



Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Tuesday, 25 August 2020

Customer Services and Digital Transformation

Report of the Executive Manager – Transformation

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report, and appendices, provides 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 and partnerships that support the offer. It also includes information illustrating the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on the ways customers have accessed Council services during lockdown.
- 1.2. In addition, the report includes an update on the Council's approach to digital transformation including some of the work undertaken so far and the additional projects identified for delivery in the next year. The focus in this report is on customer facing activities, although internal processes also form part of the Digital by Design Programme.
- 1.3. This is intended to be an initial report that sets out the current position 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) Review current proposed activity for the Digital by Design programme and propose additional opportunities for Officers to explore.
- b) Identify additional areas within digital transformation and customer services for future 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 the Group to understand the current arrangements and resources when considering service delivery. The report provides an update on the development of the Customer Service Centre and offer since 2010 when it was last scrutinised.

- 3.2. The report also sets out the progress made so far on digital transformation and the future plans for this for the Group’s consideration. This is an opportune time to review this due to the Covid19 pandemic which has forced customers to interact with us in different ways. We need to consider options for future service delivery and the opportunity to drive change.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. The essential principles of customer service remain unchanged but with the development of new technologies 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).

This report provides an update on the current arrangements for the above as well as considering the immediate impact of Covid19.

Digital Transformation

- 4.3. 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 and 2019/20:

Access channels	2013/14	2018/19	2019/20
Telephones	117,531	98,647	109,139
Face to Face (inc Contact Points)	27,469	18,413	21,341
Emails to Customer Services	3,842	10,457	16,226
Web reports	3,101	5,126	5,726

- 4.4. The table shows a drop in contact via the more traditional methods (telephone and face to face) however these remain the most popular ways to contact the Council. The increase in telephone enquiries in 2019/20 compared to 2018/19 is due to the snap election and flooding in the Borough. Contact via email has seen the largest increase of 12,384. Web reports has seen a smaller increase of 2,625 (84%) but with the introduction of MyAccount it is anticipated that this will increase further over the coming years. The MyAccount portal enables customers to access all council services from one place, for example they can:
- Flag up fly tipping, missed bins, litter, dog fouling and view a history and real-time progress on each request made

- Manage their Garden Waste subscription from February 1, 2020
- View the dates of their next bin collections.

4.5. This data does not take account of enquiries received from customers through engagement on social media, this is dealt with by the Communications Team who refer enquiries on to the relevant teams for a response.

4.6. Over the last few years the Council has been on a journey of digitising various services and looking for efficiencies both in the way it does business and in the way that residents can access services. Some of the achievements and changes in customer behaviour that resulted from the Digital by Default programme, which ran from 2014 to 2017, for Customer Services included:

- Increase in enquiries to the Council received via the website – in 2013 there were 2,916 with 4,282 in 2017
- Increase in emails to Customer Services – there were 3,482 in 2013 and 8,616 in 2017
- Self-serve kiosks area available at the Contact Centre with support from staff if required. These are used less now as most people are happy to contact us online at home or using their mobile device however this was an initial step to get customers used to engaging with the Council this way
- A number of new on-line forms improved access to services
- Direct scanning and indexing of customers documents to their accounts is now done by a Customer Services Advisors at first point of contact rather than being passed to the back office to scan.

4.7. In 2018, the Digital by Default programme was replaced with the Digital by Design Programme. MyAccount was implemented as a part of this programme and future initiatives for customer services currently planned in the programme include:

Project	Detail	Benefits
Review methods of communication available for customers and opportunities for increasing digital e.g. investigate chatbots	This is an ongoing piece of work that involves the continuous investigation of new technology available. ChatBot technology can either be an instant messaging or voice recording system designed to automatically answer queries made by residents using Artificial Intelligence.	Continuous adaptation of the way the customer service is delivered to meet the changing demands of residents.
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 that will automatically feed into the Council's systems. The scanning solution keeps documents	Efficient, simple and secure method for customers to self-serve. Frees up advisor time for dealing with other customers

	secure and negates the need for customers to photocopy documents.	
Focus Groups	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.
Phase 2 of Meritec and My Account portal	Look for opportunities to implement Intelligent Automation (IA), integration between back office systems, and enhance the use of the Council Myaccount Portal.	Provide a more efficient and effective service to customers allowing them to do more online more easily.

4.8. 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 or access these channels.

4.9. As well as this work to support the Customers Services function, there is a new Digital by Design Board who will review the programme of work across all Council services. The Covid19 pandemic has provided an opportunity to review again the way we deliver services as we have had to implement change quickly, but these new ways of working could have benefits in the longer term for the Council and our residents.

4.10. The Board will work with all service areas to identify digital transformation opportunities through automation of processes, electronic systems, and better integration with back office systems. The strategic themes of the project board are:

- Enabling a digital culture
- Efficiencies and reducing overall costs
- Customer satisfaction
- Security and privacy by design

4.11. In addition to the above, customer service focused initiatives of the Digital by Design programme for 2020/21 include:

- Implement energy management software to enable better control and monitoring of power, water and gas consumption across operational buildings.
- Introduce new online bookings and payment options for Council community facilities to enhance the customer journey and deliver efficiency savings
- Investigate and, if possible deliver, a solution to enable hybrid virtual meetings
- Due to the Covid19 pandemic, video conferencing has become essential for the Council to continue functioning, whether this is meeting colleagues or holding Council meetings with members of the public present. The next step is to expand on these facilities to allow people to attend the meeting onsite, as well as remotely (hybrid).

