

# Public Document Pack

Mid Devon District Council

## Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 10 August 2015 at 2.00 pm  
Exe Room, Phoenix House

Special Meeting  
Monday, 24 August 2015 at 2.00 pm

Those attending are advised that this meeting will be recorded

## Membership

Cllr F J Rosamond (Chairman)  
Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge  
Cllr Mrs J B Binks  
Cllr Mrs C P Daw  
Cllr Mrs S Griggs  
Cllr T G Hughes  
Cllr B A Moore  
Cllr Mrs J Roach  
Cllr Mrs E J Slade  
Cllr T W Snow  
Cllr N A Way  
Cllr Mrs N Woollatt

## A G E N D A

*Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place*

- 1 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**  
To receive any apologies for absence and notices of appointment of substitute Members (if any).
- 2 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**  
To receive any questions relating to items on the Agenda from members of the public and replies thereto.  
  
Note: A maximum of 30 minutes is allowed for this item.
- 3 **MEMBER FORUM**  
An opportunity for non-Cabinet Members to raise issues.
- 4 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING** (*Pages 5 - 10*)  
To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the last meeting of this

Committee (attached).

The Committee is reminded that only those members of the Committee present at the previous meeting should vote and, in doing so, should be influenced only by seeking to ensure that the minutes are an accurate record.

5 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

To consider any decisions made by the Cabinet at its last meeting that have been called-in.

6 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

To receive any announcements that the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee may wish to make.

7 **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION** *(Pages 11 - 40)*

At the request of the Chairman the Head of Customer Services will update the Committee on how we are responding to Digital Transformation.

8 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** *(Pages 41 - 44)*

The Committee to receive an update from the Economic Development Officer.

9 **SUPPORT FOR SCRUTINY**

The Chairman will give an update on progress to date to appoint an Intern from Exeter University to assist the Scrutiny Committee in their work.

10 **SAFEGUARDING**

The Head of Communities and Governance will give a presentation to the Committee regarding safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, explaining the District Councils role in this area.

11 **CLINICAL COMMISSIONING GROUP** *(Pages 45 - 46)*

Mr John Finn of the Northern, Eastern and Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will be attending a meeting of the Community Well Being Policy Development Group on 18<sup>th</sup> August.

Cllr Mrs J Binks has asked that in view of the CCG decision to permanently remove inpatient beds at Crediton Hospital, the Committee discuss the process and impact of this and consider questions to be put to Mr Finn.

12 **QUESTIONS FOR NEIL PARISH MP**

The Committee to consider questions to put to the MP at the Special Meeting being held on 24 August 2015.

13 **UPDATES AND ITEMS TO NOTE REGARDING OUTSTANDING ITEMS**

High Street Innovation Fund

The second round of the High Street Innovation Fund is now open for bids and relevant organisations have been contacted to make them aware of the opportunity for funding.

The closing date for bids is 12 noon on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September and following this date the bids will be shortlisted as per the criteria sent out to the organisations. Any organisation that submits a shortlisted bid will be invited in to meet with the Panel and the date of Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September has already been set aside for this.

The Panel will consist of the Head of Communities and Governance, Economic Development Manager and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration.

Head of Communities & Governance and Monitoring Officer

14 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Members are asked to note that the following items are already identified in the work programme for the next meeting:

Note: - this item is limited to 10 minutes. There should be no discussion on items raised.

**Kevin Finan**  
Chief Executive  
Friday, 31 July 2015

Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so, as directed by the Chairman. Any filming must be done as unobtrusively as possible from a single fixed position without the use of any additional lighting; focusing only on those actively participating in the meeting and having regard also to the wishes of any member of the public present who may not wish to be filmed. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairman or the Member Services Officer in attendance so that all those present may be made aware that is happening.

Members of the public may also use other forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to discussion. Lift access to the Council Chamber on the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions.

An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, or

If you would like a copy of the Agenda in another format (for example in large print) please contact Julia Stuckey on:

Tel: 01884 234209

E-Mail: [jstuckey@middevon.gov.uk](mailto:jstuckey@middevon.gov.uk)

Public Wi-Fi is available in all meeting rooms.

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 13 July 2015 at 2.00 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

F J Rosamond (Chairman)  
Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs R Berry (substituting for Cllr C P Daw), Mrs J B Binks, R Evans (substituting for Cllr B A Moore), Mrs S Griggs, Mrs J Roach, Mrs E J Slade, T W Snow, N A Way and Mrs N Woollatt

### **Apologies**

#### **Councillor(s)**

Mrs C P Daw, T G Hughes and B A Moore

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillor(s)**

C R Slade

### **Also Present**

#### **Officer(s):**

Samantha Bennion (Leisure Services Manager), Jill May (Head of HR and Development), Simon Newcombe (Public Health and Professional Services Manager), Liz Reeves (Head of Customer Services), Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer) and Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader)

## 17 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs C P Daw who was substituted by Councillor Mrs R Berry, Councillor B A Moore who was substituted by Councillor R Evans and from Councillor T G Hughes.

## 18 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

## 19 **MEMBER FORUM**

There were no issues raised under this item.

## 20 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Subject to the following amendments the minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

Page 8, that the sentence explaining the closure over the Christmas holidays be amended to say 'closed for an extended period over the Christmas holidays' and that

a bullet point be added to page 10 under the Legal Services update to say 'Managers having responsibility for their own service budget'.

## 21 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet at their last meeting had been called in.

## 22 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded the Committee that there would be a Special Meeting on 24 August 2015 at which the MP Neil Parish would be available to answer questions. He also informed the Committee that it seemed likely that Exeter University would be able to provide an intern to undertake work on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee.

## 23 CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY WELL BEING

The Committee had before it a position statement \* from the Cabinet Member for Community Well Being, summarising the key issues in each of the areas within his portfolio. The Cabinet Member explained that he was also now responsible for Digital Transformation and ICT but as this had been a recent change he had not reported on them, however he was more than happy to do so at a future meeting.

Discussion regarding Leisure Services and Public Health included:

- Income was plateauing at Exe Valley as the gym was at capacity. An extension was planned which would increase stations from 50 to 100;
- As hoped, Lords Meadow was achieving a higher income following recent capital spend;
- Other issues outside of the Council's control had increased expenditure, such as auto enrolment to the pension scheme, higher national insurance contributions and increases to holiday pay;
- Solar panels were providing savings on energy bills;
- Zest members were currently contacted at the end of their membership to try and retain them, but a system that automated this process was being introduced. This system called 'customer journey' could also be used to send motivational messages;
- Car parking issues at Exe Valley had been relieved by recent development of the tennis court area;
- Satisfaction surveys at the Leisure Centres were undertaken on a regular basis;
- Exercise classes were showing a good return and were also popular with older clients who used them as a social event;
- The cafe at Exe Valley was about to reopen;

- The Public Health Officer explained that as part of the public health agenda this service was working with the leisure service. Priorities within the public health agenda included reducing cardiovascular disease. Targeted families were being given support and it was hoped that habits gained in childhood would be maintained in adulthood. The Leisure Services Manager informed the Committee that staff were currently being trained to provide cardio rehabilitation at all three sites.
- Leisure staff were qualified to deliver diet and nutritional advice but this was very labour intensive. It was acknowledged that customer satisfaction was greater if weight loss was achieved;
- Public Health were working with AcTIV, giving support whenever possible. AcTiv was a local organisation which had the aim of getting more Mid Devon people to take part in sport and exercise. It was **AGREED** that Members would receive minutes of AcTIV meetings in future;
- The restructure in Environmental Health had resulted in the two health teams being merged into one, with a single manager, and renamed Public Health. It had been identified that there were not enough staff to cover all areas and a post had recently been advertised for a food competent Environmental Health Officer to address this;
- Rural isolation, loneliness and emotional health could be included in the Corporate Plan.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and the Officers for their report.

