

CHANNEL ACCESS STRATEGY: Creating Efficient Customer Channels to our Services

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Margaret Squires
Responsible Officer: Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement

Reason for Report: The purpose of this report is to provide Members with the revised Channel Access Strategy: Creating Efficient Customer Channels to our Services. This revised strategy is required to ensure we continue to provide appropriate access to services for our customers and do so in the most efficient and cost effective way in light of ever decreasing budgets.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Channel Access Strategy be endorsed.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: To ensure that the Council provides access to services for customers in whatever way they choose to transact with us. Ensuring extended access via digital means and improving the way that we hold information and deliver our services to customers, placing them at the centre of what we do.

Financial Implications: Decreasing central government settlements continue to apply pressure to the public sector. Investment is needed in order to analyse and potentially redesign our business processes and customer transactions. By redesigning our services and improving secure access to information for customers we can encourage self-service, reduce officer time on low value transactions and focus our resources more effectively. Any project identified as part of a Channel Access Strategy or Transformation Programme will be accompanied by a costed and approved business case.

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 risks associated with any transformation programme will be recorded and closely monitored.

Equality Impact Assessment: Service redesign will be done by focusing our reviews with the customer at the centre of what we do. It is understood that in order to achieve excellence in customer service ALL channels must be maintained.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 In November 2013 work commenced on a digital transformation programme for Mid Devon District Council. The aim of the programme was to create a customer focussed business where our customers could self-serve or could be assisted to access services.

1.2 Progress was made on the project with a new web site and a significant increase in options for customers to self-serve with

additional online forms and payments. However, due to the redeployment of key staff and significant changes within leadership the project stalled.

- 1.3 The new Leadership team is keen to reinvigorate and build on the initial project. There is now a clearer understanding of how to achieve successful transformation and an acknowledged need to broaden our approach to include not just digital transformation, but include activities to more fully understand our customers, business and staff to ensure that we are better able to align our resources.
- 1.4 To reinvigorate work pertaining to this strategy some of the ICT team have been migrated to a new Digital Services Team. These staff, along with Customer Services, now sit under the Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement.

2.0 Transformation Priorities

2.1 As a result of discussions with Leadership Team and Group Managers the following activities have been identified:

- Consider the need for a customer portal which will allow customers to more efficiently self-serve, access their own information, bills, statements etc.
- Review the current case management system to ensure full visibility of customer transactions so that when a customer contacts MDDC staff can see all contacts without having to redirect customers around the organisation.
- Complete a full analysis on a service by service basis to identify how many customers are transacting with us and by what means
- Enable customer engagement with the redesign of services by looking for opportunities to include them in the design process
- Implement Electronic Document Management across services to enable customer self-service, mobile working and accurate records management.
- Complete service reviews to identify the internal/external customer transactions and ensure they are fit for purpose, efficient, cost-effective and most importantly easy to use for our customers.

2.2 A renewed Transformation Programme of projects is to be identified and agreed and the original project objectives revisited and re-costed.

3.0 Why do we need to change?

3.1 Number of Contacts – In 17/18 the council received the following contacts:

Face to Face	30,202
Telephone	373,000 +

Emails	over 1 million
Web Forms Submitted	48,781

As our district grows with the addition of the Eastern Urban Extension and Culm Garden Village our customer numbers and need will grow, so it is important that we reassess our services now and come to an agreed understanding of future need to ensure that we are able to meet customer requirements however they may manifest.

- 3.2 We have seen a 40% decrease in Face to Face visits to MDDC between 2013 and 2017. Some of this decrease will have been down to the closure of the Crediton office. We can see that there has been a decrease in phone calls of just fewer than 7%, a limited decrease; again likely in part to the above office closure. It would not be prudent to expect a proportional move from one channel to another, but our inability to easily trace customer contact through the organisation irrespective of service or channel prevents us from achieving a full understanding of how and why customers are accessing our services as they do.
- 3.3 An example of successful service design is the Green Waste Permits – this service was designed to maximise efficiency by encouraging sign-up and renewal digitally. All customer channel options remain available to ensure access to all customers, but the figures of the way customers are choosing to transact with us provide evidence that there is a customer will to consume services digitally.

Method	
Visit/Cheque – manual process	13.95%
Via Contact Centre - telephone	36.95%
Online	49.10%
Over 1000 of the online transactions were fully automated with no human interaction other than issue of permit.	

- 3.4 Digital and Working Silos – Complex business systems are required to deliver council services. Because our systems are not fully ‘joined up’ or integrated, following customer requests through multiple staff/system handoffs becomes impossible. We lose the ability to trace service request history and monitor/measure service provision adequately. By logging all customers communications, irrespective of channel, i.e. phone, web, email, etc. through one system and integrating that system into the back office we are then better able to serve the customer, allow the customer to serve themselves and allow the organisation to monitor their requests through the organisation. By removing the digital and working silos and empowering staff through technology and training, our officers can assist customers through their entire service requests and trace their history.
- 3.5 Staffing – Staff are our most expensive resource; they are also our most valuable. As part of the transformation strategy we will be looking

to better align our staff resources with the services that we provide. A corporate review of skills and staff will be instigated to ensure that we align our workforce plan and transformational activities to empower and develop staff whilst planning how to best utilise resources against decreased budgets and increased customer numbers.

Contact for more Information: Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement, Tel: 01884 234981 or email: llewis@middevon.gov.uk

Circulation of the Report: Cllrs. Margaret Squires & Colin Slade, Leadership Team and Cabinet

List of Background Papers: