

## CABINET

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Tuesday, 22 <sup>nd</sup> October 2019
<b>Report Subject</b>	Flintshire Connects Annual Report
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Governance)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the annual performance of Flintshire Connects, the service responsible for providing face to face and digital access to Council services in 2018/19.

Flintshire Connects is integral to the Council's Customer and Digital Strategies in terms of providing high quality, accessible, responsive and cost effective public services.

As part of the Council's business planning process, Flintshire Connects completed a review of its structure in 2018/19 which led to a £46,000 efficiency, avoiding any detrimental impact on customer access to services.

This report provides an overview of performance in 2018/19 and information relating to customer demand following the implementation of a revised structure.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Cabinet note the high performance and customer satisfaction across Flintshire Connects Centres.
2	That Cabinet support the review of the services supported by Flintshire Connects in 2019/20.
3	That Cabinet note the important role of Flintshire Connects to support the Council's Customer and Digital Strategies.

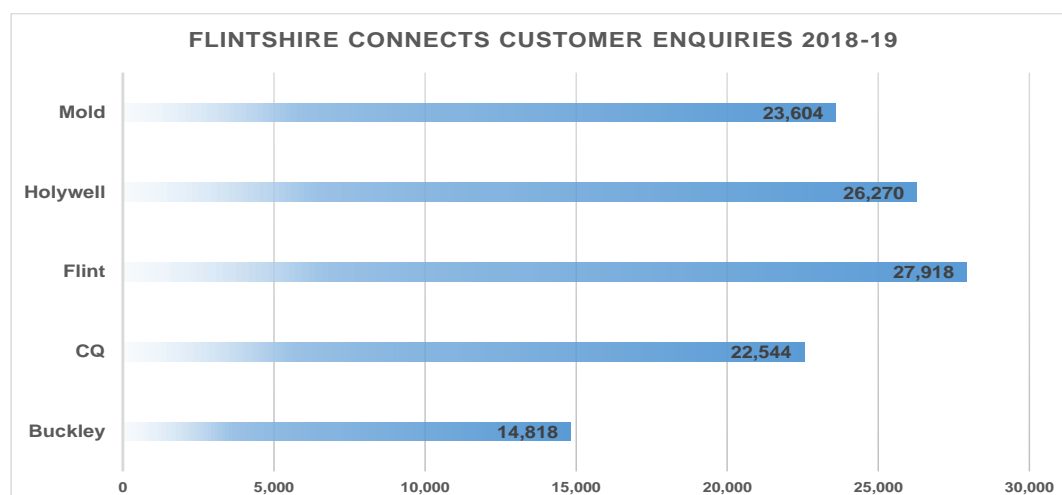
## REPORT DETAILS

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING FLINTSHIRE CONNECTS</b>																																																	
	<b>Background</b>																																																	
1.01	Flintshire Connects is delivered in partnership with Aura, Job Centre Plus and North Wales Police. There are five Connects Centres across the county providing face to face support for vulnerable customers who need assistance to access services as well as those who need support to access services online. Customers can access a range of services at Connects Centres and a number of those are statutory e.g. Blue Badges, Social Housing, Homelessness, Revenues, Benefits and Birth Declarations.																																																	
1.02	Flintshire Connects also support digitally excluded customers, helping them to embrace digital technology by providing advice and support to increase their confidence to use digital technology as a way of contacting the Council and third sector organisations.																																																	
1.03	12.05 Customer Service Advisors and one Team Leader are employed in Flintshire Connects to resolve customer enquiries at first point of contact thus reducing duplication, releasing back office efficiencies and improving the service for customers.																																																	
	<b>Annual Performance 2018/19</b>																																																	
1.04	Flintshire Connects transferred to the Governance portfolio in 2018/19 and a revised structure was introduced on 1 June, 2018. In addition to a £30,000 efficiency in 2017/18, a £46,000 efficiency was achieved in 2018/19 through the introduction of new opening hours (09:00-16:30) which enabled the service to reduce its FTE whilst maintaining a service across all five Connects Centres.																																																	
1.05	Whilst Flintshire Connects has revised its opening hours to achieve efficiencies, the demand on the service has increased by 16% in 2018/19. The number of customers visiting Connects Centres has increased from 96,633 in 2017/18 to 115,154 in 2018/19.																																																	
1.06	Customer satisfaction remains high with an average of 84% of customers very satisfied that their enquiry was resolved by Flintshire Connects and a further 7% indicating they were satisfied.																																																	
1.07	Table 1 illustrates the demand across Connects Centres in 2018/19 and the breakdown of customer enquiries by service type:  <b>Table 1</b>																																																	
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Concessionary Travel & Transport	767	902	788	781	1,606	4,844
Council Tax	986	2,117	1,935	1,591	1,692	8,321
Debt Enforcement	30	107	90	86	45	358
Education / Coleg Cambia	32	75	51	27	22	207
Electoral Services	23	20	56	44	32	175
Env Health / Public Protection / ASB	11	43	57	73	24	208
Housing General	371	751	1,327	792	507	3,748
Housing Rent	570	1,320	1,397	1,573	1,003	5,863
Housing Repairs	207	435	971	1,124	414	3,151
Housing Solutions	375	1,057	1,497	714	465	4,108
JCP / NWP / Library	52	185	661	704	57	1,659
Language Line / Migrant Workers Support	0	27	30	27	4	88
Non - Council / Foodbank / DAF	149	272	287	435	195	1,338
Planning	12	24	31	42	22	131
Reception Duties	92	224	6,523	1,732	132	8,703
Recycling Collection	3,440	3,883	2,475	5,026	7,272	22,096
Resident Parking	9	79	213	71	69	441
Self Service - Signposted	103	322	192	328	244	1,189
Service Charges	28	22	42	51	37	180
Social Services	62	52	553	91	96	854
Streetscene & Highways	1,655	1,592	1,598	2,050	2,402	9,297
Tourist Information	4	1	12	14	33	64
Universal Credit	95	346	152	58	57	708
Van Bans	54	78	99	169	62	462
Welsh Speaking	7	2	5	7	32	53
	<b>14,818</b>	<b>22,544</b>	<b>27,918</b>	<b>26,270</b>	<b>23,604</b>	<b>115,154</b>