Note: \* Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed Minutes.

## 24 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK (00:54:16)**

The Committee had before it a report \* of the Head of Communities and Governance providing Members with an update on performance against the corporate plan and local service targets for 2014/15.

The Committee discussed the number of sick days taken by staff. The end of year performance showed that 9.21 days per officer were lost during the year due to sickness.

The Audit Team Leader explained that a lot of the sickness reported in the last year had been long term, due to illnesses such as cancer. She also explained that Human Resources had agreed to change the reporting procedure so that sickness over 15 days would be classed as long term (the figure had previously been 40 days). This would help to differentiate between long term absence due to illness, such as cancers and operations, and general short absences.

The Head of Human Resources outlined the current procedures in place for dealing with sickness, which included back to work interviews, phased returns and keeping in touch with staff during absence. Managers were issued with sickness reports when the 'trigger point' was reached. She also informed the Committee that Human

Resources organised health events, such as blood pressure monitoring, to encourage good health in the workforce.

Discussion took place regarding:

- A staff survey would be issued which would help identify areas of stress;
- Sick pay and national terms and conditions;
- Home working and the advantages/disadvantages of this;
- Incentives and benefits;
- The breakdown of sickness type;
- The balance between cutting staffing levels and creating stress.

Discussion also took place regarding the Planning Service:

- The time taken to implement and review the Article 4 Direction for Cullompton;
- Poor performance in some areas of the planning service;
- The staffing issues and restructure that had been put in place to rectify this;
- Joint working with North Devon for Building Control services;
- Performance for enforcement site visits, and the fact that although the initial visit may take place within the target of 15 days, follow up actions often took a long time;
- The High Street Innovation Fund had allocated monies for enhancement of shop fronts in Tiverton Town Centre but this had not yet taken place;

It was **AGREED** that the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration be invited to attend a meeting of this Committee to discuss the issues raised.

It was **AGREED** that a report be brought to this Committee outlining plans and progress for the Tiverton Pannier Market.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the following area be identified as a matter of concern:

Performance for Listed Buildings and Conservation area consents.

(Proposed by Councillor Mrs N Woollatt and seconded by Councillor Mrs J Roach).

Note: \* Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed Minutes.

## 25 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**



The Chairman explained that the list \* attached to the agenda had been compiled from items identified by Members at the last meeting when he had asked them to make note of matters of concern that had been highlighted by the public when they were canvassing during the election.

The Committee worked through the list and discussion took place regarding:

The Manor House Hotel, Cullompton

It was agreed that the Head of Planning and Regeneration had kept Members informed. However, Members felt that the situation now needed to be resolved in order to save problems of grid lock in the town centre and access for the fire service. It was **AGREED** that the Head of Customer Services would discuss the matter at the next Management Team meeting with the intention of convening a meeting of District Councillors, County Councillors, Town Councillors, Highway Officers and relevant County/District Council Officers.

#### Devolution

Joint working with other authorities and whether this was providing value for money.

#### Waste Service

Changes to the waste service and how they had bedded in.

#### Broadband

The roll out of Broadband in rural areas and how this was progressing.

#### Town Improvement

The under-use of the Pannier Market

#### Moving Forward

Exploring why it sometimes took a long time for recommendations that had been agreed by Members to be implemented by Officers. It was **AGREED** that Members would be asked to provide specific incidents of this.

#### Value for Money

Whether or not cutting services, such as closing toilets, was actually saving money in the long term or whether the implications were that these cuts would affect future income within the District.

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman would consider the areas raised to identify items for the work programme.

It was **RESOLVED** that a working group be set up to look at the effects of cuts on outcomes/value for money. Membership of the Group to comprise Cllrs Mrs J Binks, B Evans, Mrs S Griggs, F J Rosamond and Mrs J Roach.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

**26 UPDATES AND ITEMS TO NOTE REGARDING OUTSTANDING ITEMS**

There were no updates given.

**27 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Economic Development  
Digital Transformation

(The meeting ended at 4.45 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**

Liz Reeves

**Head of Customer Services.**

Back ground:

Work started in 2005 setting up a central customer service team, the objective was to improve efficiency by reducing administration and providing one easy and accessible contact for customers. Reports were provided to Members on the outcomes of this project annually.

Customer Service is now an established service providing:

- Front line enquiry service open 9.00 to 5.00 /4.30(Friday) for face to face contacts for all services.
- A call centre open 8.30 to 5.00/4.30 (Fridays and covered by DCC until 8.00pm and Saturday mornings) providing a combination of switchboard and service contact for a range of services.
- A central Admin team covering post opening, scanning and a range of other general administrative support task.
- Communications, website and digital contacts.
- Revenues collection.

The teams are generic and cover for one and other to maximise our ability to respond to demand. This is an essential part of the design of the service as customer contact is increasing and customers now use a variety of methods to contact us, and at times that suit their own life style. As well as the traditional contact method, of face to face, phone and letter, customers now email, text, go on line and use social media.

Staffing levels have decreased across the Council, so we need to build services that can respond to customer demand and this must include digital and self- service options. Developing digital services will enable mobile working and allow scope to consider shared and partnership working.

The Customer Service project and now the Digital Transformation project have included business analysis and transformation of how we transact with customers from the point of contact to delivery of the service.

These two corporate projects have contributed to our ability to maintain services as our budgets have reduced.

A summary of the savings made from the Customer Service project is provided in table 1.

It is difficult to quantify savings as the project has grown as there are so many changing factors to our business. For example in the past 10 years the Council has introduced a new waste collection

scheme, introduced Local Welfare Assistance, made changes to the Electoral services, on street parking and Housing services etc.

Details of savings in postage costs can be seen in table 2.

Reduction in printing costs can be seen in table 3.

The project work is now focused on digital transformation, to help the Council work more effectively and provide customers with new digital channels for completing transactions with us. I have provided the Digital Transformation strategy and Cabinet report from January of this year, which contain details of why we are making this investment in change.

A quarterly highlight report is provided to Management Team who are the project board for this high profile project.

I will be happy to answer questions.

Liz Reeves

Head of Customer Services

Table 1 Customer Services Project report 2011

**Summary of savings to date:**

Annual Savings	2005/6 £	2006/7 £	2007/8 £	2008/9 £	2009/10 £	2010/11	Totals £
BPR	23,760	23,760	23,760	23,760	23,760	23,760	142,560
BPR		15,150	15,150	15,150	15,150	15,150	75,750
BPR			6,150	6,150	6,150	6,150	24,600
Staff saving			40,140	40,140	40,140	40,140	160,560
BPR*				34,230	34,230	34,230	102,690
BPR & staff					10,535	6,745	17,280
Staff saving**						16,857	16,857
BPR						987	987
<b>Total</b>	<b>£23,760</b>	<b>£38,910</b>	<b>£85,200</b>	<b>£119,430</b>	<b>£129,965</b>	<b>£144,019</b>	<b>541,284</b>

\*includes estimate of cost of providing extended opening hours through DCC

**Table 2 Savings on postage:**

Franked		cleanmail	
Franked Mail 2013/14	£29,960	Clean Mail 2013/2014	£123,963
Franked Mail 2014/15	£20,459	Clean Mail 2014/2015	£113,383
Saving	£9,501	Saving	10,580

Further savings will be by investigating alternatives to postage and where post is the best media using outsourced solutions to maximise discounts.

