

Customer Access Strategy

2017 - 2019



Introduction:

Times are changing. With rapid growth and uptake of mobile devices, social media, high speed broadband and open data, there are extensive opportunities for the council to respond to the changing digital world.

We live in a digital age. Demand for public services and expectations of levels of service are ever increasing. Customers and businesses expect the same levels of access, ease of use and customer service that they see online from large private sector organisations such as Amazon and Tesco. They expect to be able to access their services from multiple locations and in ways to suit them.

The period since 2010 has seen enormous changes both in technology and the way in which it is used. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures published in February 2014, for instance, suggested that, 44.3 million adults in the UK (87 per cent of the total), including 99 per cent of all 16 to 24-year-olds, had used the internet in 2013, an increase of 1.2 million over the same quarter in 2012. From online banking to downloading music to ordering groceries on-the-go, digital tools are increasingly allowing people to conduct everyday tasks how, when and where they like.

Ofcom's Communications Market Report of August 2015 painted the following picture: "Huge growth in take-up of smart phones and tablets is creating a nation of media multi-taskers, transforming the traditional living room of our parents and grandparents into a digital media hub.

- People are still coming together to watch TV in the living room – 91 per cent of UK adults view TV on the main set each week,. But, an increasing array of digital Media is now vying for their attention. People are streaming videos, firing off instant messages and updating their social media status - all while watching more TV than before.
- Two thirds of people now own a smartphone, using it for nearly two hours every day to browse the internet, access social media, bank and shop online.
- Smartphones have over taken laptops as the most popular device for getting online, Ofcom research has revealed, with record ownership and use transforming the way we communicate.
- The average household now owns more than three types of internet- enabled device with one in five owning six or more.
- Smartphones have become the hub of our daily lives and are now in the pockets of two thirds (66%) of UK adults, up from 39% in 2012. The vast majority (90%) of 16-24 year olds own one; but 55-64 year olds are also joining the smartphone revolution, with ownership in this age group more than doubling since 2012, from 19% to 50.

In order to keep pace with the advances in technology, we need to have a clear strategy for how we will use technology to increase avenues for access to council services , to improve service delivery and respond to the expectations of our customers for the provision of a 24/7 council.

The wider use and availability of data will improve decision making and increase transparency, the shift to a more digitally inclusive Stafford will ensure that we are improving people's lives with the best affordable services.

By placing the customer, customer or business at the centre of service delivery and developing a single version of the truth for each person or business will lead to a seamless end to end experience. Stafford will become a digitally engaged council.

What is an Access Strategy?

Stafford Borough Council has a responsibility to provide excellent services to the public and value for money to the taxpayer. The channels through which public services are delivered and by which the public has contact with the authority, (be that via telephone, online, in person or via other means) are a critical part of public service provision and there is an ongoing impetus for them to be managed effectively and efficiently for everyone.

An access strategy is our plan for the channels we will use to deliver services to, and interact with, our customers. It explains how we will meet the contact demands of our customers using the resources we have available bearing in mind the needs of the customer.

It is imperative that we do move forward with the digital changes needed to meet the needs of our customers. Central Government have already published their own digital strategy which place clear expectations on local authority delivery

This strategy aims to build on the progress that has already been achieved in transforming our customer access arrangements. Good Customer Services has been highlighted as one of the main priority areas contained within the 2016 – 2020 Corporate Plan. The emphasis within the Plan is to develop our customer services across existing and new contact channels to ensure efficiency and cost effectiveness. Our residents want to access our services quickly and efficiently from different locations using an increasing number of different devices. In response to this, the Council need to implement a Customer Access Strategy.

This strategy sets out our commitment and approach to working with and for the people who live, work and visit Stafford Borough and who use our services. The strategy explains how we will meet the demands of our customers using the resources we have available. Channels that are efficient and effective deliver services that customers desire without wasting time, money or effort for either the customer or the Council. We want local people to feel valued by their Council, trust us and have excellent customer experiences in their dealings with us, whatever channel they choose. It cuts across all services within the Council and as such will require support from all areas.

Why is an Access Strategy Important Now?

