

# ***Information Digest***



**To: Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

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***Access to Services Strategy - Update***

**Councillor Tony Hall  
Cabinet Member for Customer Service**

**Karen Lomas  
Head of Customer Services**

## **1. Reason for the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress Customer Services have made since developing the Channel Access Strategy in 2016 and confirm the next steps in developing the Access to Services Strategy.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Members note the report and provide any comments and feedback into the development of the Access to Services Strategy.

## **3. Executive Summary**

- 3.1 In January 2016, the Council developed the 'Customer Access Strategy' to reshape the way in which customers' access services, to meet ever changing customer demand, deliver efficiencies and improve processes to fit the digital age. Offering digital channels where this is preferred by, and acceptable to, customers, enabling business to be carried out at a time and a place of choice.
- 3.2 As part of the Channel Access Strategy, a number of campaigns and training programmes were implemented or launched, including the ICan (Do it online) campaign.
- 3.3 There has been significant progress made as part of the Channel Access Strategy, however it is recognised that there is further improvements that can be made, particularly as technology develops and the ability to transact digitally is enhanced.
- 3.2 The Access to Services Strategy will be developed over the next 6 months, and will detail the proposed actions to be implemented over the medium term. The Strategy will be developed in liaison with Senior Officers and key staff to ensure the link between service delivery and customer service is as simple, efficient and streamlined as possible, leading to improved customer experience and reduced contact and complaints.
- 3.3 We invite Members to feedback on the proposed process for the development of the Access to Services Strategy. Please provide any comments to:  
**Karen Lomas (Head of Customer Services)** [karen.lomas@highpeak.gov.uk](mailto:karen.lomas@highpeak.gov.uk)

## **4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 As part of the Corporate Plan priority 'effective use of resources and provide value for money', there is a specific priority outcome to 'Develop an Access to Services Strategy to ensure that Council services are accessible to all.'

**CLAIRE HAZELDENE**  
**Acting Executive Director (Finance & Customer Services)**

**Web Links and**  
**Background Papers**

**Contact details**

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress Customer Services have made since developing the Channel Access Strategy in 2016 and confirm the next steps in further improving the customer experience and access to services. Therefore, this report:-

- Reflects on the campaigns and training that has been undertaken as part of the Channel Access Strategy
- Focuses on the development of an 'Access to Services Strategy'

1.2 The Access to Services Strategy formed one of the objectives outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan launched in 2019:

***'To ensure our services are easily available to all our residents in the appropriate channels and provided 'right first time'***

1.3 The purpose of the strategy will be to set out how the Council proposes to provide access to services, continue to improve the customer experience and utilise technology to enhance the customer journey.

## 2 Channel Access Strategy 2016

2.1 In January 2016, the Council developed the 'Customer Access Strategy' to reshape the way in which customers' access services, to meet ever changing customer demand, deliver efficiencies and improve processes to fit the digital age. Offering digital channels where this is preferred by, and acceptable to, customers, enabling business to be carried out at a time and a place of their choosing

2.2 The strategy covered all core access channels such as telephone, web and face to face and focussed on 2 key areas

- **Channel improvements** – Maximising the efficiency of all channels through user-centred design to ensure that both customer and business needs are considered
- **Process improvements** – Delivering business processes for the digital age, supported by appropriate, proactive marketing and engagement with staff and customers.

2.3 As part of the Channel Access Strategy, the following campaigns and training programmes were implemented or launched:

<b>Citizens Portal</b>	A Citizens Portal was launched, allowing customers to self serve, view their account balances and a history of certain transactions with the council, report problems and request services through one secure authenticated channel.
<b>ICan (Do it online) campaign</b>	In March 2017, the 'ICan' (do it online) campaign was launched, improving services and reducing costs. The priority being to place the customer first and provide a single view of customer transactions.