**Table 3 Savings to printing costs**

year	saving
2004	£20,000 move to Phoenix house centralised printing
2005	£16,000 further savings maximising use of shared printers in Phoenix house

Further savings will need to be from use of digital solutions, reducing the need for paper copies/files.

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## Digital Transformation

**Cabinet Member** Cllr Brenda Hull  
**Responsible Officer** Liz Reeves, Head of Customer Services

**Reason for Report:** To inform Members of the digital transformation plans for Mid Devon District Council. This programme of work is needed to ensure we continue to provide services for our customers that are appropriate and efficient within a reduced budget.

### RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. To approve the Channel Access Strategy 2014-2017.
2. To approve additional one-off expenditure, shown in appendix 2, for the digital transformation programme 2014-2017.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** To ensure that people have access to the services they need, particularly those on low incomes and those who are sick or disabled. People also need easy access to information about services at the right time and in the right place whether that is by telephone, website or face-to-face.

**Financial Implications:** We have to generate savings both directly and indirectly for our own business effectiveness and because central government settlements are decreasing in value. Investment is needed to analyse and potentially redesign our business processes and customer transactions. This will inform our transformation programme to create digital services using existing and where appropriate new technology. The capital investment will ensure we can continue to provide effective services with reduced resource and budget.

**Legal Implications:** Any new methods of service delivery must ensure we are able to continue to meet our statutory duties and maintain data security.

**Risk Assessment:** All the risks associated with this programme are recorded and will be closely monitored.

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2013, work started on a digital transformation programme for Mid Devon District Council. The aim of the programme is to create a customer focused business where our customers can use self-service or can be assisted to access our services.
- 1.2 With reducing budgets and continued pressure on resource any changes in how we deliver our services must be able to reduce costs directly or provide a platform for future cost reductions and must simplify customer interactions.
- 1.3 The transformation agenda means we need to rethink how we work, to review customer contact and transactions and to streamline processes from start to finish. Service review includes both external and internal transactions, by

making our working practices as efficient as possible, savings will be made in time and resource.

- 1.4 Each service has been involved in the analysis and has provided details of how digital transactions could improve the service provided, this has informed the priorities for the digital transformation programme.

## 2.0 Transformation priorities

- 2.1 As a result of the analysis completed the programme for change will focus on:

- A new website, that is transactional, easy to use and that will render to mobile devices.
- Improved and integrated on-line forms to enable self-service and reduce back office administration.
- Mobile working to improve information available to staff when visiting customers off site, reduce office space and improve administrative efficiency.
- Improve and extend the use of Document Management Systems (DMS) this is required to enable mobile working.
- Implement texting (SMS) as a new additional access channel.

- 2.2 In addition a review will be carried out with each service to implement digital services. The review will focus on the top transactions for that service and the needs and preferences of their customers as outlined in the Channel Access Strategy.

## 3.0 Why do we need to change?

- 3.1 The Council receives contact from customers in a variety of ways. In 2013-14 we had 110,641 visitors to our offices for enquiries or to make payments, answered 403,594 phone calls (in the call centre and direct to officers) and received over 800,000 emails. Add to this contact by post, internet, Facebook and Twitter, we received in excess of 1.3 million contacts from our customers during the year.

- 3.2 The number of contacts is increasing year on year; traditional contact volumes have increased by 10% since 2010 add to this, new methods of contact such as online applications and social media and the increase in customer contact is realistically in the region of 15%. The variety and method of contact is changing and our current working practices make this difficult to manage. Customer expectation has also changed, a more immediate response is assumed when using digital contact such as email, online or text. To meet this expectation we need to rethink our working practices, create efficient digital processes that help to remove avoidable contacts and ensure we can respond to the ever increasing method and volume of contacts.

- 3.3 Our full time equivalent staff (FTE) levels have decreased by 50 since 2010. We have continued to provide both statutory and non-statutory services with a reduced workforce. The Customer First project has contributed to this by creating a central admin and call centre team to deal with customer contacts. Significant savings have been made already but we will not be able to



continue to meet the increasing demand within budget unless we change how we work or reduce or cease some of the services we provide.

- 3.4 In 2010 our council tax property base was 33,477 this has increased by 1,277 properties to 34,754 in the 2015 tax base, increasing the services we need to provide and this upward trend will continue while staff levels and budgets reduce.
- 3.5 How customers want to transact with us is changing, in a survey with the citizens panel 90% had access to the internet at home and 63% said they had used our website, 60% had smart phones and 71% of them had used these devices to access our website. The survey also confirmed that the preferred method of contact was email.
- 3.6 National figures show the trend towards smart phones and other mobile devices as a preferred method of access to the internet. This is an economic choice for some customers who cannot afford a land line and chose only mobile technology.
- 3.7 Customers expect to contact organisations by email or other digital channels and to be able to transact with services at times to suit their own needs. Our service standards have focused on contact in person over the phone and by post, but now need to include on line contacts, email and social media.
- 3.8 The increase in housing in Mid Devon combined with the new range of access channels, means we will struggle to keep up with demand unless we either employ more staff or improve our processes to remove the need for more staff. The digital transformation programme aims to provide self-service where appropriate and improve working practices to remove duplication, automate where possible and remove low-value contacts i.e. follow up contacts.

#### **4.0 Investment in digital transformation**

- 4.1 As budgets reduce the challenge to provide services will increase. The target outcomes for the digital programme are at appendix 1.
- 4.2 Customer contacts are increasing and will continue to grow. The digital transformation programme will provide a sustainable means of dealing with increased demand with less staff and resource. Moving customers to self-service will contain the impact and remove the need for additional administration and customer service front line staff to cope with the demand. Customers that do not want to use digital and automated services will still be able to use assisted service.
- 4.3 The range of services we provide require complex systems that need to be secure and retain customer confidentiality. To deliver digital services information from these data bases need to feed into one access point for customers. Careful process mapping, analysis and redesign is essential to create digital transactions that are easy to use for customers and reduce administration and inefficient working practices.

- 4.4 The return on investment on digital transformation will be made by, reducing our printing, stationary and postage costs, freeing space in our buildings and reduced staffing. These measures will provide digital services that customers want to use and ensure we are able to meet increased customer contacts and continue to provide services within budget.
- 4.5 Estimated savings identified from digital transformation include:
- Reduce postage by 20% (2013/14 spend £154,322 20% saving) = £30,864
  - Reduce printing by 20% (2013/14 spend £43,448 20% saving) = £8,689
  - Reduce staffing (estimate 5 FTE scale 7 £28,054 x 5 saving) = £140,270
  - **Initial estimated annual saving = £179,823**
  - Plus additional savings will be made by enabling a reduction in requirement for office space and equipment.
- 4.6 The return on investment will be long term as once customers move to new digital channels these will become the channel of choice. Service reviews will be embedded in the culture of the council and will ensure efficiency savings continue. The additional start-up costs for the first two years are detailed at appendix 2 and will be repaid by the year on year savings noted at paragraph 4.5
- 4.7 Failure to move to new automated and self -service transaction will mean the council is not able to respond to customer needs. Business and other organisations are moving to digital platforms and we need to be able to work in the environment that will become the norm.