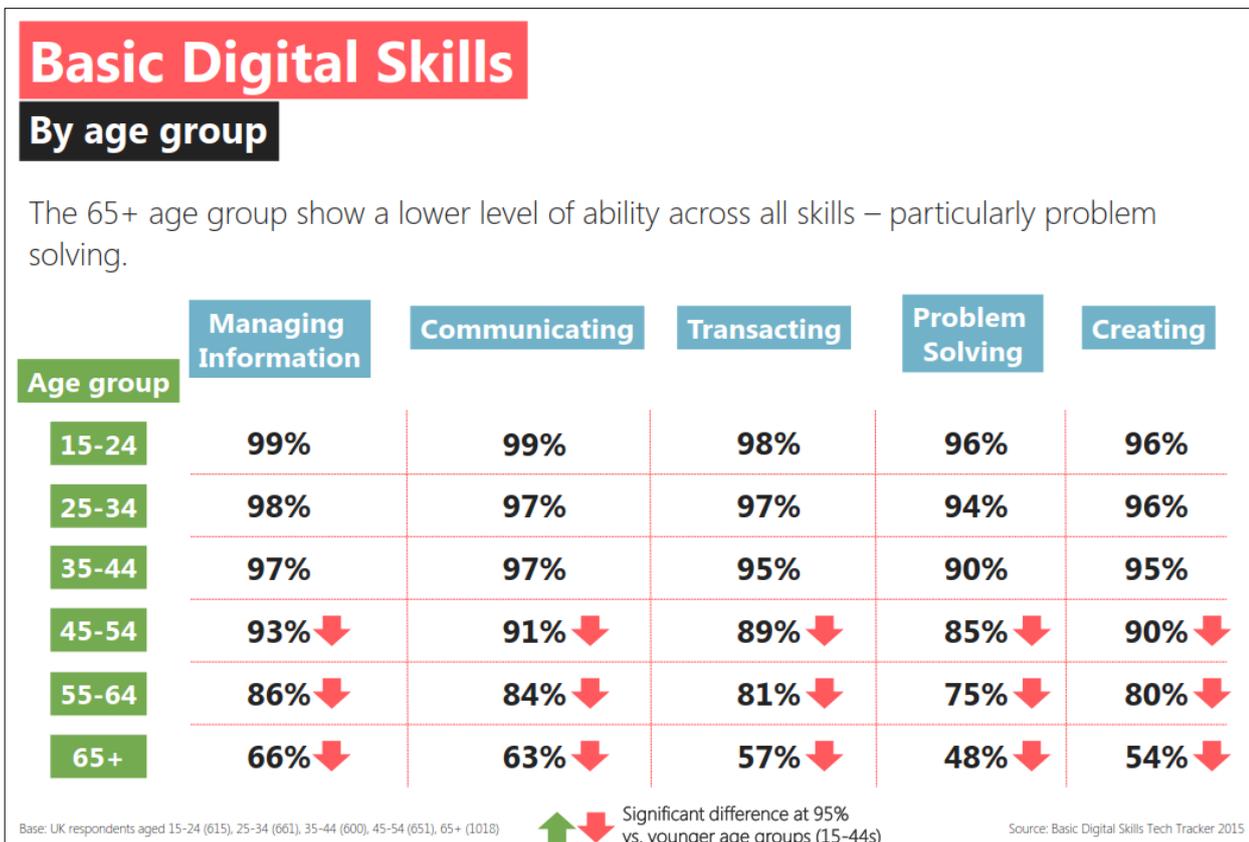
Customers receive a high standard of customer service from many public and private sector organisations. However, customers sometimes have low expectations of service provided by local government, and it will be necessary to exceed rather than meet these expectations to achieve channel shift to cheaper and/or more effective channels. To achieve this, the public sector must continue to raise its own standards of service across all the channels it uses and offers. We need to improve our services with the customer in mind.

In order to meet the needs of customers, Stafford Borough Council must provide services that are:-

- Easily accessible
- Simple to use
- Effective
- Streamlined
- Convenient
- Cost effective
- Robust
- Secure

It is also important to bear in mind the target audience’s access to technology, the type and complexity of the contact, their personal preferences as well their skill sets when selecting channels. At Stafford Borough Council we will ensure that we introduce services to channels customers want basing our decisions on data rather than theory.

Rising internet use and customer expectations of accessing public services online present an ongoing opportunity for public service providers. Competent online services are easy and quick to use, available whenever customers need them and have a relatively low administrative burden. Managed well, online access to services is a very effective channel with considerable benefits for customers and taxpayers.



What will success look like?

The customer of the future will be able to access the services they need through the most appropriate channel. Routine transactions will be conducted via self-service including online and voice recognition technology. Customers will have the choice of authenticating to their own public services account to pay for parking permits, check on their council tax balance and check on the progress of a service request, receive updates and informative messages with real time information.

They will be supported by public sector staff who have access to and are able to use technology to find the information they need supported by streamlined processes and new ways of working. Technology will be harnessed to automate as much routine and transactional activity as possible, allowing staff to focus on actions that add value to its residents.