1.08 After waste services the second highest volume of customer contact relates to assisted digital which has increased from 11,570 to 12,881 in 2018/19. This reflects the Council's commitment to supporting customers to access online services. Other noticeable increases include Blue Badge enquiries up from 7,470 to 8,748 and Council Tax up from 7,259 to 8,321.

**Table 2**



1.09	All Connects Centres have seen an increase in the number of customers accessing services over the last 12 months and Table 2 illustrates that Flint is the busiest Connects Centre accounting for 24% of visitors.																								
1.10	<p>Table 3 illustrates the increase in footfall across all Connects Centres with a noticeable increase at Buckley, Flint and Mold:</p> <p><b>Table 3</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Buckley</th> <th>CQ</th> <th>Flint</th> <th>Holywell</th> <th>Mold</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2017/18</td> <td>11,332</td> <td>19,908</td> <td>20,978</td> <td>25,494</td> <td>18,921</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018/19</td> <td>14,818</td> <td>22,544</td> <td>27,918</td> <td>26,270</td> <td>23,604</td> </tr> <tr> <td>↑</td> <td><b>24%</b></td> <td><b>12%</b></td> <td><b>25%</b></td> <td><b>3%</b></td> <td><b>20%</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Buckley	CQ	Flint	Holywell	Mold	2017/18	11,332	19,908	20,978	25,494	18,921	2018/19	14,818	22,544	27,918	26,270	23,604	↑	<b>24%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>20%</b>
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1.11	A useful breakdown of the top ten services by each Connects Centre is given in Appendix 1.																								
1.12	<p><b>Key Service Updates</b></p> <p><b>Blue Badges</b> have been administered by Flintshire Connects since 2014 using the Welsh Government's toolkit for assessing eligibility removing the burden on GPs and cost to the Local Authority. Following legislative changes across Wales that has widened the criteria for Blue Badges to include people with cognitive impairments and those who have temporary restrictions in their mobility, Flintshire Connects administered an additional 1,278 applications in 2018/19, a total of 8,748. The Department for Transport also reviewed its processes in 2018 and introduced new partners which directly impacted Flintshire Connects. Flintshire Connects has developed new working partnerships with Valtech who provide direct support to the Council as the host service for applying for Blue Badges including an online portal via gov.uk; and Allied Publicity Services who manufacture Blue Badges on behalf of the Council.</p>																								
1.13	<b>Birth Declarations</b> were piloted in Connah's Quay in 2016 and extended to Holywell and Flint thereafter. Following requests from the community in Buckley, birth declarations were extended to this location in December 2018. The benefit of providing birth declarations at Flintshire Connects not only means parents can register their child's birth locally, trained Customer Service Advisors can also provide advice and guidance in respect of Child Tax Credits, Housing Benefits, Universal Credit and wider benefits such as mother and baby groups and library services.																								
1.14	<b>Homelessness</b> triages are undertaken at all Connects Centres. During 2018/19 Flintshire Connects assisted 4,108 people in respect of their housing needs. Initial enquiries are managed by Customer Service Advisors with only urgent cases and those people requiring social housing being referred to Housing Solutions or SARTH thereby releasing capacity in Housing Solutions to focus on complex and urgent cases.																								
1.15	<b>Universal Credit</b> was rolled out in Flintshire in 2017, the most significant welfare reform had an impact on Flintshire Connects who played a key part in the provision of support to those people most affected. Flintshire Connects supported 3,340 people in 2017/18 but as those people in receipt																								