**Contact for more Information:** Liz Reeves, 01884 234371  
lreeves@middevon.gov.uk

**Circulation of the Report:** Cllr Brenda Hull, Management Team

**List of Background Papers:** Project Initiation Document, Channel access strategy.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Extract from Project initiation Document (PID)**

#### Products:

- Develop a Digital transformation strategy that supports channel shift.
- Enable mobile working, taking our business with us wherever we go. – issue mobile devices e.g. tablets
- Enable customers to contact us using mobile devices. – mobile enabled web site
- Implement Social network services listening tool to discover customer insight over various media such as twitter and other social media
- Enable alerts and messaging to customers – SMS gateway
- Implement a data warehouse solution to enable a single view of the customer, to support a customer portal and enable greater analysis of customer requirements
- Implement an extranet/customer portal to enable customers to access their own information for self service.
- Implement Live Chat to provide mediated online service
- To provide public Wi-Fi to promote online self service
- To provide additional meeting room/training space/colocation space by 20% reduction in desks and storage required for officers (mobile/home/hot desking)
- To create a champion group for the programme using key people from each service to promote digital transformation in their service

#### Outcomes

- Reduced front line contact – Face to face and phone by 20% over the next 5years
- Increase interactions on line that allow customers to self-serve, using systems that wherever possible integrate with back office systems, improving processing times and reduce printing and paper retention costs
  - Implement payment kiosk in Phoenix House 2014
  - Implement Customer Portal 2017
  - Improve online forms and increase usage from 1% to 10% of customer interactions
  - Increase use of scanned or electronically saved documents and free up additional floor space currently used for filing
- Continue to deliver services that are needed but with less resource
  - Still meeting performance indicators but on reduced budgets
- Standardise internal processes across the organisation
  - Measure savings on each process reviewed and revised
- Increase scanning at post opening and at front line delivery to reduce double handling, printing costs and paper storage

- Scan all documents at post opening and received at reception by 2017
- Reduce or remove paper forms (internal and external) that need to be scanned or keyed into systems
  - Reduce use of paper forms by at least 20%
- Enable electronic delivery of work from scanned images using work flow that will support mobile and home working and reduce paper retention and printing costs
  - All services to receive 'post' using workflow by 2017
  - Issue tablets to mobile officers
- Create a customer focused approach to service delivery that encourages a consistent "one council" approach at the first point of contact
  - Customer service training to all staff
  - Enable electronic viewing of plans in reception by installing large monitor

## Appendix 2

ICT have a limited capital programme for technology.

To support this major investment project capital investment needed is itemised below:

Table 1

Resource required	Budget required	New expenditure
<b>Project support Staff</b>		
1 FTE scale 7 to provide a Uniform systems admin role for the implementation of Uniform enterprise. This covers work for planning, EH, property services, private sector housing, parks and open spaces.(JD for equivalent post already exists)	£28053 (includes on costs) Temporary 2 year contract	£56,107
1FTE estimated at scale 9 to back fill in services as work on digital transformation is carried out. The scale and duration of contract will vary for each service and may be lower than scale 9 if the back fill is for administration but may also be higher if experienced agency staff are required.  £28,922 plus on costs	£36152 (includes on costs) temporary and varied contracts for 2 year period.	£72,305
1 FTE to assist with on line integration into back office systems Scale 9	£36152 (includes on costs) 2 year contract	£72,305
<b>Total for period of project</b>		<b>£200,717</b>

### Existing capital programme to deliver digital transformation includes:

Table 2

Improved website (Improved on line forms to increase digital transactions that are integrated into our back office systems).
Text messaging facility (Additional communication channel for providing information to customers).
Tablets or other mobile devises ( develop mobile working)
Improve telephony/unified communications

All the items in table 2 are included in the 2015/16 capital programme and have already been considered at PDG and budget meetings. The expenditure is essential to ensure we can continue to deliver business as usual and respond to modernisation of technology.

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# Mid Devon District Council's Channel Access Strategy 2014 - 2017 “Digital Transformation”

Version 1.4 | November 2014

## Amendment History

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Version	Date	Name	Description
1.0	07/02/2014	Dave Witts	Initial draft version for client review
1.1	26/09//2014	Liz Reeves	Project review



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## 1 Executive Summary

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### 1.1 Channel Access strategy

Mid Devon District Council (the Council) is a small district council, providing services for approximately 77,750 residents and 2,671 businesses. The Council wished to define a strategy, focused on “putting the customer first” and encouraging channel shift. This strategy focuses on improving the quality of the customer’s experience, encouraging channel shift and reducing avoidable contact whilst embracing “Digital Transformation”.

Services need to be available through appropriate and cost effective contact channels designed with the needs and preferences of our customers in mind. Customers will be encouraged to use the most effective contact method, by creating a series of deliberate and targeted channel shifts. This will not discriminate against any individual by limiting the choice of contact method available.

The format of this strategy leads with an executive summary, including all key recommendations and the remainder looks in more detail at each of the customer access channels.

### 1.2 Key Success Factors

The key success factors of an effective channel access strategy are:

- **Commitment to change** – to re-think how we transact with all customers end to end, improve customer service, align back office and customer needs and provide a professional customer service while enabling reduction in cost.
- **Detail** - the deliberate design of the channel access strategy for **each type of service**, bearing in mind the level of human interaction required and the needs of the targeted customer base.
- **Constant review**- of the effectiveness of the channel access strategy for each type of contact bearing in mind changing technologies and changing customer habits.
- **Simplicity** – the optimum channels for the organisation should be the easiest to use for the customer to drive a shift in customer behaviour.
- **Inclusion** – no group should be denied access to a service because of disability, language or cost of the access channel (e.g. mobile phone costs, broadband access). Options should be made available other than the organisation’s preferred method of contact.
- **Cost effectiveness** – particularly in the current economic climate, finding ways in which to deliver services effectively but at lower cost is increasingly important.

### 1.3 Key Recommendations

The key recommendations contained in this strategy are:

#### 1.3.1 Digital transformation priorities

1. To implement a new website Content Management System (CMS) to enable the redesign of the existing website ensuring all content is focused on the needs of the customer, has simple easy to use transactions and provides a solution for mobile and tablet users.
2. Provide a single customer focused approach to all access channels so that customers are able to contact and transact with us in the most effective ways.
3. To promote the website as the main access point for the council’s services for information and transactional services and provide mediated access through our face to face and contact centre staff.
4. To develop effective use of social media for engaging with our customers.
5. To provide access to the internet and wifi in our offices.

6. To enable mobile working for staff.
7. To improve and extend use of the Document Management System (DMS) to support self-service and mobile working.
8. To develop action plans with all services for digital transformation, that reduce cost, increase efficiency and support customer self-service.

### 1.3.2 Customer Insight

All decisions and recommendations made throughout this strategy have been focused on the needs of our customers. An exercise was carried out to develop personas for MDDC. Details are available in the Senior Officers Engagement Report on Share point.