Digital by Design

The Council will move to a principle of 'Digital by Design' across all services and key strategic areas. This will be achieved through innovative new ways of working to deliver services through the channels that customers and businesses want to use and are most appropriate to their enquiry and this will be through a combination of options. For the majority of transactional contact self-service options (including digital) will be available. These channels will reduce the need for contact with the council creating capacity for complex enquiries from customers to be supported as needed. Consideration will be given to the end to end customer journey to identify when and why a customer contacts us, acknowledging that different customers have different needs.

However, if we want more people to use our digital services we need to make sure they are intuitive, easy to access, readily available and designed around the customer.

The move to digital by design will ensure that the council is a 24/7 service, therefore helping the local economy through connectivity, speed of service, introduction of business accounts and availability of information.

We will also look how we interact with our supply chain and ensure that we further expand our digital reach – through electronic purchase orders to paperless invoicing and automated payments.

How we will achieve Digital by Design

We will have an innovative approach to information and technology services including exploitation of mobile technologies as a delivery channel and as an enabler for internal agility and flexibility.

We will increase the use of on-line provision as the primary method for service delivery.

Increase proactive use of social media, our website and on-line transactions by pro-actively sharing information and providing automated feedback giving the customer the confidence that their issue is being remedied without the need to contact the Council.

The re-design of the service benefits from a reduction in print outputs through a move to automated responses, improved web information, introduction of customer portal and other digital tools.

Customer and Business at the Centre

Service improvements will place the customer, customer or business at the heart of our processes, ensuring that as far as possible the service request is resolved at the first point of contact.

We will consult and engage with our residents to ensure that we are responding wherever possible to what the customer needs and not what we think the customer wants, this will mean

end to end system redesigns that cross the boundaries of services and follows the customer journey with the council.

We will achieve this through developing new solutions that integrate services rather than restricted to departmental reach.

What will we do?

We will use customer insight / business intelligence to focus our improvement activity on areas of highest interactions therefore using our limited resources in the areas of most impact.

We will join up data across our services to develop one version of the truth for property, business and customer records.

We will establish customer and business portals that give the user a view of their interactions with the council whilst adopting a principle of ‘tell us once’

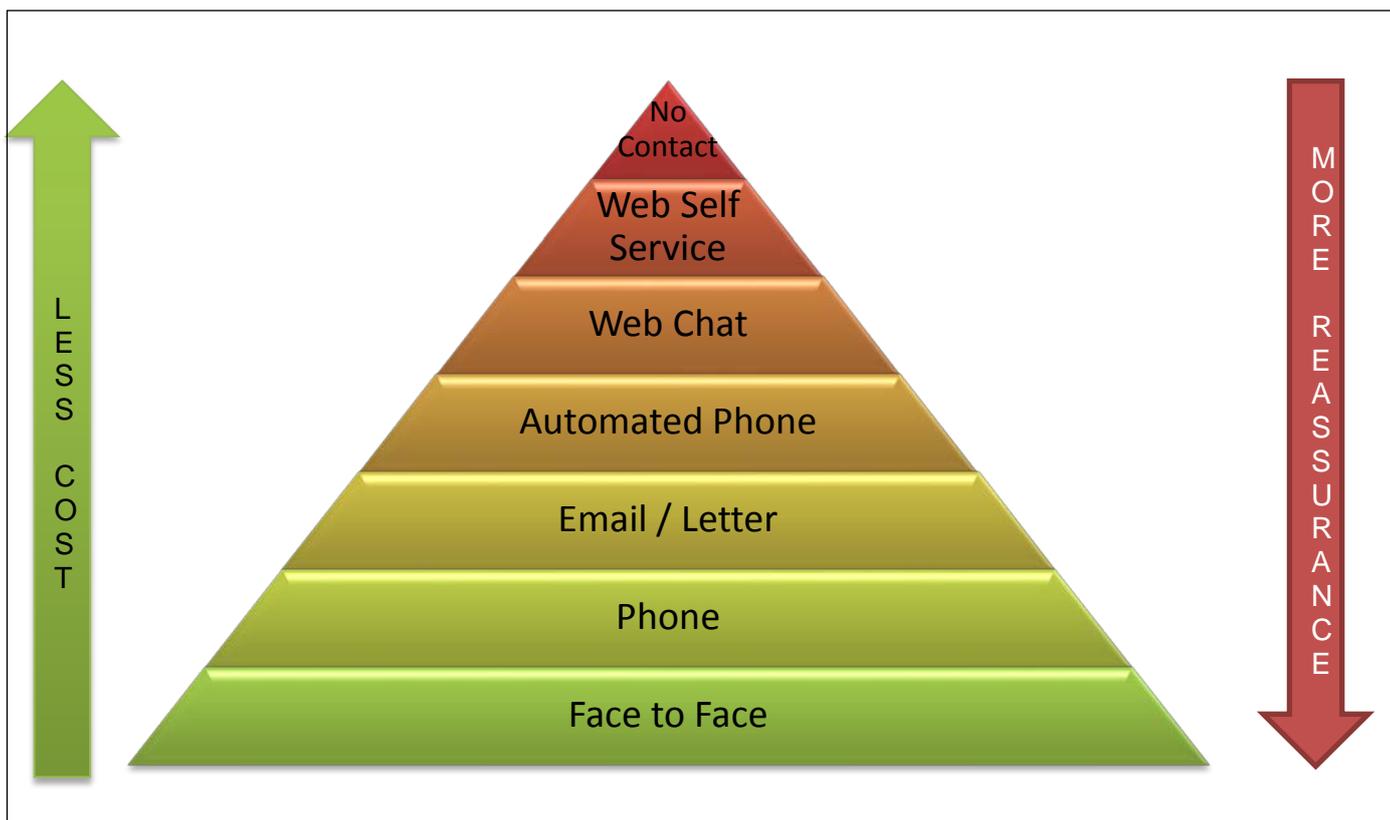
We will ensure a focussed move from face to face / telephone contact onto digitally enabled channels – digital inclusion.

