	Growth and Development Scrutiny Group
	Tuesday, 17 March 2020
	Customer Services and Digital Transformation

Report of the Executive Manager – Transformation

1. Purpose of report

1.1. This report and appendices provide an overview of the Council's current customer service offer in Rushcliffe. It includes information on the channels available for residents to contact the Council, as well as the existing partnerships that support the offer.

1.2. This is intended to be an initial report that sets out the current offer for the Group to consider and to identify any future items for further scrutiny.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

a) Notes the information detailed in this report; and

b) Considers future items for further scrutiny.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1. The report covers support provided directly by the Council's Customer Service Team and that which is delivered in partnership with other agencies. It is important for Councillors to understand the current arrangements and resources when considering service delivery.

3.2. The report provides an update on the development of the Customer Service Centre and offer since 2010 when it was last scrutinised.

4. Supporting Information

4.1. The essential principles of customer service remain unchanged but with the development of new technology expectations have been raised. Rushcliffe has to ensure it is keeping up with these changing expectations and delivering an effective, efficient and high quality service to all.

4.2.   Since 2010 there have been several key factors that have changed the way residents are able to contact the council:

- Increased digital methods (web/email/My Account/social media)
- Working with partner agencies
- Increased access to services at Contact Points around Rushcliffe (Bingham, Cotgrave and East Leake).

4.3.   Customers can also still contact the Council on the phone. There is the ambition, wherever possible, to resolve all calls at the first point of contact and so the Team are highly trained to deal with many different enquiries that come through. This improves the service customers receive but means that calls can take longer to resolve, impacting on call answering times.

	Average enq Duration Sept 2017	Number Of Enquiries	Average enq Duration Sept 2019	Number Of Enquiries
Home Alarms	1 min 17 sec	80	12 mins 58 sec	108
Strategic Housing	6 mins 45 sec	470	11 mins 36 sec	356
Pest Control	2 mins 26 sec	370	11 mins 2 sec	218
Licensing	4 mins 40 sec	404	10 mins 29 sec	296

Digital Transformation

4.4.   The introduction of more electronic methods of accessing Council services has provided residents with more choice. The table below shows the change in the way that customers are choosing to contact the Council comparing data from 2013/14 with 2018/19.

Access channels	**2013/14**	**2018/19**
Telephones	117,531	98,647
Face to Face (inc Contact Points)	27,469	18,413
Emails to Customer Services	3,842	10,457
Web reports	3,101	5,126
Total enquiries	151,943	132,643

4.5.   It shows a clear drop in contact via the more traditional methods of contact (telephone and face to face), however, these are both still the most popular ways to contact the Council. Contact via email has seen the largest increase of 6,615 (172%). Web reports have seen a smaller increase of 2,025 (65%) but with the introduction of MyAccount it is anticipated that this will increase further over the coming years. When customers register for the MyAccount portal it enables them to access all council services from one place.

4.6.   The development of further electronic methods is continuous to ensure that Rushcliffe keeps pace with changing customer demands; however, there will always be a requirement for mediated support for residents unable or unwilling to use these channels.

4.7.   Digital by Design Project (Customer Services)

SCANSTATION (awaiting implementation)	There are a number of instances when customers could benefit from self - scanning solutions located at the Customer Service Centre and contact points. Providing a scanning solution to scan documents for benefit claims directly onto their account for example. The scanning solution keeps documents secure and negates the need for customers to photocopy documents.	Efficient, simple and secure method for customers to self-serve. Frees up advisor time for dealing with other customers
Conduct Focus Groups with residents on existing services	Setup focus groups with residents, and contact via telephone for feedback on Council services.	Identify what services customers want to access digitally and identify ways to improve our digital footprint.

4.8.   This data does not take account of enquiries received from customers through engagement on social media, this is generally dealt with by the Communications Team and other relevant teams.

Partners

4.9.   **Nottinghamshire Police:** In 2011 the Council's Customer Service Centre relocated from the Civic Centre to West Bridgford Police Station. Rushcliffe and Police staff became multi skilled to enable them to deliver the services of both organisations. Over time, the number of face to face enquiries for the police service declined, as more people now use mobile phones to call the control room directly, and in the last year an upgrade to police technology reduced access to their systems to police employees only. This significantly reduced the number of enquiries the RBC team could resolve. In 2020, the police will be launching a new on-line service for all enquiries and, therefore, when the sale of the police station was announced it was also made clear a face-to-face service would not be required moving forwards. However, the Council's new Customer Service Centre at Fountain Court in the centre of West Bridgford continues to provide access to police services via 101, 999 and the police website.

4.10. **Libraries (Inspire):** The Cotgrave Hub opened in 2018 as a contact point providing Council Customer Services from within the library area of the building. This partnership provides more local access for residents to Council services and also extends the opening hours of the library, as Rushcliffe staff provide that service when the library staff are not there. This delivery model has been replicated in East Leake Library, from February 2020, with an increased presence from 4 hours to 37 hours per week.

4.11. **Metropolitan Housing Trust (MHT):** In 2009, the Council and MHT entered an arrangement whereby RBC advisors could access MHT IT systems and support customers with low level enquiries regarding their MHT tenancy. However, access to their IT systems is no longer available and while MHT continue to provide funds, work is ongoing to see how further support can be provided in particular with access to interview rooms at Fountain Court.

4.12. **Nottinghamshire County Council:** In 2013, the Council began to provide access to some Nottinghamshire County Council services via supported self-serve or provision of forms for completion. This delivery model is replicated across all Nottinghamshire authorities and is funded by NCC.