The digital transformation programme will involve engagement with all services to ensure the benefits of understanding customers are embedded in the redesign of services

### 1.3.3 Channel Insight

From the data currently available an exercise was undertaken to identify the number of interactions per access channel and to formulate a cost per channel so decisions could be informed of where to most effectively channel shift interactions and prioritise the digital transformation programme. See graphs at page 9.

### 1.3.4 Avoidable Contact

The re-design of services must reduce the need for our customers to contact us by reducing red tape, automating processes and working with partner authorities to provide “joined up services”. To ensure continued improvement we will:

- Establish a permanent Customer Service Improvement Team to analyse data from our main customer access channels to look for opportunities to reduce the need for citizens to make unnecessary or multiple contact with the authority
- Improve the number of customer queries that we are able to resolve first time face to face, on the telephone and on line by improving our back office processes
- Broaden scope outside the organisation to actively look at end-to-end process opportunities to eliminate contact

### 1.3.5 Channel Shift

To design cost effective, efficient and user friendly means of contacting the council and then encourage our customers to use the channels that work best for them. All new services including information services will be designed around the user for 24/7 web access first wherever possible, ensuring all channels have access to the same information to accommodate ‘channel hopping’

### 1.3.6 Digital Inclusion

To ensure that citizens who do not have access to digital channels at home or work are not disadvantaged when communicating with the council we will:

- Provide public internet access at our key locations, e.g. Leisure Centres, Council Offices and provide information on other available access in the area.
- Provide support and assisted access to our website at the council’s face-to-face locations
- Widely advertise our full choice of contact channels.

## 1.3.7 Channel Strategies

### 1.3.7.1 Website

To provide a single, comprehensive, easy to access and up to date website that allows anyone to transact and interact with the council 24/7

### 1.3.7.2 Telephone

To minimise the number of contact numbers published, to provide access to an officer and to reduce the amount of irritating low value calls that our residents have to make.

### 1.3.7.3 Mobile, Smartphone/Tablet

To use the emerging mobile phone technology in a tactical manner to provide better access to information for targeted user groups, to reduce costs, increase speed of communication or reduce direct contact

### 1.3.7.4 Face to Face

To maintain our Face to Face services, in the most cost effective locations by fully trained expert officers

### 1.3.7.5 Email

To reduce the amount of email communication by better use of electronic forms and other electronic channels

### 1.3.7.6 Post/Paper

To reduce the amount of post and paper communication by better use of electronic channels

### 1.3.7.7 Social Media

To communicate and listen with customers on Social Media to promote the web channel

## 1.4 In Conclusion

Adopting and implementing the recommendations in this strategy will lay the foundations for the development of all the Council's customer access channels, with a focus on improving the quality of the customers' experience, encouraging channel shift and reducing avoidable contact through “Digital Transformation”.

## 2 Channel Access Strategy

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### 2.1 What is a Channel Access Strategy?

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

A channel access strategy is an organisation's plan for the channels it will use to deliver services to, and interact with, its customers. A channel access strategy explains how an organisation will meet the contact demands of its customers using the resources it has available bearing in mind the needs of the customer. However, a channel access strategy is **not** simply a plan to move service provision to online channels.

### 2.2 Why is a Channel Access Strategy Important

Customers receive a high standard of customer service from many organisations. To ensure the Council follows this route, the organisation must continue to raise its own standards of service across all the channels it uses and offers.

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

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

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 as their skill sets when selecting channels.

Rising internet use and customer expectations of accessing services online present an on-going opportunity for organisations. 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 organisations.

The Council must however also meet the needs of people who do not (yet) have access to the internet. 'Digital Inclusion' therefore is a core element of any channel access strategy.

### 2.3 Purpose of a Channel Access Strategy

To outline the broad principles for the ways in which the Council will deliver its services through a range of contact channels that provide better value for money, are more accessible and are designed with the customer in mind.

### 2.3.1 The need for insight

The process of developing and implementing a channel access strategy needs to be guided by insight, and insight specifically relating to:

- The customer
- The services an organisation is providing and each service area in question
- The current delivery channels at the organisation's disposal as well as those that may be available or need to be used in future

It is also important to understand the wider online services market, as expectations of online services are driven by customer experiences of using similar services of other organisations.

### 2.3.2 Organisational challenge

In considering a channel access strategy, there is often a considerable challenge and change to existing organisational structures. A channel access strategy needs to become an integral part of the structure of the organisation and the way the objectives of the organisation are realised. It cannot be imposed or “made to fit” onto existing practices and as such is likely to require or precipitate considerable organisational change.

We also need to recognise that people will use different channels not just for different types of interactions, but also to suit their own convenience.

## 2.4 Scope

1. This strategy document sets out the basic principles by which the Council will deliver its services to its customers through the contact channels currently available.

Contact channels in scope include:

- Face to face
  - Email
  - Internet/Website
  - Social media
  - Telephone
  - Mobile technology (including SMS text messaging, apps and mobile web)
  - Automated telephone technology
  - Post
2. This document focuses on three key types of contacts between the Council and its customers
    - **Transactions** (e.g. reporting a repair or paying a bill)
    - **Interactions** (e.g. obtaining advice)
    - **Information** (e.g. exploring available properties)

## 2.5 Channels Hierarchy and Design Principles

The choice of contact channels available to customers is growing all of the time as new technologies are developed and released. For example in the last 5 years we have seen the emergence and growth of channels such as social media ( Facebook and Twitter), mobile internet, interactive TV and mobile phone applications (apps).

Without a channel access strategy many organisations typically adopt one of two approaches to using these channels by either 1) launching all of their products and services on all new channels without much thought to the relevance and cost of doing so or 2) focusing on switching their customer contact to the cheapest channel (often assumed to be the internet) without much thought as to the relevance of this channel to their entire customer base.

The key factors to an effective channel access strategy therefore are:

1. **Commitment to change** – The organisation must understand that this is about changing the way we work to ensure there is a seamless relationship between the customer, frontline staff and the back office process
2. **Detail** - the deliberate design of the channel access strategy for **each type of service**, bearing in mind the level of human interaction required and the needs of the targeted customer base
3. **Review** – the constant reviewing of the effectiveness of the channel access strategy for each type of contact bearing in mind changing technologies, channel hopping and changing customer habits
4. **Simplicity** – the optimum channels for the organisation should be the easiest to use for the customer to drive a shift in customer behaviour
5. **Inclusion** – no group should be denied access to a service because of disability, language or cost of the access channel (e.g. mobile phone costs, broadband access). Options should be made available other than the organisation's preferred method of contact.
6. **Cost effectiveness** – particularly in the current economic climate, finding ways in which to deliver services effectively but at lower cost is increasingly important.

## 3 Customer Insight

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A key focus during the development of this strategy was to build an understanding of who the customers of Mid Devon District Council are and how they interact with the Council, so plans can be developed to channel shift as many interactions as possible to the cheaper channels.

A persona is a realistic but fictional character that represents one segment of the Council's target audience. The Personas developed were based on the Council's demographics and can be seen in the Senior Officer Engagement report

Key observations when developing the Personas and interacting with the Services at the Senior Management Engagement workshop, included:

- Highlighted different needs of the customer, important to understand local needs (one size does not fit all)
- One point of contact, simple to contact regardless of access channel used.
- Alerts on changes to services or planning notices
- Mixture of methods customers need to use - depends on the type of enquiry
- Potential for use of live chat (on line web tool)
- More services available online, booking and reporting etc.
- Some customers will never change / be on the internet, so must be able to support them
- Effective signposting is very important
- Simplify the website
- Provide joined up information from across services and organisations
- Need for effective Online payments
- Channels that suit customers varied lifestyles

### 3.1 Recommendations

Continue to work with all services to ensure the benefits of customer insight are embedded in the redesign of services.