Priority will be to allow efficiencies through more integrated services, robust website, on- line forms, customer and business portals for the services that are delivered locally.

We will identify opportunities to promote on- line and digital activities through targeted marketing campaigns and better use of social media.

We will identify how we can better engage with the customers to enhance the decision making of the council.

We will be pro-active rather than reactive by pushing out information via various channels.



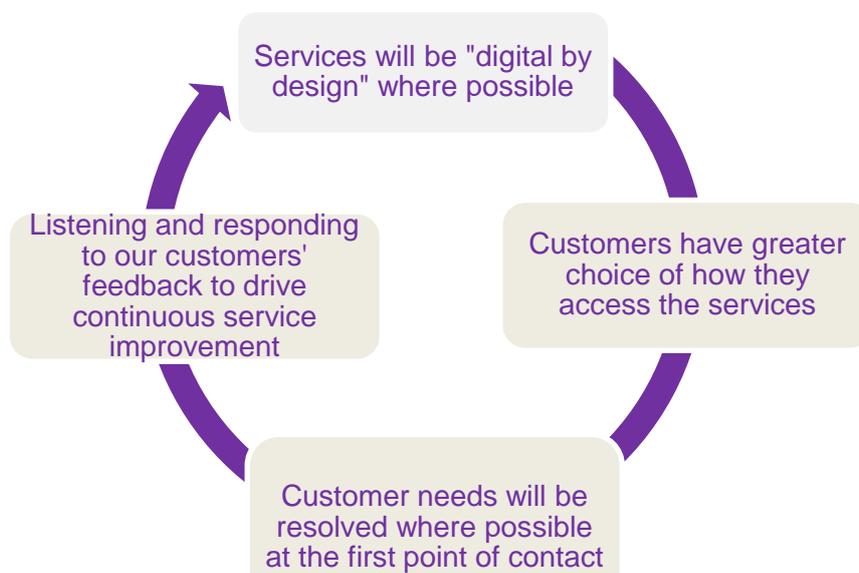
What this model shows is that as we move up the triangle the cost of delivery typically gets cheaper for the organisation. However for some types of contact a greater level of human contact is required, particularly for contacts that require some level of reassurance.

For example, imagine you've received a letter asking you to pay a bill or the bailiffs will turn up at your house. You've just paid the bill and now want reassurance that your personal belongings are safe. You are unlikely to log on and have a look at the organisations website's FAQ page for reassurance (even though this might be the most cost-effective solution for the organisation) but you may be more inclined to ring up the contact centre to request a letter confirming that matters are in hand. In this example, there may be a case for having online FAQs relating to debt recovery in terms of best practice, but there is probably little chance of shifting this individual contact online.

It is therefore vital to fully understand each type of contact and the level of reassurance that the customer is likely to require before focusing the organisation's efforts on the design of any contact channel for that service.