Contact Points

4.13. RBC contact points are located within Bingham Health Centre, Cotgrave Library and East Leake Library offering residents local access to Council services. Since it opened in 2009, the Bingham contact point has provided a service 5-day a week. In Cotgrave it was previously half a day per week (based in the Police Station) but this increased to 5-days a week when the Multi Service Centre opened, which is where the members of staff are based. The same is true of East Leake where it was previously half a day per week in the Parish Council Offices but from February 2020 this has increased to 5-days per week.

4.14. The table below shows the increase in customers accessing the contact points comparing 2013/14 with 2018/19.

Year	Bingham	Cotgrave
2013/14	806	0
2018/19	1962	1176

4.15. As it shows there has been an increase of 1,156 (143%) enquiries at Bingham and 1176 at Cotgrave. Figures for East Leake have not been provided as the contact point only opened in the library for five days a week in February 2020 and so data is not comparable.

4.16. At contact points, residents can complete forms, hand in supporting documents, find information and make payments (not cash). The advisors work at the Centre and contact points on a rota basis, and therefore, the service delivered is consistent irrespective of where the resident chooses to access the service.

4.17. This increase is very positive and highlights the need for delivering the service in this way; however, it puts pressure on the service as well. Allocating two members of staff to each of these contact points takes advisors off the phones, although they do still answer telephone enquiries when they do not have face to face customers. This is, however, impacting on call waiting times and, therefore, it has prompted the Team to work with colleagues in Property Services to create screening at Cotgrave, so one advisor is answering calls while the other deals with customers coming in to the contact point.

4.18. The opening hours at all the customer service sites changed on 10 February 2020. The hours are now:

Monday	08:30 – 17:00
Tuesday	08:30 – 17:00
Wednesday	09:30 – 17:00
Thursday	08:30 – 17:00
Friday	08:30 – 16:30

Opening slightly later each Wednesday morning allows the team to receive training and attend team meetings which was previously unachievable. The earlier closing time each Friday provides time for staff to ensure all customer documentation is scanned to accounts before the close of business for the weekend and, where applicable, for staff from Contact Points to return to the West Bridgford Centre with any sensitive or confidential documents that have been handed in by customers during the day.

4.19. Outside of opening hours, telephone calls automatically divert to an out of hours provider who conduct a triage of the call and refer to on call officers where appropriate, or take details and pass to RBC customer service via email if non urgent.

4.20. This change was widely publicised and was in response to the changing demands of customers and the times at which customers are accessing services in this way. This new arrangement brings Rushcliffe more in line with other councils in Nottinghamshire. To date, no complaints have been received about this.

Performance

4.21. Customer satisfaction remains consistently high at 98%. Where customers are dissatisfied, it is generally where they are unhappy with the answer provided rather than the service they received.

4.22. There are periods of high demand for the Team, some of which can be planned for as it is anticipated e.g. green waste scheme renewals, council tax billing period and elections. However, there can be an increase in demand that is unexpected e.g. extreme weather conditions, snap election. The Team's ability

to answer calls within target times can prove challenging during these peaks in demand. However, this has not yet impacted on customer satisfaction levels and very few complaints are received. Last year further technology was introduced to the telephony system whereby at busy times callers are now advised of their position in the queue.

4.23. To provide resilience some of the Council's Business Support Unit team are trained to handle non-complex telephone enquiries, and, as such, are an additional resource at peak times.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

5.1. This is an initial report intended to inform Councillors and, therefore, there are no risks and uncertainties associated with this report.

6. Implications

6.1. **Financial Implications**
The report includes details of existing provision which is provided directly by the Council or in partnership. All activity is currently fully funded. There are no current financial implications associated with this report.

6.2. **Legal Implications**
There are no legal implications associated with this report.

6.3. **Equalities Implications**

There are numerous ways customers can contact the Council and all are available to all residents in Rushcliffe and, therefore, there are no equalities implications of this report. Hearing loops are available at all sites, translation services are provided by way of a tablet and documents can be requested in braille and larger print.

6.4. **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications**
There are no crime and disorder implication associated with this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	Broad access to Customer Services provides the best and easiest access for individual residents at a time and in a way that suits them
Efficient Services	Ensuring that residents have access to council service at times, and places, convenient to them with speedy resolution to enquiries.
Sustainable Growth	Not applicable

The Environment	Not applicable

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

a) Reviews the information provided by the Customer Service Team; and

b) Consider future items for further scrutiny.

For more information contact:	Leanne Ashmore Executive Manager - Transformation lashmore@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None.
List of appendices:	**Appendix 1** – Digital by Design

Appendix 1

Digital by Design

Increase in online transactions	In 2015 there were 216,330 on line transactions with 365,668 in 2017. An increase of over 149,000 online transactions since, an overall increase of 69% in three years.
Understand Resident's Needs	Identify through analysing statistical data collection on customer contact (face to face, telephone and web) across all service areas. Use resident trends, feedback, and data to influence design of new services.
Accessibility for Everyone	All digital services design will be secure, ease of access and navigation, inclusive, legible and readable as possible. Accessibility is key to keeping residents engaged and actively using digital services.
Building Digital Services	To build Digital platforms such as 'My Account' portals, and 'Self-Serve' facilities for residents to gain quicker and easier access to council services, or their own personal information from one place.
Robotics and Artificial Intelligence	Increase efficiencies to residents with instant responses to online requests. Continue to automate existing back office processes, integration between back office systems will increase automated responses to complex requests, and explore the possibility of using Artificial Intelligence technology as this area develops.

	2013	2017
Enquiries via website	2,916	4,282
Emails to Customer Services	3,842	8,616

	2015	2017
Online Transactions	216,330	365,668