## 4 Channel Insight

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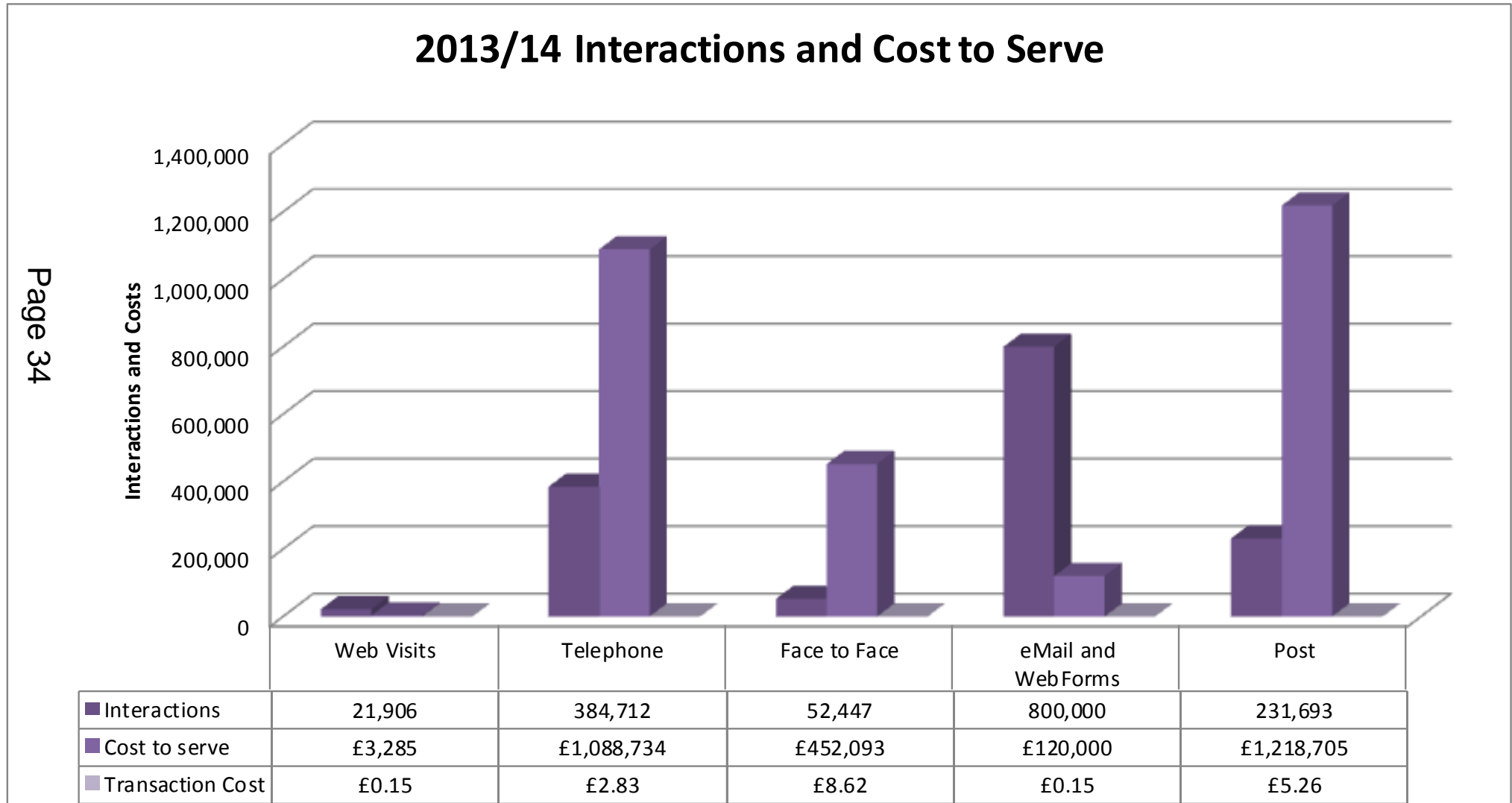
It is important to bear in mind the Council's target audience's access to technology, the type and complexity of the contact, their personal preferences as well their skill sets when selecting channels.

From the data currently available an exercise will be undertaken to identify the number of interactions per access channel and to formulate a cost per channel so decisions can be informed of where to most effectively channel shift interactions.

Customer interactions dealt with by service areas outside of Customer Services are logged on a number of different systems, some manual, and to a varying degree of detail. Data will need to be collated from these services and analysis will be required when delivering this strategy. The data collected so far does however highlight areas with a high volume of interactions and where the greatest savings may be possible.

The costs used for each channel are those identified nationally by SOCITIM. Focusing on end to end process improvements will reduce channel costs and ensure efficient service delivery.

## 4.1 Customer Services transactions showing totals by channel and showing costings for - Web visits (for payments)/telephone / face to face / email / post



## 5 Mid Devon District's Channel shift Strategies

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### 5.1 Website.

To encourage channel shift we must provide a cost effective, efficient and user friendly website that is available for customers to use at a time that suits their needs and that they are confident to use. An important part of this strategy will be to encourage customers to use the new channels if they are suitable for their needs.

1. Promote the website as the main access point for the council's services.
2. Provide wifi and public access in our offices to assist customers to use self -service options.
3. Use marketing and communications expertise to direct customers to the website and on line services.
4. All new services will be designed around the user for 24/7 web access first wherever possible.
5. Ensure customers have access to the same information regardless of the channel they chose to contact us.

More details on our website strategy are at item 6.1 of this document.

### 5.2 Digital Inclusion Strategy

To ensure that citizens who do not have access to digital channels at home or work are not disadvantaged when communicating with the council

1. Provide public internet access at our key locations, e.g. Leisure Centres, Council Offices and provide information on other free access available.
2. Provide full mediated access to our website at the council's face-to-face locations and over the phone.
3. Widely advertise our full choice of contact channels, particularly to hard to reach groups, e.g. transient and socially excluded groups.
4. Never design a service that is available only through digital channels
5. Provide staff training to ensure they have the skills to support customers using digital transactions.

### 5.3 Accessibility of Contact Strategy

To provide a full range of contact channels for each of our services, with some channels providing enhanced access for customers with special requirements.

1. Continually engage with groups representing those with specific requirements for the way they contact us and ensure that an appropriate choice of channels is available to those individuals
2. Ensure that we widely advertise our choice of contact channels, particularly to hard to reach groups, for example young people or vision impaired customers
3. To provide a comprehensive translation service to allow easy access to the authority for all through the face to face and telephone channels.
4. Provide disabled access to our buildings
5. Provide induction loops within our main offices for customers with impaired hearing.
6. Investigate the use of "live chat" to assist customers using our on line services.