	<p>of Universal Credit become more confident in the use of online services following support from Flintshire Connects, the number of people supported in 2018/19 reduced to 708. The digital support funded by the Department for Work and Pensions ceased on 31 March, 2019 and the reduction in footfall means Customer Service Advisors can focus on other areas of support.</p>
1.16	<p><b>Council Tax Reduction Scheme</b> enquiries increased in 2018/19 from 7,259 to 8,321. Customer Service Advisors are trained to deal with enquiries at first point of contact which has improved the customer experience and first time resolution which enables back office services to focus on more specialist and complex cases.</p>
1.17	<p><b>Digital Services</b> increased in a number of areas in 2018 providing Customer Service Advisors with a number of online solutions to access services more quickly. New online services include Foodbank referrals, School Uniform Grants, Free School Meals and Occupational Therapy referrals. Flintshire Connects also identified an increase in self-service around transport e.g. timetables and bus/train passes.</p>
1.18	<p><b>Assisted Digital</b> is a key priority for the Council. Flintshire Connects play a key role in supporting the implementation of digital initiatives for those customers who may be digitally excluded to help them embrace digital technologies. During 2018/19 Customer Service Advisors assisted 12,881 customers which is an increase of 1,311 compared to the previous year. Of key importance was the launch of My Account enabling customers to view and track enquiries online, and pay for Council services.</p>
1.19	<p><b>2020/21 Priorities</b></p> <p>Flintshire Connects plays a major role in the delivery of the Customer and Digital Strategies. Customer Service Advisors are skilled personnel who contribute to the achievement of the Connected Council theme within the Council Plan 2019/20 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing high quality, accessible, responsive and cost effective public services;</li> <li>• Improving customer service response and resolution times;</li> <li>• Increased self-service;</li> <li>• Ability for customers to pay for services electronically.</li> </ul>
1.20	<p>The role of Flintshire Connects will continue to change and develop as the Council's programme to increase the availability of digital services progresses. Flintshire Connects will continue to provide an important function where face to face contact is required and will continue to strive to deliver these services in full at first point of contact.</p>
1.21	<p>Specific priorities moving in to 2019/20 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Installation of new <b>payment kiosks</b> to provide modern facilities for cash and card payments throughout Connects Centres;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of <b>UK Visas and Immigration</b> services to support EU citizens apply for EU Settled Status if they wish to remain in the UK when the United Kingdom leaves the EU and other visa services;</li> <li>• <b>Renovation works at Holywell Connects</b> to increase the floor space for Job Centre Plus enabling their appointments to be evenly distributed between Flint and Holywell, also increasing rent;</li> <li>• <b>Review customer facing services</b> to identify those services which cannot be delivered digitally or by telephone to ensure the best use of resources including reception duties;</li> <li>• Introduction of <b>Transport for Wales</b> online application for concessionary travel cards across Wales;</li> <li>• <b>Blue Badge</b> review to ensure the efficient use of resources across Flintshire Connects and Benefits who administer applications for those people who automatically qualify;</li> <li>• <b>Assisted digital</b> support in respect of new online services introduced by the Council.</li> </ul>
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<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	There are no revenue / capital implications.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
3.01	This report provides the annual performance report for Flintshire Connects. At this point there are no proposed changes or actions and as such no impact or risks have been identified. Subject to approval by Cabinet of recommendation 2 of this report, as part of the review of services supported by Flintshire Connects, a full integrated impact assessment will be conducted for each service that is reviewed moving forward.

<b>4.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT</b>
4.01	None.

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	Appendix 1 – breakdown of the top 10 services accessed by customers at each Connects Centre during 2018/19.

