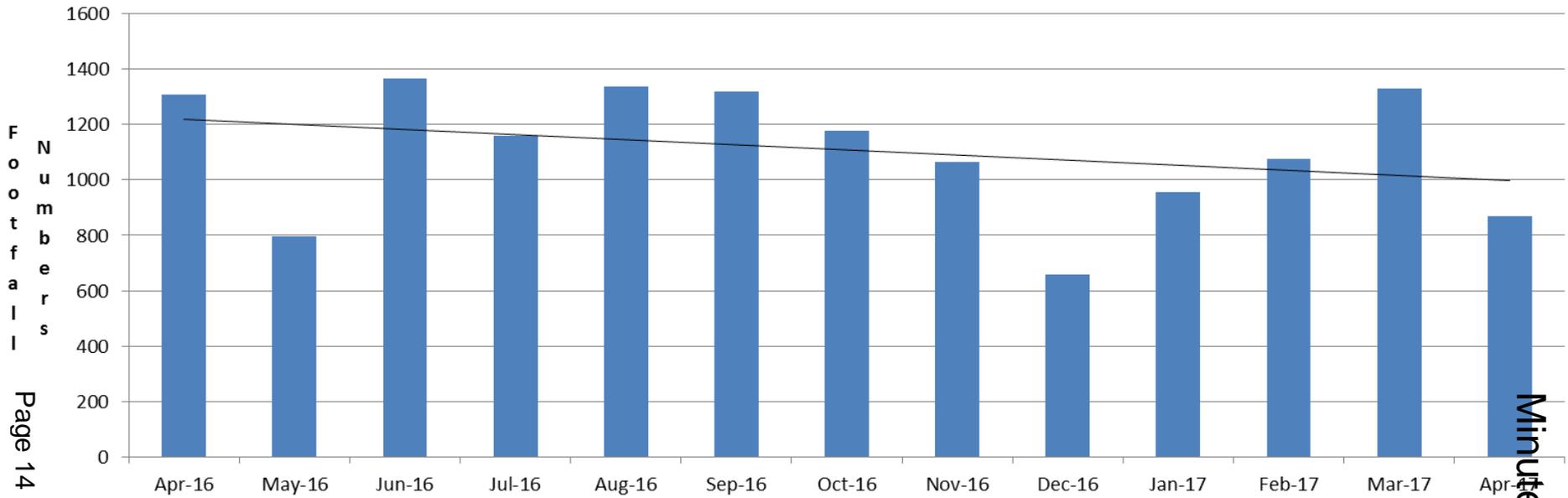
Page 12

Age profile of RDO customers



RDO visitors

Ramsgate Footfall



What are your customers telling us?

“But you are here so why not use the facilities – you are being paid anyway”

“I know I can report it online or call you but all the time you are here I will come in”

“Why would I go online when I can come here where there is no queue”

**“If I pay here I know it has gone through,
if I pay online I don’t know if it has gone
through or if I have done it right.”**

**“I can do it online but as I am passing I
dropped in”**

“It’s nice not to wait”