We will achieve this using four main drivers:-

- Services will be "digital by design" where possible - greater use of electronic and social media to report service issues and communicate with customers.
- Customers have greater choice of how they access the services - they will be available at times and locations to suit the customer. Customers have a greater choice of access channels.
- Customer needs will be resolved where possible at the first point of contact – via trained staff who have a consistent view of the customer across the organisation (Single Customer Record)
- Customer feedback drives service improvement – via a revised performance management framework and feedback from customers.



Building Blocks of Delivery

Channel Shift Programme will alter the ways in which the Council provides access to its services. The development and implementation of access channels will be informed by cost, customer insight, the ease by which services lend themselves to alternative methods of access and the delivery channels already in place.

A Revised Performance Framework that reviews and improves service delivery ensuring that customer needs have been identified and met. It will allow the setting and monitoring of service targets and provide feedback on our performance against these targets. By providing better quality management information this will facilitate more effective service planning.

Customer consultation / satisfaction The council will (as part of this strategy) develop, publish and monitor a new set of specific customer care standards. These will allow customers to know what to expect and when and will affect every part of the Council.

A programme of projects will be required that will deliver the building blocks and ultimately the customer outcomes. To support this, the final section of this strategy proposes a governance structure which sets out the roles and responsibilities necessary for delivery.

Customer Focussed

Customers want more transparency. By having a customer portal and a more consistent approach to how we interact with them, customers will be able to access their information more easily. They will also have the ability to view and manage all their interactions with the Council in one place.

Customers want to engage on their terms. By increasing the range of channels available for accessing a full range of services, customers are better able to engage at a time and in a way that suits their lifestyle. This makes it easier and more convenient for our customers to access services, when, where and how they choose to do so in the most cost effective way.

Customer driven. By giving our customers the tools to do things for themselves we will encourage self-service. Pushing service channels outwards onto the web will promote the culture of the Council as an enabler rather than a solution provider.

Operational

The drive towards greater targeting of service delivery in the pursuit of efficiency. In particular the work programme on channel shift will make customers more active and independent when they want to access Council services by pushing them towards using electronic services.

The need to reduce avoidable contacts (“Once and done”) Will be delivered by equipping front line staff through training and process changes to be able to resolve as many queries as possible at the first point of contact. This will reduce the need to hand-off to other services and further unnecessary contact with the customer.

The need to deliver services around customer journeys/pathways. Understanding customer journeys from a whole-system perspective, where customers ‘touch’ Council services and how we can work in partnership with other is key to improving and simplifying customer access and delivering services seamlessly.

The need to learn from failure demand

Reducing avoidable contact; minimising the proportion of customer contact that is low or no value to the customer.

Any customer contact made with the council as a result of the council either failing to provide at the correct time a service it is responsible for delivering, or sending correspondence that the customer cannot understand, is classified as “avoidable” i.e. the customer would not have had occasion to contact the council had we “got it right” the first time.

Dealing with avoidable contact from the customers requires time and resources that could otherwise be used to meet other work demands, or resources that simply wouldn't be required at, all thus reducing costs. It also impacts negatively on the Council's reputation

The customer experience for both customers and businesses when contacting us should be one which is responsive, timely and efficient.

By identifying customer contact that is ‘avoidable’ we are better placed to redesign the way services and information are made more accessible to our customers, so they do not have to make unnecessary valueless contacts which are both frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the Council.

By understanding the causes of ‘avoidable contact’ we can then work to address key barriers to efficient and effective service delivery.

The Changing Face of the Council

In developing this Strategy it is appreciated that the Borough Council does not provide all of its Services directly.

A fundamental change that has taken place since the last Customer Service Strategy is that of shared services. In respect of Revenues and Benefits Services. Stafford residents in the main are served by Cannock Chase District Council employees. Whilst there is no discernible difference for the customer never the less service standards and customer performance are determined jointly by both Authorities.

A major piece of work subject to completion by December 2017 is the outsourcing of Leisure Services. The Charitable Trust chosen would have a degree of flexibility in terms of customer contact and channel shift.

In both instances it is anticipated that the principles contained within this report are adhered to for Customer Services.

In addition we have a shared service in terms of IT with Cannock Chase District Council there may be the opportunity to have joint standards and shared initiatives with that authority in the future.