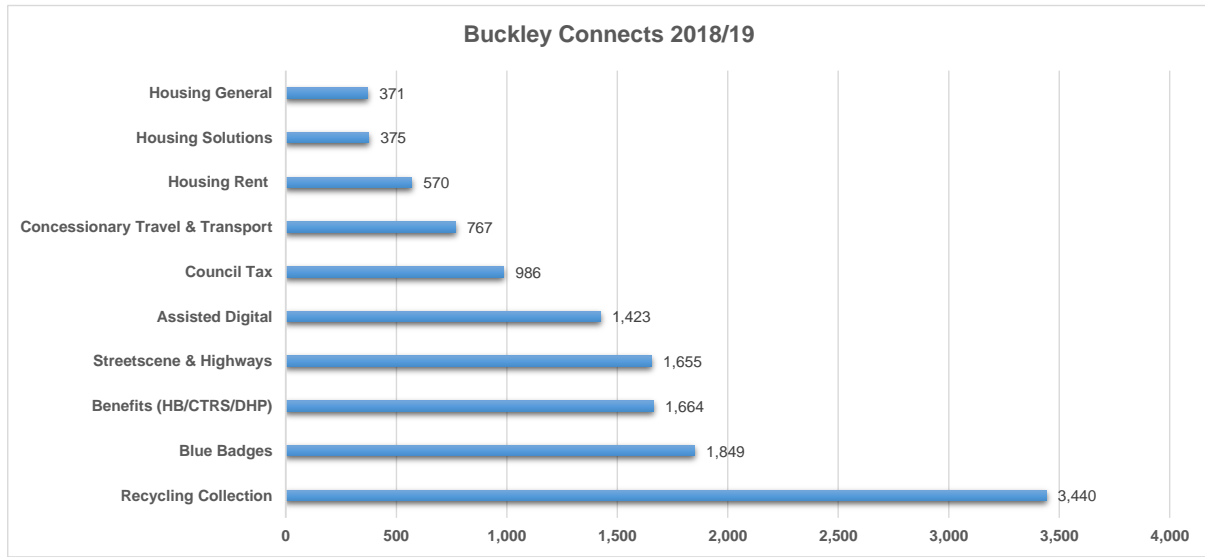
<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	None.

<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	<p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Rebecca Jones, Customer Contact Service Manager  <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 702413  <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:rebecca.jones@flintshire.gov.uk">rebecca.jones@flintshire.gov.uk</a></p>

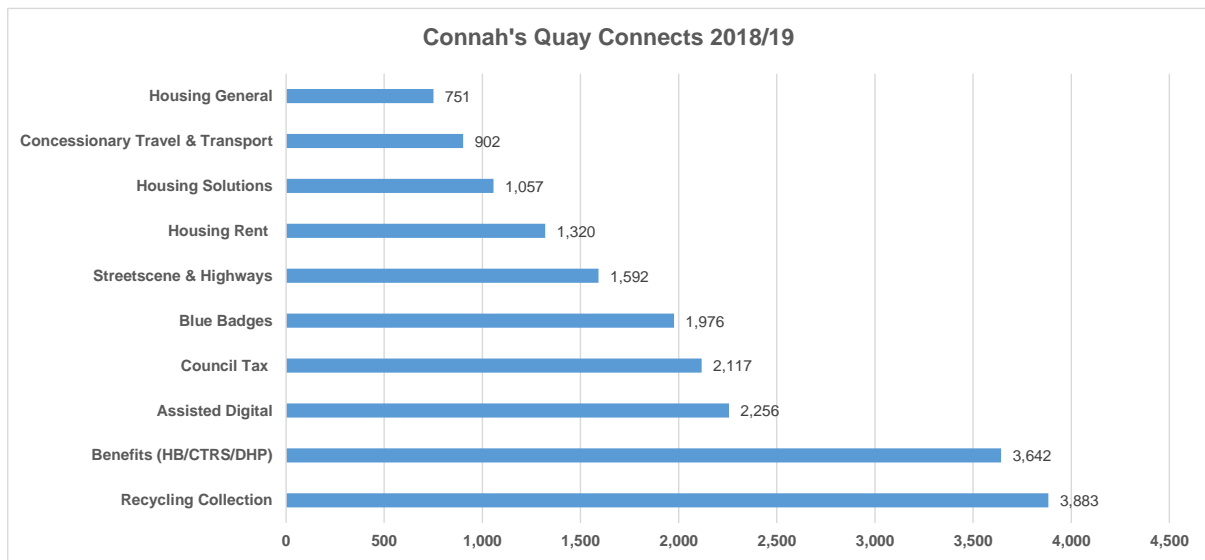
<b>8.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
	<p><b>Digital Services</b> - the electronic delivery of information including data and content across multiple platforms and devices such as a website or mobile phone.</p> <p><b>UK Visas and Immigration</b> - is a division of the Home Office responsible for the United Kingdom's visa system.</p> <p><b>Settled Status</b> - means being both ordinarily resident in the UK and without any immigration restriction on the length of stay in the UK.</p>