	<p>Staff, citizens and other stakeholders were engaged to roll out the ICan campaign and the Communications team arranged press releases through media and local radio, postcards were included with all council tax bills, posters displayed at libraries, parish and town councils as well as posts on the Council's social media pages. Self serve PCs and tablets were installed in all reception areas.</p> <p>There are now around 400 forms available online for customers to 'Pay, Apply and Report'</p> <p>As at May 2020, channels and volumes of contact have increased or reduced as follows :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact centre calls reduced by 46%</li> <li>• Reception visits reduced by 45%</li> <li>• Web forms Increased by 350%</li> <li>• Benefits Forms 100% online</li> <li>• Planning Applications 95% online</li> <li>• Website Visits increased by 500%</li> </ul> <p>Implementation of the customer service vision and the ICan campaign realised savings of £300k (cross Alliance) from staff reductions and savings on post and print.</p>
<p><b>Staff Training:</b></p> <p><b>Customer Service Excellence Programme</b></p> <p><b>Handling Challenging Situations</b></p>	<p>In July 2018 all staff across the Alliance engaged in the first part of the Customer Service Excellence Programme 'I Can Make a Difference' – with the aim to 'Establish a culture to deliver excellence across the Alliance'</p> <p>The programme was focused on key behaviours, closely linked to corporate values and a reminder that good customer service also helps supports with working more efficiently and reduces unnecessary repeat calls and avoidable contact.</p> <p>It was launched as not just a training programme, but a culture change programme aimed at all staff at all levels. 'Train the trainer' sessions were also held and now internal staff deliver this training as part of the corporate induction plan.</p> <p>It was recognised that front line staff have to deal with many challenging situations via all channels. To assist with handling such situations and as part of the Customer Service Excellence programme, the Customer Services team plus front line staff in Benefits, Council Tax and Housing attended 'Handling Challenging Situations' focussing on effective communication.</p>
<p><b>Bereavement Support</b></p>	<p>Following feedback from customers and (at times) delays in processing, it was recognised that improvements were required to the way in which bereavement enquiries were handled and prioritised.</p>

	The customer service team worked with frontline services and reviewed processes, webpages and documentation relating to bereavement. Workshops were delivered by Cruse (a national charity who provides bereavement support services). The training supported staff in understanding how to communicate effectively and compassionately with bereaved people and develop confidence when talking / making contact about difficult and sensitive topics.
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### **3 Development of the Access to Services Strategy**

- 3.1 There has been significant progress made as part of the Channel Access Strategy, however it is recognised that there is further improvements that can be made, particularly as technology develops and the ability to transact digitally is enhanced.
- 3.2 The Access to Services Strategy will be developed over the next 6 months, and will detail the proposed actions to be implemented over the medium term. The Strategy will be developed in liaison with Senior Officers and key staff to ensure the link between service delivery and customer service is as simple, efficient and streamlined as possible, leading to improved customer experience and reduced contact and complaints

#### ***Key Issues /Challenges***

- 3.3 Some of the key issues / challenges that will be incorporated into the updated Strategy include;
- Ensuring that there is capacity to deliver customer needs - customer expectations are increasing all the time and they expect real time information – system technology does not currently have all of the integration / automation necessary to eliminate back office intervention
  - Increasing the ability to pay via direct debit or online across all service areas
  - A proportion of customer contact is avoidable, therefore services need to be redesigned so that unnecessary valueless contact, which is both frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the councils, is eliminated where possible.
  - Ensuring that customers are kept informed
  - Review customer journeys and where, for example, automation can be introduced and there is a business case to do so, consider the plan for implementation. In doing so, have regard to those customers who may be vulnerable and seek other solutions suitable to avoid digital exclusion
  - Enhance the ability to provide seamless customer service delivery remotely where possible – particularly as a consequence of COVID-19
  - The internet is being used increasingly across all areas of life and digital transactions have many benefits to customers, of which those who are digitally excluded may be missing out on .

- Ensure alternative contact channels are provided for those who cannot access Council services digitally, or where services are not available online
- Reduce print and postage costs as a result of increasing electronic solutions
- Explore the introduction of a dedicated Business service, providing businesses with online services, information and single point of contact
- Consideration of rolling out the citizens portal to incorporate additional service areas

3.4 In consideration of the above, it is proposed that the development and implementation of the Strategy will include:

- Establishing a project group of senior management / key staff members
- Undertaking process reviews within service areas, prioritising high volume areas
- A focus on the whole organisation adopting a consistent approach for customer service delivery
- Ensure staff have necessary skills and key behaviours to deliver effective customer service
- Improving or maintaining customer service while reducing costs and responding to the financial challenge (right first time, automation of processes)
- Identify those groups who are digitally excluded to understand the challenges and offer support to overcome barriers and continue to recognise the importance of ensuring that non-digital alternatives continue to be made available to enable everyone to have access to services
- Understanding the challenges that people face in terms of online contact:

<b>Access</b>	the ability to actually go online and connect to the internet
<b>Skills</b>	to be able to use the internet
<b>Motivation</b>	knowing the reasons why using the internet is a good thing
<b>Trust</b>	a fear of crime , or not knowing where to start to go online

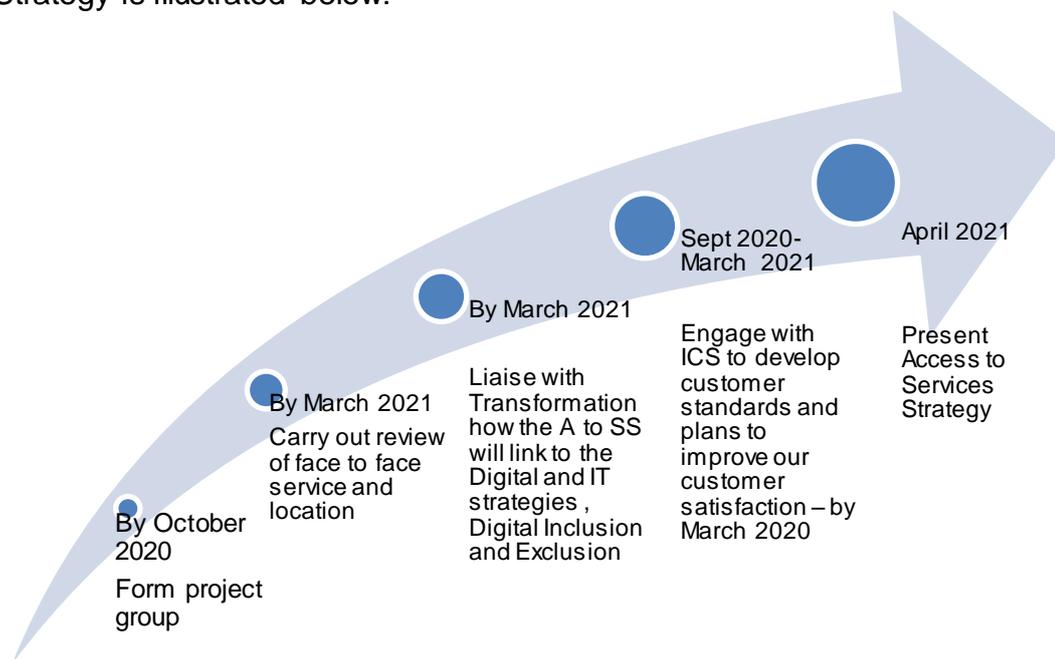
- Encouraging feedback and consultation with citizens and partners
- Engaging with the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) , making best use of our membership to measure customer satisfaction and enable us to improve the experience of our customers
- Undertaking Employee Engagement (via ICS) to provide valuable insight about how our employees feel about our services, the challenges they face and what they believe we need to focus on.
- Using the positive legacy of COVID-19 to review the locations and opening hours of our face to face facilities targeting this method of contact to the most vulnerable within the community
- Linking the strategy to other corporate plan objectives, for example, the ICT Strategy, Organisational Development Strategy and Communication plans

## ***Institute of Customer Services***

- 3.5 In December 2019, the Council joined the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) on a 2 year Discovery Roadmap Membership. The Institute will help to develop a comprehensive customer service roadmap and engagement plan that will meet the ongoing needs of customers, create sustained improvements in service and improve business results. This will support with the development of the Access to Services Strategy.
- 3.6 The ICS will support us and recommend a relevant blend of insight and knowledge , tools , training and practical solutions that will raise our customer service performance levels to meet customers needs;
- **Insight** – customer engagement and understanding
  - **Strategy and Action Plans** – developing the medium term plan for accessing services
  - **Customer Journey Mapping** – supporting the Council to see the organisation from a customers perspective
  - **Networking & Training** – learning from other organisations and enhancing the skills of our workforce

## ***Delivery Timetable***

- 3.7 The proposed timetable for the presentation of the Access to Services Strategy is illustrated below:



## **4. Member Feedback**

- 4.1 We invite members to feedback on the proposed process for the development of the Access to Services Strategy. Please provide any comments to:  
**Karen Lomas (Head of Customer Services)** [karen.lomas@highpeak.gov.uk](mailto:karen.lomas@highpeak.gov.uk)