ONS Internet stats 2016

Figure 3: Recent internet users in last 3 months by age group and sex, UK, 2016

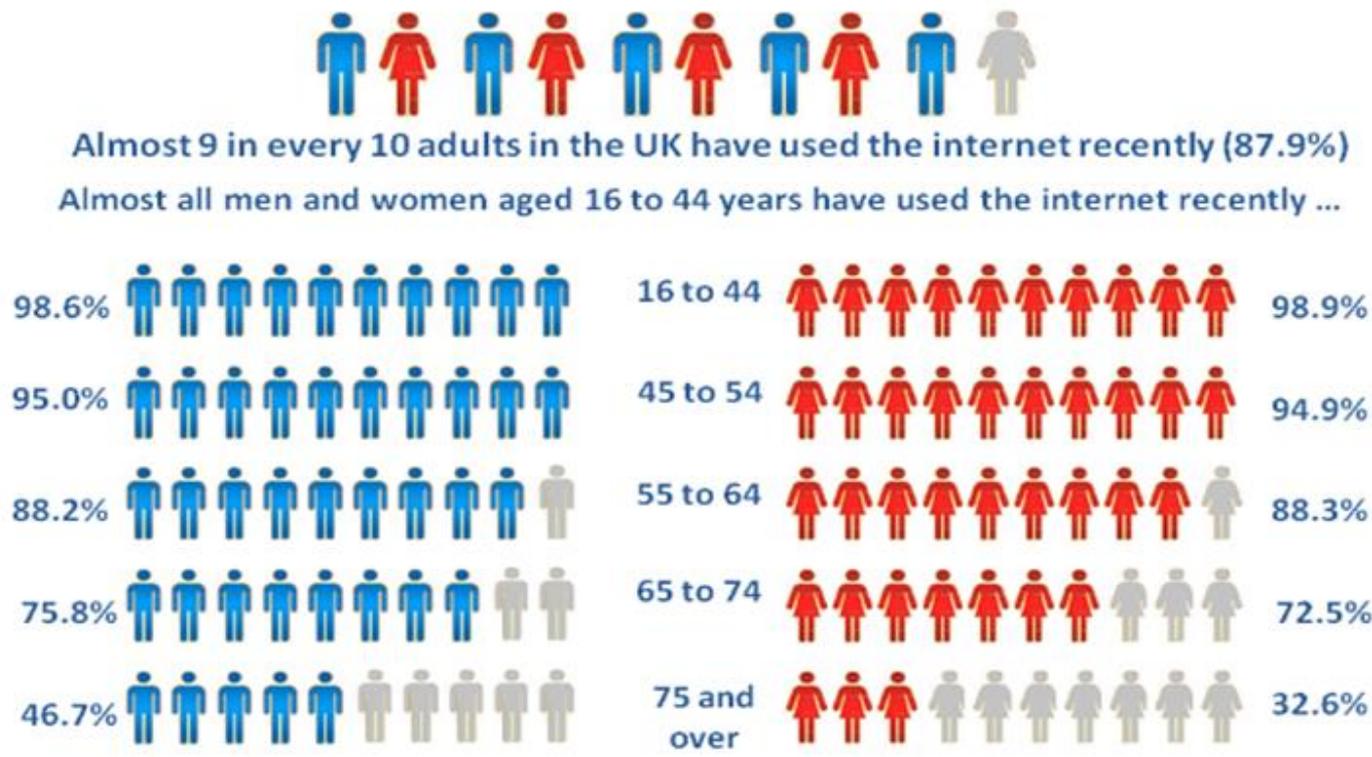
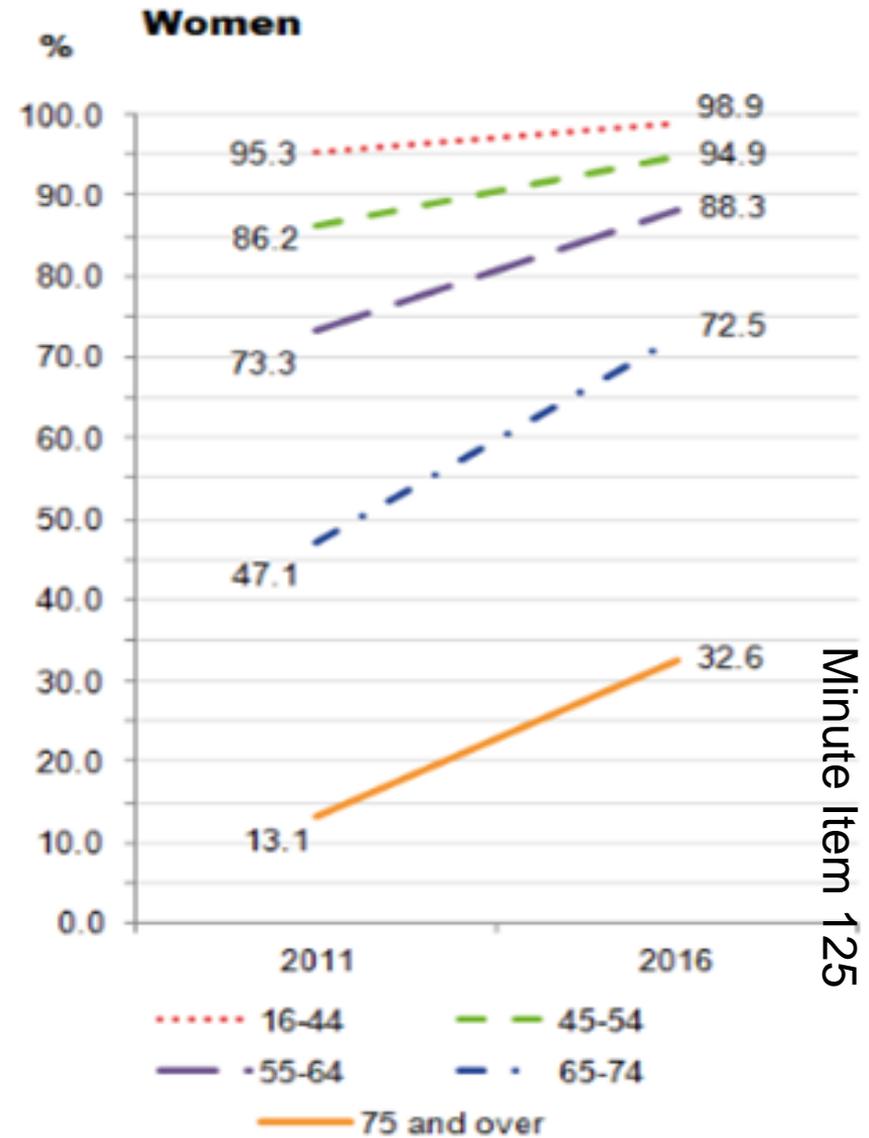
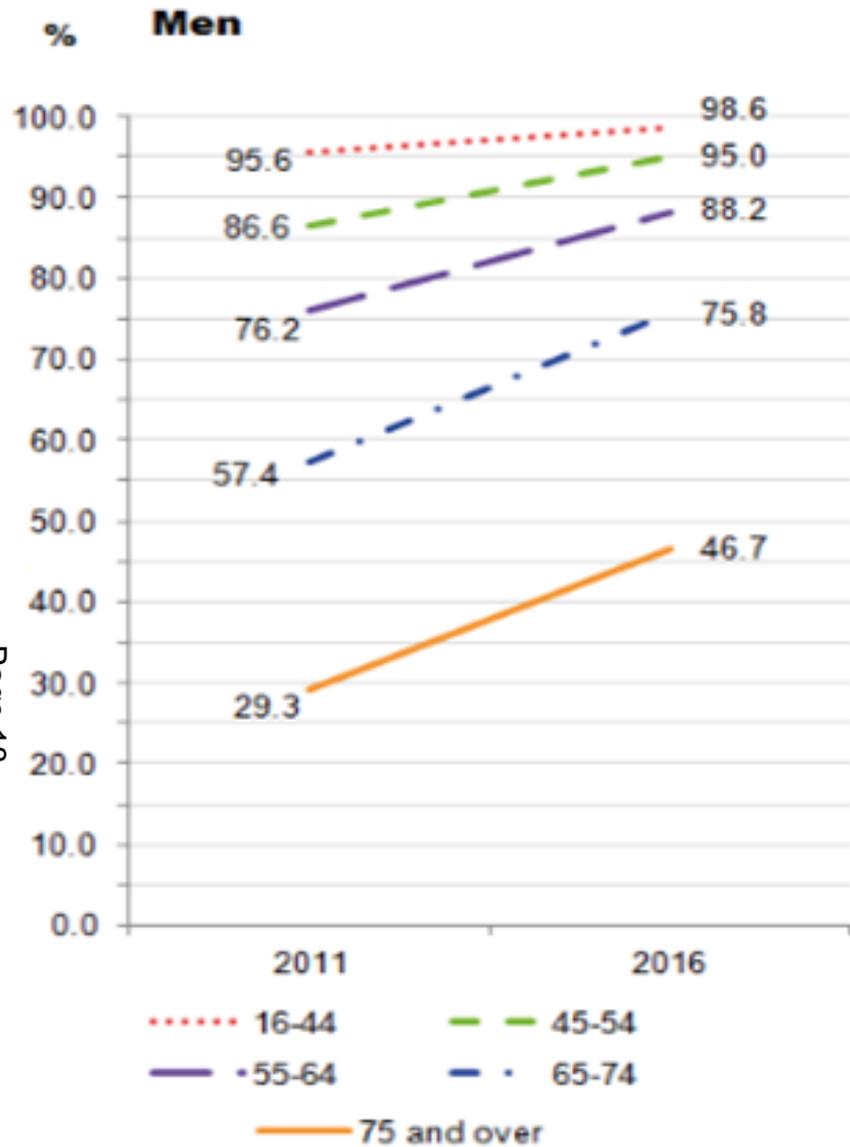