## 6 Strategies for Specific Channels

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### 6.1 Website Strategy

To provide a single, comprehensive, easy to access and up to date website that allows anyone to transact and interact with the council 24/7

1. Create a new website using Umbraco open source technology, that allows greater flexibility to update and amend the website to reflect changes in services, technology and customer requirements.
2. To increase and improve on line forms to make them the channel of choice for simple, effective transactions that will encourage channel shift.
3. Use analysis of transaction failures to improve the website and on line functions.
4. Train key staff to update the website to ensure the site is always up to date.
5. Ensure that business cases for improvements reflect both increased public satisfaction, but also reduced contact centre and officer time and effort in providing mediated access.
6. To provide appropriate intuitive map based interfaces to both transactional and information systems
7. To integrate all online transactions directly into back office systems to prevent double entering of information.
8. Remove telephone numbers and email addresses for individual officers, to reduce the need to update pages and ensure access to services is via one agreed point of contact.
9. To ensure that all council leaflets and literature are made available via the website in order to reduce printing, cost and environmental impact
10. To ensure that all communication is replicated on the council's website
11. Provide “open” datasets online in order for interested parties to create their own interfaces and combinations increasing transparency
12. Constantly review and respond to feedback to improve the website

### 6.2 Telephone Strategy

To minimise the number of contact numbers published, to provide fast access to an expert officer and to reduce the amount of irritating low value calls that our residents have to make

1. To provide one main phone number for the organisation which can be easily found in order to make contacting the council straightforward for our residents
2. Provide an automated telephone system for payments.
3. To use local rate phone numbers wherever possible to make contacting the authority cheaper on “pay as you go” mobile phones
4. To constantly improve the number of customer queries that we are able to resolve first time on the telephone.
5. To use telephone call data and customer feedback to identify areas of improvement within the council and work to eliminate red tape, process failure and unnecessary cost to the public
6. Wherever possible, use the public website to transact in our Customer Services Centre to ensure that the site is fit for purpose for our residents and the same service is provided across the various access channels.

### Mobile Strategy

To use the emerging mobile phone technology in a tactical manner to provide better access to information for targeted user groups, to reduce costs, increase speed of communication or reduce direct contact.

1. To provide access to council telephone based services using only local rate telephone numbers to ensure the minimum costs to mobile phone users, particularly on "pay as you go" tariffs
2. To use outbound text messaging to confirm appointments, chase payments and advise of items of interest
3. To develop new inbound and outbound text services, this can also be used for hearing impaired customers.
4. Provide a mobile/tablet rendered website.
5. Provide mobile solutions for staff to improve access to information on site visits, improve efficiencies and remove double handling of data.

## 6.3 Face to Face Strategy

To maintain our Face to Face services, but to provide these services in more appropriate and cost effective locations by fully trained expert officers

1. To seek opportunities to share face to face provision with other organisations
2. To provide mediated access to the Council website through our face to face staff and assist customers to use self- service .
3. To undertake process reviews to identify potential channel shift and quality improvements to our face to face service.
4. One and done approach
5. Provide wifi access in our main offices and leisure centres and provide information on other public access facilities.

## 6.4 Email and on line Strategy

To reduce the amount of email communication by better use of electronic forms and other electronic channels

1. To provide a complete range of online forms to minimise the amount of emails handled
2. To encourage use of outgoing e-mails to communicate rather than phone and post.
3. Email alerts for changes to expected services.
4. To provide status updates for any transactions that are started on the web but cannot be completed online – for example reporting a fault

## 6.5 Post/Paper Communication Strategy

To reduce the amount of post and paper communication by better use of electronic channels

1. To provide a complete range of online forms to minimise the amount of post handled
2. To place more of our leaflets and information online in order to minimise printing and reduce our environmental impact

3. To integrate email and postal distribution lists in order to give people the choice to opt for email only
4. Use DMS for all paper correspondence to support mobile working and customer self service
5. Use second class post as our main postal tariff
6. Use external print/post mail companies to maximise post discounts.

## 6.6 Social Media Strategy

To communicate and listen with customers on Social Media to promote the web channel

1. Develop our use of Social media
2. Use a monitoring management tool to identify individuals to respond to

## 7 Performance Management and Governance

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### 7.1 Channel Shift

- The Head of Customer Services will have the day to day responsibility for the Council's Channel Access Strategy and it's implementation. An annual report is provided to Members on complaints and this will include data on customer transactions and changing trends.
- We will compare the effectiveness and usage of different channels for each service and seek to shift contacts to the most appropriate channels

### 7.2 Website

- Customer Services will ensure that, through constant customer feedback and task based metrics the web content is always relevant, up to date and user friendly
- The “exit pages” and transaction abandonment on the website will be analysed each month to see where transactions are failing and corrections made accordingly
- ICT will ensure that the website is available and operational 24/7
- An officer web group will maintain overall service excellence as evidenced by customer feedback, industry awards and SOCITM usability ratings
- Obtain and maintain the “WCAG 2.0 level AA” rating for accessibility by all.

### 7.3 Mobile technology

- The ICT Manager will have responsibility for the mobile phone strategy
- To monitor opportunities and take up rates of mobile technologies
- Performance and usage of this channel will be monitored as services are developed

### 7.4 Customer Service

- Individual service managers will be responsible for their own services and monitor performance against the standards set in the Council's Customer Care policy. The Head of Customer Services will monitor, review and update the Customer Care Policy.
- Our Corporate Induction process includes information on Customer care.

### 7.5 Digital transformation

- Business cases will be prepared to implement new technology or other equipment to ensure the expenditure will result in efficiencies and savings to the Council. Any new systems must demonstrate a dual benefit, to the public, and to ease of use for staff to facilitate savings in time and efficiency for the Council.
- As a result of our digital transformation programme:
  - We will aim to reduce the volume of visitors to our offices, calls into our Customer Service Centre and Direct Dials by 20% over 5 years by moving these contacts to the web.
  - We will aim to improve processing times for high transaction services.
  - We will aim to reduce the use of paper forms by 20% which will contribute to the reduction of:-
    - Printing costs , postage costs and stationary costs
  - This strategy will contribute to overall efficiency savings

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## Economic Development Update

Over the last 12 months Economic Development has made great progress in establishing Mid Devon on a regional and national platform, as a local authority that is leading on the development of business support services. We are taking a highly proactive approach to supporting the business community, and this seems to be creating a positive buzz about Mid Devon.

Within the district we have pulled together departments from across the Council that have a business facing role, and started the process of ensuring that we work more closely together, undertake joint meetings with businesses and cross sell our services as appropriate. We have also coordinated meetings with our key stakeholders to coordinate our business support activities more effectively so that businesses access a more seamless service. We also meet regularly with the Mid Devon Gazette and are building a strong rapport with their team. This has had a positive impact on the way that business related stories are reported (See the case study at the bottom of this brief).

Regionally we have been playing a leading role in the development of a bid to fund a business signposting and diagnostic service. Through this piece of work we have established the foundations to take the lead on other funding opportunities that would support our business community. The work has seen us pull together every district and unitary authority in the Heart of the South West LEP (HotSW LEP) area, educational bodies including the University of Exeter and PETROC college, employment support services, regulatory services, and the business community. Successfully bringing the entire business support structure for the south west to rally behind a bid we are coordinating is a huge step change in the role that Mid Devon plays.

We have managed to bring together Economic Development teams from across Devon on a regular basis to discuss our activities and better coordinate the support we put into place for businesses. We have particularly started to work more closely with Exeter, East Devon and Teignbridge, known as "Exeter and the Heart of Devon" (EHOD) to look at options for the joint procurement of business support services using pooled resources to achieve economies of scale.