Design Principles

The design principles are:-

1. Our services will be accessible to all our different customers groups.
2. Our customers will be able to access information and services through a range of channels and we will maximise the use of self-service options
3. We will respond to customer enquiries and service requests promptly and, wherever possible, at the first point of contact. We will provide face to face contact via an appointments based system only for those customers who need it.
4. We will provide information, advice and guidance to signpost/refer customers to other support agencies
5. We will empower and enable our employees and partners to seamlessly deliver services first time, on time, by using integrated and consistent systems and processes.
6. Where there is a demonstrable need for face to face service we will ensure efficiency and value for money by fully utilising Customer Access Points, Community hubs and by maximising the range of services delivered through them.
7. We will publish a set of open and honest customer care and service specific standards and these, together with customer satisfaction, will be used as a key measure to manage the performance of our employees and our partners.
8. We will work with partners, external agencies and the private and voluntary sector, where appropriate, to deliver cost effective and high quality customer services.

These principles form the framework for the delivery of this strategy and inform the key deliverables through which effective and efficient reshaping of customer services will be

3. SERVICE CONSIDERATIONS IN DELIVERING THIS STRATEGY

Above has set out a broad framework and infrastructure for delivery of this strategy. The principle contribution to delivery will come from the services themselves as they are critical to the delivery of this strategy. It is through service redesign that this strategy will be brought to life and drive changes in the way services are provided.

It is a requirement of this strategy that all services will undertake a self-assessment to gauge their relative position in respect of being fit for purpose and delivering more efficient and effective customer access in line with this strategy. This self-assessment will enable services

to identify what actions they need to take to ensure the necessary steps are made to improve access to their services. These actions will help drive both a Council-wide programme of customer access change and on a more local level impact on service plans where simple and effective changes can be made.

In undertaking this work there are several areas where consideration needs to be made by the service ahead of any action-planning as they are important factors affecting future service delivery. Consideration of these cannot be made in detail at a corporate level as each plays its part differently depending on the service. These areas are:-

GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY

The key to providing excellent customer-centric services lies in transforming the way we deliver those services. Through a review of systems, processes and structure within each service area, we can identify appropriate areas for change. Those changes will deliver effective, efficient services which are accessible to, and meet the needs of all our diverse customers. This strategy document sets out a plan for achieving this.

Whilst the responsibility for delivering the actions identified in this document ultimately lies with all, a programme of projects will be required that will deliver the building blocks and ultimately the customer outcomes. What follows outlines the proposed governance for ensuring delivery of this programme of projects.

Leadership Team: will engage and support members and senior managers in understanding and embedding the principles set out in this strategy.

Customer Access Delivery Board: A new Board will be established to drive delivery of the strategy. The Board will be responsible for overseeing delivery of the building blocks outlined previously. The Delivery board will also agree prioritisation within the programme with service areas and transformation projects and obtain and manage the resources needed, thus ensuring delivery.

Service Areas: will be responsible for mapping and re-designing their processes to encompass channel shift and take advantage of the new technology put in place as part of the Customer Access Strategy. Service areas are recognised as the subject matter experts so are best placed to design practical solutions which will improve customer service in their area.

They will also be expected to support and engage with the transition process to enable customer contacts to be processed differently.

ICT: will be responsible for delivering the technical infrastructure needed to deliver this strategy. Working closely with the project teams and services, they will integrate and build the technical infrastructure to meet the channel requirements within each service as a result of the redesign work.

This strategy is closely interlinked with the Technology Strategy.

CONCLUSION

Customer access supports delivery of the Corporate Plan, specifically the Council priorities of “Leading and Delivering”. The scope to remove duplication and improve services is significant and this area is key in that it drives customer experience and can inhibit customers from accessing high quality services.

In summary, by 2020 the following will have developed across the organisation:-

- A deeper understanding and level of insight in terms of customers and demand will emerge. This will provide clear information on transactions and shape customer centred service delivery to meet the needs of our service users.
- Accessibility to fulfil our statutory duty to customers with different communication needs.
- More services will have a single view of the customer, reducing process duplication and clearer customer pathways will emerge as a result.
- More channels (including those provided through social media) will suit the needs of identified customer groups with a much more transactional website that is integrated into end to end customer processes. Other channels will also be better integrated.
- Across the Council, business intelligence and performance information with regards to customer management will be fully developed and embedded
- Culture across Stafford Borough Council will put the customer at the heart of service delivery. Joint working with partners will help ensure that we are providing a consistent set of information to customers no matter how they access a service.

By making more of our services accessible online, we increase convenience and at the same time lower costs. We will make sure that our service delivery is designed around our customer’s needs. We will standardise our service processes so that all delivery methods are equally available and convenient to the customer.