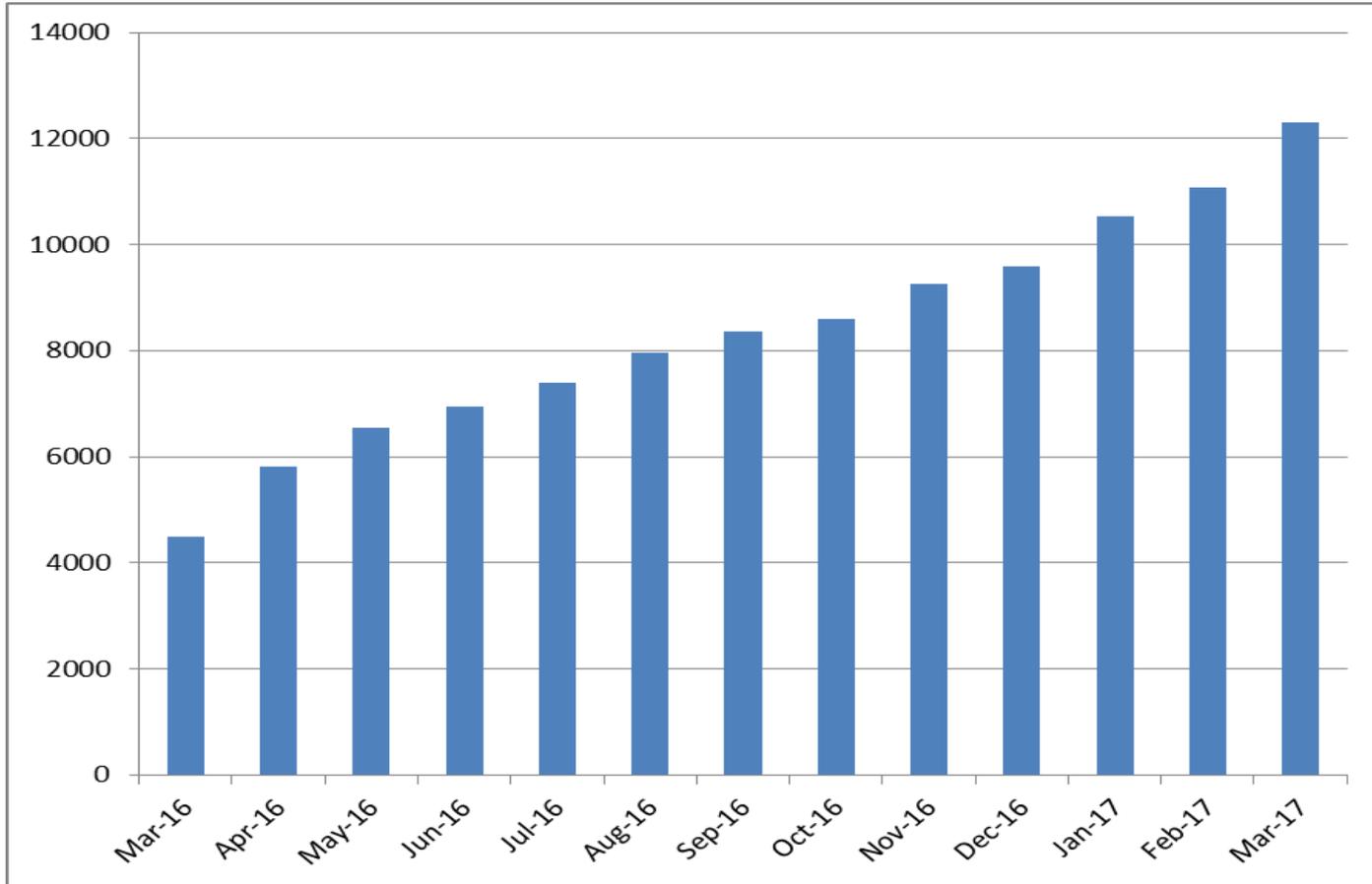


Figure 4: Recent internet use in 2011 and 2016 by age group and sex, UK



Council Tax E-Billing





age UK

Minute Item 125

What happens next ?

- Ramsgate Office will close on Friday 1st September
- Arrangements in place for waste/recycling
- Transition plan in place
- Help and assistance for customers

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