Nationally, through the work that we are doing on a Growth Hub bid and with an initiative called Better Business for All (BBfA), the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) has expressed an interest in our approach to developing business support. They have sent Director level staff to visit us here in Mid Devon to find out more about our activities and to express their enthusiasm for the work we are undertaking. We have also been on several visits to BIS to share our practices with other LEP areas and BIS staff. They have commented that here in the South West we are trailblazers who are leading on innovative ways to support businesses and that the work we are doing is likely to become national best practice.

Example of our local success at influencing the narrative about Mid Devon:

A recent article in the Mid Devon Gazette

[Optimistic outlook for Mid Devon businesses](#)

[Business owners in Mid Devon are a resilient bunch. There is no doubt that the economic downturn has hit rural communities, but figures show that the entrepreneurs in this part of the region have fared better than some. During the recession, the unemployment rate rose, but Mid Devon was more resilient to the economic downturn than other areas. This resilience is likely to be down to the mix of large employers and small businesses in the community.](#)

Chris Shears, Economic Development Officer at Mid Devon District Council, said: "Business is generally doing well. There is optimism, with businesses looking to expand, high commercial occupancy rates and the creation of employment opportunities."

There is a high rate of new business survival with 92.5% surviving over 12 months compared to 91.1% nationally.

The district has exceptionally low unemployment, with fewer than 450 job seekers, a rate of 0.9% (March 2015), well below the regional and national averages of 1.3% and 2.0%, respectively.

Employment opportunities have been given a boost by funding available in the district designed to help businesses prosper and bring new ones in.

Mr Shears explained: "Projects such as Unlocking Business Investment, and others which provide subsidised development support, such as the Growth Vouchers have helped businesses move to the next level.

"Significant planning applications have opened up new employment sites. These include Hitchcocks Business Park at Willand. It is already attracting new business investment and is home to several large Mid Devon businesses."

But the business community needs fast action to maintain momentum. The development of Mid Devon's Local Plan has been delayed by certain factors, including the general election. With some of the district's most significant sites being discussed, almost a thousand representations were received, delaying the sign off of the plan until later in the 2015 calendar year.

Mr Shears said: "This has an effect on how quickly some of the major employment land sites allocated within the plan can be brought forward for development, and with businesses already keen to expand onto and invest in the new sites.

"The election has also delayed the start-up of some of the grant programmes that will support Mid Devon businesses. The LEADER project, a multi-million pound package of support, which will assist in the development of the rural economy, has been delayed since January 2015.

It is now expected to go live in June 2015, and is much needed for encouraging growth in parts of the district and sectors that are not usually the focus of support."

Some of the biggest employers in the area include Two Sisters Food Group, Heathcoat Fabrics, Gregory's Distribution and Crediton Dairy. They provide significant employment, but it is also important to recognise Mid Devon's smaller businesses that help to make the economy more resilient. 89.4% of businesses in Mid Devon are deemed to be micro-businesses, employing between 0 and 9 people, and 99.9% of local businesses are small to medium enterprises.

The residents of Mid Devon tend to be well qualified, with 37.5% holding an NVQ level 4 and above qualification, compared to 36% nationally. The district also has a negligible proportion of residents with no qualifications, supporting the narrative that Mid Devon schools and FE colleges perform extremely well.

Over the next year Mid Devon is looking to continue to develop as a place that proactively supports businesses. Mr Shears said: "There is work being undertaken to influence regional strategy so that it better reflects the needs of Mid Devon businesses. This will make it easier to draw down funding from Europe and Central Government to support the local business community where Mid Devon has previously lost out to other areas."

Organisations that support employment, skills and enterprise are starting to work more closely together and to develop clear links between their activities.

This bodes well for the business community who should find that they are able to access a more streamlined, simplified service that makes it easier for them to take advantage of the support being offered to them.

The Mid Devon district has several networks that businesses can get involved in. The Business Forum Mid Devon is the largest forum operating in the district, meets on a bi-monthly basis, and has a regular attendance of between 50 and 80 business representatives. Tiverton has the Tiverton Traders Association, Cullompton has

a support group called Culm Valley in Business, and Crediton now has its own Chamber of Commerce. Details of these groups are available on the business pages of the Mid Devon District Council website.

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## Briefing note

Date: 16 July 2015

### **Doctors agree to improve resilience of Eastern Devon's community hospitals**

The NHS Northern, Eastern and Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (NEW Devon CCG) Governing Body has today agreed to consolidate overnight inpatient beds at Eastern Devon's community hospitals to secure nursing care close to people's homes.

Community hospital beds in Eastern Devon will be consolidated as a platform for further review and reform of community services, aiming to treat more people in their own home where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

It will mean the number of community hospital inpatient units in Eastern Devon will reduce from 10 to seven. Community hospitals at Axminster, Crediton and Ottery St Mary will no longer have overnight inpatient beds, although Ottery St Mary Hospital will have 15 overnight stroke rehabilitation beds for now.

None of the community hospitals will close as a result of the decision. Health and social care hubs with a range of outpatient services, day surgery and other health and social care services will be developed at hospitals without inpatient beds.

Dr David Jenner, a GP from Cullompton and chair of the CCG's Eastern Locality, said:

"This will improve the resilience of care at our community hospitals in the face of financial and workforce challenges.

"We are looking to continually improve services to support people in their local communities whether they are cared for at home or in hospital and this is one step forward on that journey.

"We want to thank all the local people and organisations who have been involved throughout the development of the plans over the last couple of years. We held over 30 public meetings or drop-in sessions and have taken their comments into consideration when making our decision today.

"Of course we understand that some people will always want to have community beds in their own area and this decision may disappoint them but making sure everyone has the same level of access to services is very important.

"Over the last few years the hospital provider Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust has had to temporarily close some community hospital inpatient units due to staffing

*Healthy people, living healthy lives, in healthy communities*  
[www.newdevonccg.nhs.uk](http://www.newdevonccg.nhs.uk)

Contact the communications team on 01392 267 647  
or email us at [d-ccg@communications@nhs.net](mailto:d-ccg@communications@nhs.net)

issues. Consolidating from 10 to seven units means we will have much more robust staffing at our hospitals in the future.”

The process in which we developed the changes agreed today will now be considered at the Devon Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 September 2015.

The timeline for implementing the changes will depend on the outcomes and feedback from this Scrutiny meeting.

A summary of the changes agreed today is below:

<b>Hospital</b>	<b>Beds pre-decision</b>	<b>Beds post-decision</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Exeter Community Hospital	20 medical	20 medical	No change
Exmouth	22 medical + 8 stroke	16 medical	8 stroke beds to Ottery St Mary Hospital
Crediton	3 medical + 7 stroke	None	7 stroke beds to Ottery St Mary Hospital. Hub also under development
Okehampton	16 medical	16 medical	No change
Tiverton	32 medical	32 medical	No change
Axminster	10 medical	None	
Seaton	10 medical	24 medical	
Sidmouth	18 medical	24 medical	
Honiton	18 medical	16 medical	
Ottery St Mary	10 medical + 0 stroke	0 Medical + 15 stroke	
Moretonhampstead	0 medical	0 medical	Hub under development
Budleigh Salterton	0 medical	0 medical	Hub under development