



Cabinet

Tuesday, 11 October 2022

Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025

Report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for 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. 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.
- 1.2. A draft Customer Access Strategy is included at Appendix One for consideration and adoption.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet approves the adoption of the Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 at Appendix One.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

The Council does not currently have a clear and approved 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. The Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 has been drafted 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. Nationally suggests that Smartphone ownership amongst adults is as high as 84%. 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 budge.
- 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

- Installing free Wi-Fi 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.

5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

The Council could have continued to operate its Customer Services offering without a clear strategy, but this could have led to the Council failing to maximise the benefits of changing customer behaviours brought about by the pandemic which may ultimately lead to more accessible and more cost-effective services.

6. Risks and Uncertainties

There are no risks or uncertainties involved with forwarding the draft Customer Access Strategy to Cabinet for consideration. 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.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial Implications

The developments outlined in the draft Customer Access Strategy are covered by existing and future looking budgets.

7.2. Legal Implications

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

7.3. 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 for all residents.

7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

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

8. 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	
The Environment	

9. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet approves the adoption of the Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025 at Appendix One.

For more information contact:	Peter Linfield Director – Finance and Corporate Services 0115 914 8439 plinfield@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	
List of appendices:	Appendix One – draft Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025