2. KEY DELIVERABLES, BENEFITS AND TARGETS

The section below outlines the key deliverables for each outcome alongside the key benefits that can be expected for both the customer and Stafford Borough Council. As can be seen from the key deliverables, they are all aspects of one or more of the four building blocks identified and will form the basis for the action plan to be developed to support delivery of the strategy.

Driver	Objectives	Key Deliverables	Key Benefits		Key Targets
			For the Customer	For SBC	
Services will be 'digital by design' where possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We actively promote increased take-up of digital services through our corporate communication channels. Electronic media will be the first choice for customer interaction. We actively promote increased take-up of digital services for all through the assisted self-serve, website, customer/business portal and mobile app. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transfer as many services as possible to use an electronic delivery mechanism Reduce non-essential services delivered via face to face and over the telephone Increased self-service – with assistance for those who need it. Publicity campaigns developed to promote alternative channels of communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convenience of accessing services 24/7. High quality experience with easy to use tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowest cost provision of customer access. Efficient processes will reduce duplication of effort. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish baseline and determine target to increase the number of electronic forms submitted online by 2020 Establish baseline and determine target to increase the number of all payments made online by automated telephony by 2020 Exceptional cheque payments only
Customers have greater choice of how they access the services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We encourage and enable customers to choose their preferred method of interaction to access the service they need. We give seamless service delivery across the principle access channels, online telephone and face to face Where appropriate we will look to provide channels based on mobile and social media. We understand customer diversity issues and address 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An integrated contact management system with a clear link to the vision for systems integration, between the customer portal and back office processes. A fully transactional website providing online services that will benefit customers the most. Online functionality with authentication to enable book and pay for appointments and the ability to track application requests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater choice and personalisation over service access. Greater access to more relevant information for customers. Appropriate access channels that suits customer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More efficient and cost effective service delivery. Removing duplication of process tasks Improved understanding and management of risk of customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish baseline and determine target to reduce face to face and telephone contact by 2020 as customers switch to other channels. Take-up of the Customer Portal will be at least 1000 people by 2020 All services will be reviewed for choice of customer access.

Driver	Objectives	Key Deliverables	Key Benefits		Key Targets
			For the Customer	For SBC	
	barriers to access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All principle access channels to have a customer feedback mechanism. Information is provided on request in an appropriate accessible format for all customers, irrespective of channel used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> needs and lifestyles. Clear and appropriate useable access routes to services. More inclusive service provision. Access 24/7 Receive notifications and information and track service requests. 	being excluded	
Customer needs will be resolved where possible at the first point of contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a single view of the customer and know their touch-points with services. We ensure all access channels provide consistent information, advice and tools to deliver services at the first point of contact. All front-line staff are trained to provide a resolution at the first 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A consistent view of the customer through a 'Single Customer Record' Introduce a Customer Portal which links information from back-office systems together. Use service redesign to maximise efficiency in service delivery. Content on the Council's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service request is resolved first time, on time. Expectations are managed where first time resolution is not possible. Simplified processes for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in avoidable or repeat contacts. Increased customer satisfaction More efficient service delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced avoidable contact. Reduction in Customer Service complaints. All services to sign up to the Customer Services standards in 2017 Increase the number of people who accessing

Driver	Objectives	Key Deliverables	Key Benefits		Key Targets
			For the Customer	For SBC	
	point of contact.	<p>website is easy accessible and designed around the customer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch the customer standards across the Council 	<p>accessing services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication with customers is clear and unambiguous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved Council reputation 	<p>assisted self-serve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased self-service use in Reception.
Customer feedback drives service improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer satisfaction and value for money will be at the heart of our performance management framework within the strategy. We publish content on the website only when it assists the delivery of a service to customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear, performance management framework which delivers a balanced approach to monitoring and managing customer outcomes is in operation. A set of corporate Customer Standards is published annually. The web channel structure is aligned to popular customer tasks, streamlining content around the customer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service standards which are met consistently. Greater confidence that service requests will be dealt with satisfactorily. The website is easier to use and navigate around. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer focussed culture. Fewer resources needed to respond to complaints. All services are more efficient by using customer feedback to drive service improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance met on service standards. Establish baseline and determine target to reduce the number of complaints that result in service improvements.

APPENDIX A

Access Channels

Access channels are the various methods by which the public can contact and interact with the Council. Channel management is the process by which the Council provides access to its services and focusses attention specifically on two areas:

Access channels to be used by the Council in the future are as follows:

Web – Continue the development of the corporate website, until all appropriate services are available online. Complete a full re- design of the corporate website, making it easier for customers to navigate to and access the services they need by using the Council's web site to find information and carry out transactions. This will be completed by moving to a “top task” based approach, which places an emphasis on the most common services that our customers wish to access.

