



## Communities Scrutiny Group

Thursday, 6 October 2022

### Customer Access Strategy

## Report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services

### Cabinet Portfolio Holder Finance and Customer Access, Councillor G Moore

#### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The Council's last active Customer Access Strategy expired in 2017. At that time the Council's Customer Services offering, and the demand on that service, had been stable for a number of years.
- 1.2. Given the significant changes in resident behaviour brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, it was felt necessary to review where we are now, the direction in which to develop access to customer services in the coming years, and also how best to ensure that all customers that wish to access our services can do so at a time and in a way that suits them.
- 1.3. A Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 has been drafted and put forward to Cabinet for approval on 11 October 2022. This Strategy is included at **Appendix One** for information and the Communities Scrutiny Group is asked to consider a number of points outlined in paragraph 4.6 of this report in relation to the action plan contained within the Strategy.

#### 2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group review the action plan contained within the Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 and make any further suggestions to officers they feel appropriate.

#### 3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Council continues to look to improve its approach to Customer Access. In addition, the Council has seen significant changes in the ways in which customers are accessing Council services as a result of behaviours influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.2. The Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 has been created to encapsulate the current position with regard to customer access and set out how the Council intends to develop Customer Services over the next three years in line with customer demand.

## 4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. Rushcliffe Borough Council is committed to enabling residents who require help from the Council to access that help in a way that suits them and at a time that suits them. This means that our Customer Services offering extends past the call centre and front desk operations of past strategies and embraces the changes brought about by increased access to technology and ever improving acceptance of use of technology as an efficient way of contacting the Council.
- 4.2. When comparing pre-Covid data against more recent figures across all of our contact channels this shift can clearly be seen:

Channel	Pre-Covid monthly average	Current monthly average	Trend
Phone	9,094	7,381	↓
Face-to-face - WB	816	276	↓
Face-to-face – Contact Points	109	72	↓
Email	1,352	1,921	↑
Web	478	692	↑
E-forms	4,353	7,009	↑

- 4.3. Smartphone ownership amongst adults is as high as 84% nationally. Many customers are now seeking help electronically first and only contacting the Council in person when they have been unable to 'self-serve' ie fix the problem themselves. However, there remain customers who are unable or unwilling to contact the Council electronically. These are likely to be some of our most vulnerable customers and it is important that we continue to provide services that meet their needs also.
- 4.4. Therefore, the Council's draft Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 does not cast aside its face-to-face or telephone access. It continues to offer these vital contact channels whilst focusing development in its growth area of self-service via electronic means. These contact channels are more cost effective and scalable enabling the Council to do more against a reduced budget.
- 4.5. Over the life of this Strategy, the Council will look to:
- Explore proactive text messaging as an information delivery tool (much in the same way your dentist may now send a reminder that you have an appointment tomorrow)
  - Investigate new contact channels such as automated chat-bots (as are used by energy companies and online banks to help customers find the answers they are looking for online or respond to simple requests such as 'when is my next bin collection')
  - Develop our self-serve offering at contact points to assist customers when we are not physically present (in the same way that you now order your items on a digital touch screen rather than with a piece of paper in Argos)

- Undertake the My Account phase two project to integrate back-office systems and provide greater access to information for individual customers through the website (from 'who's my Councillor' to 'when is my next bin collection' and 'when is my next benefit payment due')
- Launch a new corporate website for the Council which makes it easier for customers to find the information they need and transact the business they need to undertake
- Identify and develop new online services by using data to recognise common areas of contact through traditional means and creating additional online services where required – or increasing awareness of existing services
- Install free wifi at customer access points
- Monitor customer services standards across the organisation to ensure equitable access for all
- Review our existing service level agreements with partners to identify areas in which we could expand or enhance services to benefit our customers
- Continually seek customer feedback through mystery shopper and satisfaction surveys to improve the customer experience
- Review existing technological solutions to ensure usage and digital capability is maximised
- Work towards reducing the Council's reliance on print and postage as a means of contacting customers.

4.6. The Communities Scrutiny Group is asked to consider the following points:

- Do the four high level themes contained within the Action Plan accurately represent the areas of development the Group feel it is appropriate to explore?
- Do the fourteen tasks build upon the existing and established customer service offering?
- Do the fourteen tasks reflect the Council's corporate priorities and approach to customer service?
- Will the fourteen tasks make it easier for residents to access services in a way and at a time of their own choosing?
- Will the fourteen tasks build upon the channel shift (towards more efficient and less expensive customer contact options) and customer behavioural change seen through the Covid-19 pandemic?
- Can the Group identify any additional problems that their residents have accessing services at the Council that will not be resolved by tasks outlined in the Action Plan?

## **5. Risks and Uncertainties**

5.1. There are no risks or uncertainties involved in bringing the Customer Access Strategy Action Plan to Communities Scrutiny Group for discussion. However, there are significant risks to the Council in not developing services that meet resident needs and that allow customers to access Council services in a variety of different ways to suit their personal needs and circumstances.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1. Financial Implications**

The developments outlined in the draft Customer Access Strategy Action Plan will be contained within existing budgets.

### **6.2. Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications contained within the recommendations of this report.

### **6.3. Equalities Implications**

The Council is actively seeking to ensure all customers can access the services they require in a manner and at a time that suits them. This increases equality.

### **6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications**

There are no Section 17 implications contained within the recommendations of this report.

## **7. Link to Corporate Priorities**

Quality of Life	Customers should be able to access the services they need, when they need them and in a way that suits them. Satisfaction with the Council and the services it provides are substantial factors in contributing towards a good quality of life.
Efficient Services	Development of further access to Council services through electronic means will lead to improved processes and more efficient services.
Sustainable Growth	Customer access should meet the demands created by growth within the Borough
The Environment	Remote customer access reduces the need for travel.

## **8. Recommendations**

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group review the action plan contained within the Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 and make any further suggestions to officers they feel appropriate.

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<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix One – Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025