The following information provides a breakdown of the top 10 services accessed by customers at each Connects Centre during 2018/19:

**Buckley**

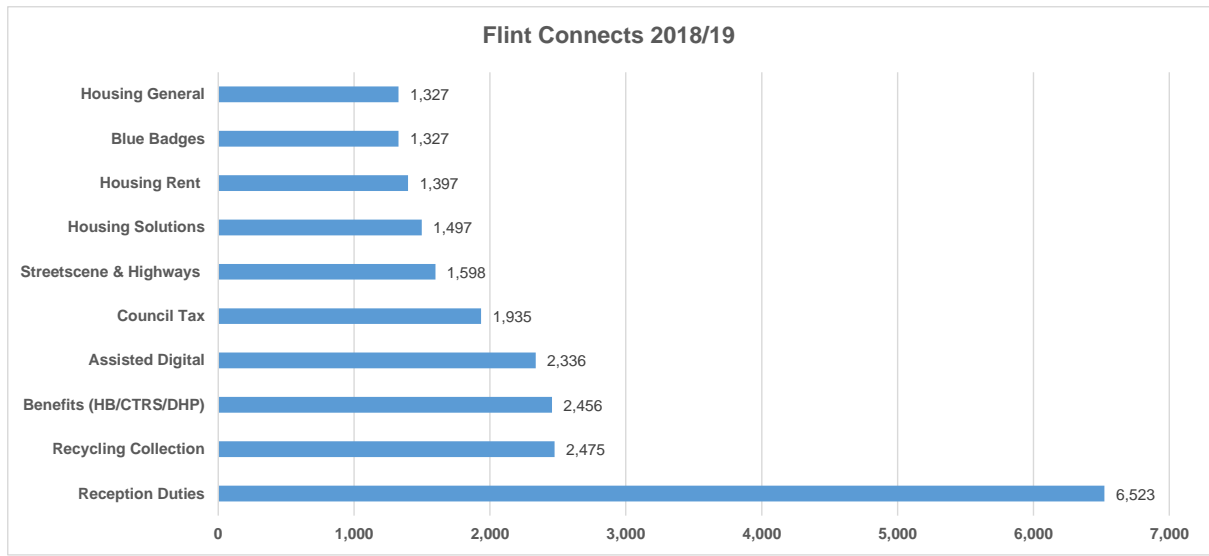


**Connah's Quay**

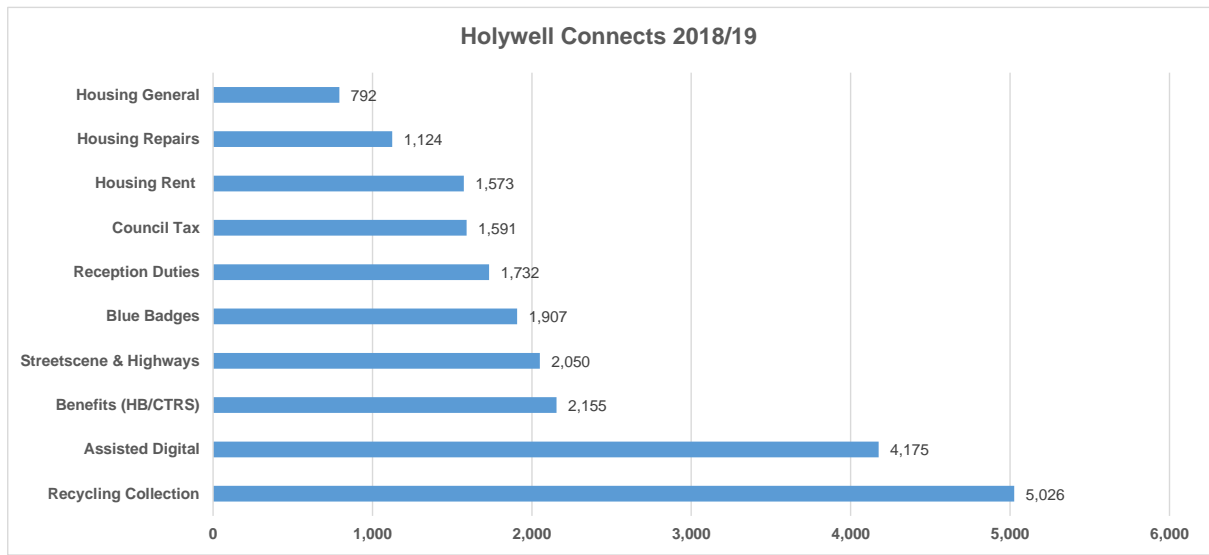




## Flint



## Holywell



## Mold