Web content must be clear, concise and relevant to delivering a service to the customer. It is extremely important that all Council services have a presence on the Council website and information is accurate and up to date, and they should consider this when making any service changes which may affect the public

Web ‘chat’ tools can also be used to handle multiple customer enquiries simultaneously, which is a more efficient use of staff time than a telephone call. As well as web chat being cheaper than a phone call, the council learns from the problems identified, and can implement changes to the website.

An online Appointments booking system would allow us to move to an appointments-based face to face service and would offer the wider Council a tool to manage customer visits via a consistent interface.

E-forms - Create multi page forms with intuitive workflow. Fully automate the admin and delivery of services using workflow and integration.by creating intuitive forms that let customers do everything online, even pulling in information to populate fields as required. The real benefit is that customers can have two-way, open communication with the council and be equally involved as they can upload documents or add comments to their case, in real time. Most importantly, this can be done on any device (mobile or desktop)

Online Payments Seamlessly integrate online payments with E-forms, CRM and third party systems to create an end to end experience for customers.

Customer Portal (My Account) Our online presence could be enhanced by a web-based customer portal where customers can view and transact their business with the Council through their own personal account. This will allow people to self- serve by ordering, managing and tracking requests for services from the Council online at any time of their choosing as well as receiving notification by email or SMS. There will be authentication of the person as part of the sign in process so that the Council has an assurance that this person is who they say they are.

Text - via a text message to a mobile phone can be used to send and receive information. The Council's use of text messaging can be expanded to include things like broadcasting messages to service user groups, text payment service and issuing appointment or payment reminders.

Use mobile phone technologies tactically to provide better access to information for targeted user groups, to reduce costs, increase the speed of communication or reduce direct contact.

Telephone: to the Call Centre or directly to an individual of their choice. This could be further enhanced by implementation of the speech recognition module which would fully automate the touchtone phone payment system. A Minicom/text phone system would aid communication for customers with hearing difficulties.

Social media: The use of social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter is becoming increasingly popular allowing Councils to be more proactive in reaching the community in general and targeting specific groups in the community (young people, older people, people with disabilities etc.) to promote Council activities. Our strategy is to build on the current Council presence on social media and use this to encourage further take up of online services. It is proposed that customer contact from the corporate social media accounts will be monitored by the Contact Centre and Communication Team.

Social media tracking tools can also be implemented so that problems can be addressed even without the Council being contacted directly. These tools enable tracking of discussions on social media which mention Stafford Borough Council by name, allowing the authority to deal with issues before they become complaints and provide a proactive response, thus improving the reputation of the Council.

E-mail - By sending an email could be further enhanced by all correspondence being scanned and indexed and put into a monitored work stream which would automatically allocate on date received into the Authority.

Reduce the amount of email communication by better use of integrated forms and other electronic channels.

Post / Paper - Reduce the amount of post and paper communication by targeted use of electronic channels. Ensure key leaflets and information are readily available on line and encourage staff to use them. Increase the use of email for billing prioritising Revenues and Benefits. Printing and postage costs monitored, especially in areas of high volume. Monitor demand across all channels for a representative sample of information

Face To Face - To make the most of our existing face to face services, focussing on key areas of most value to customers and encouraging use of cheaper channels where appropriate. A new online appointments system will support the future intention of moving to appointments only contacts. Customers will be seen at the appointed time or, if we are delayed, will receive an explanation and be kept informed. Customer satisfaction measures will be reviewed monthly

Customer consultation/satisfaction

Over a period of time we will create a history of customer contact, both in terms of the number of contacts made and for which services they have accessed.

By introducing new technology we will be able to improve intelligence and learn more about who our customers are, which services they want to access and how they choose to access them. Feedback mechanisms will be established to allow inclusive feedback via as many channels as possible. Further work is needed in all areas to ensure feedback can be gathered via the various channels.

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of the strategy work to assess how it impacts vulnerable customers and to ensure that they will not be disadvantaged in any way by the changes being made to Customer Service delivery,

Our commitment:

- We will use a selection of delivery channels so that people have more choice in how and where they access services.
- Develop contact centre technology to respond to the demand to contact the council by telephone.
- Make effective use of appropriate new delivery channels to encourage all sectors of the community to access our services.
- Using IT systems which help us to understand our customers and meet their requirements and enable IT technology to deliver joined up services.
- Designing and implementing systems which help us to provide better quality, joined up and accessible services to our customers.

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