- Promote the growth of Gov.Delivery including the expansion of content and campaigns to encourage sign up by residents
- Undertake a review of the home alarm service to identify new technology and joint working options.

4.12. Once the refresh has been completed, an update on the programme and its activities could be presented to a future Growth and Development Scrutiny Committee.

Customer Service Partners

4.13. **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.

4.14. **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.

4.15. **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.

Contact Points

4.16. 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 five days a week. In Cotgrave, it was previously half a day per week (based in the Police Station) but this increased to five 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 increased to five days per week.

- 4.17. The table below shows the increase in customers accessing the full time contact points comparing 2013/14 with 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Year	Bingham	Cotgrave
2013/14	806	0
2018/19	1962	1176
2019/20	1989	2637

- 4.18. As it shows, there has been an increase of 1,183 enquiries at Bingham and 2,637 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 had to close due to Covid19 lockdown a few weeks later.
- 4.19. 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.
- 4.20. 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, but this has an impact on the speed at which calls are answered during busy periods.

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 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 the many different enquiries that come through. This improves the service customers receive but means that calls can take longer to resolve, impacting on overall call answering times.

	Average enq Duration Sept 2017	Number Of Enq	Average enq Duration Sept 2019	Number Of Enq.
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

- 4.23. 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, or the snap election as happened in 2019 and explains increase in demand 2019/20. The team's ability to answer calls within target times can prove challenging during these peaks periods. 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.
- 4.24. 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.

The impact of Covid19

- 4.25. The Covid19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the way we deliver Council services. For Customers Services, the main impact has been the closure of all contact points when the country went into lockdown.
- 4.26. There was no change in the ability to respond to telephone calls, web reports and emails from residents when lockdown was announced as the Customer Service Team, like other council services, are all able to work remotely. The Customer Services Centre in West Bridgford and the other contact points closed and, therefore, residents were unable to access any service from the Customer Service Team in person.
- 4.27. Face to face service resumed at the Customer Services Centre at Fountain Court on 1 June, however, the premises is small and to ensure social distancing is maintained and controlled, an appointment only service was introduced. Appointments are available on two half-days per week but, as the table below shows, demand remains extremely low.

Customers requesting appts	Number of appts	Type of enquiry
June 2020	11	Proof of life (3) Assistance with benefit claim form (3) Taxi driver test (3) Submit documents (2)
July 2020	17	Proof of life (5) Submit documents (11) Use of Homesearch (1)

- 4.28. It is anticipated that face to face appointments will be available at Cotgrave and East Leake library by mid-September. Libraries are now open, albeit with very restricted opening hours. There is no date agreed yet to reopen the Council's

contact point within Bingham Health Centre, but we are working closely with partners.

- 4.29. The table below shows how residents contacted the Council during the lockdown period of 2020 compared with the same period in 2018. As the table shows there has been an increase in enquiries via email and on the web, clearly the pandemic will have had an impact on this, but it is important to note that this reflects an existing trend.

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July
Phone Calls						
2018	11,820	13,547	13,255	12,327	9,087	9,563
2020	8,964	12,841	7,993	7,643	8,223	8,094
Face to Face in WB						
2018	1,661	1,387	1,765	1,726	1,641	1,525
2020	1,101	801	0	0	11	17
Contact Points						
2018	208	258	219	222	237	203
2020	461	260	0	0	0	0
Email						
2018	802	1,102	1,151	884	548	899
2020	1,610	2,017	1,779	1,491	1,716	1,462
Web enquiries to CSC						
2018	376	476	366	509	504	368
2020	453	466	413	743	720	650
Visits to RBC website						
2018	51,100	52,030	44,909	47,863	45,161	45,767
2020	56,258	61,893	49,806	58,055	56,618	40,093

- 4.30. How customers are interacting with the Council is changing and there is an opportunity to review how Customer Services is provided in the future. This will be addressed in part by the Digital by Design programme, but also how we adapt to the reduction in face to face demand and redesign the service.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

- 5.1. This is an initial report intended to inform the Group 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. The Police currently contribute £19k per annum. In 2021/22 this will reduce to £10k and from 2022/23 reduce to £5k. This is reflected in the MTFS going forward.

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 channels 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	Maintaining and enhancing our residents' quality of life by providing the best and easiest access to services for the resident.
Efficient Services	Ensuring that residents have access to Council services at times and places convenient to them, with speedy resolution to enquiries at first point of contact.
Sustainable Growth	The Digital by Design programme will support delivery of the Council's corporate objectives and priorities.
The Environment	The Digital by Design programme will be aligned to support delivery of the Council's Carbon Management Plan.

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Review current proposed activity for the Digital by Design programme and propose additional opportunities for Officers to explore.
- b) Identify additional areas within digital transformation and customer services for future scrutiny.

For more information contact:	Leanne Ashmore Executive Manager - Transformation lashmore@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None.
List of appendices:	

