

**Report for: Community PDG**

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Date of Meeting:	22 August 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Customer Services Briefing Report</b>
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Jane Lock, Cabinet Member for Working Environment
Responsible Officer:	Lisa Lewis, Corporate Manager Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement
Exempt:	No
Wards Affected:	n/a
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 – Customer Services Briefing July 2023  Appendix 2 - Community Survey Results

**Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)**

This report has been requested to provide members with clarity on existing opening times, customer transaction levels and future service activity for the Customer Services department which provides face-to-face, telephone and online presence for the residents of Mid Devon.

**Recommendation(s):**

**That the committee note the report on Customer Services at Mid Devon District Council (MDDC).**

**Section 2 – Report**

**1.0 Introduction – Customer Services**

1.1 The Customer Services department provides an enquiries, switchboard and sign-posting service for internal and external customers and visitors. The service is based on the ground floor of Phoenix House and staffs the reception area whilst we are open to the public.

1.2 Phoenix House Opening times are listed below. The contact centre is open 09:00 – 17:00 Mon – Fri.

- Mon 09:00 – 13:00
- Tue 09:00 – 13:00
- Wed – Closed
- Thu 09:00 – 13:00
- Fri 09:00 – 13:00

1.3 Members of the team also staff reception for public meetings 09:00 – 17:00 or during any council activities which result in increased footfall for a temporary period of time e.g. Elections Candidate Nominations

1.4 The team is made up of the following:

- Service Manager
- Team Leaders – 1.81 FTE
- Customer Service Project Support officer
- Senior Customer Services officer (temp)
- Customer Services officer – approx. 50% are part-time

1.5 A recent member briefing on the service was provided for members on 6 July 2023 and the slides are attached at Appendix 1. This attachment provides some metrics of how our customers have changed the way they are accessing our service over the last five years.

1.6 With the increase in digital transactions there has been a reduction in footfall and customer behaviours have changed; so too have staffing levels. MDDC's requirement to achieve value for money has seen the customer service team shrink from 25.43 FTE in 19/20 to 20.04 FTE in 23/24.

1.7 Resourcing and service levels are actively managed. The service works as flexibly as it can depending on corporate need. An example of this was secondment of staff during the pandemic to help administer the Covid relief grants and applications overseen by the Revenues department.

## **2.0 Current Service**

2.1 The service is aware that there is some disquiet about the reduction in opening times post-pandemic. The original reduction in hours post-pandemic saw public opening in the afternoons, but after listening to customer and partner feedback this was changed to mornings. This will be

reviewed should a corporate, prospective tenant or significant customer need be identified.

- 2.2 The service actively monitors footfall and is currently offering an appointments based service. However, we are also seeing 'walk-ins' without an appointment if we are able. Customers can request an afternoon appointment if a morning slot is not convenient.
- 2.3 The staffing of the Reception area unfortunately restricts our ability to provide a full service to our customers due to confidentiality, the requirement to deal with visitors and the inability to deal quietly and succinctly with telephone queries. Footfall is low and staffing of the reception with reduced functionality is expensive in comparison to customer service via other channels of communication used by customers.
- 2.4 We hope that the implementation of the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system over the coming months may change this by shifting significant numbers of telephone queries to digital which can be dealt with appropriately at reception.
- 2.5 **Community Survey** - The recent independent community survey provided some interesting insight into our customer contact preferences. Respondents were largely digital and it is interesting to note that over 50% of respondents were over 65 years.
- 2.6 Over 50% of respondents interacted with MDDC a few times a year, which gives us a good indication that respondent survey responses were based on repeated customer experience with MDDC.
- 2.7 As expected our older population prefers interacting via phone call or email. But it should be noted that respondents aged 65-74 and 75+ preferred online over 40% and over 30% respectively. In person transactions grow as the *least preferred* method of interaction as people grow older.
- 2.8 Member attention is drawn to the summary findings on the last page of Appendix 2.
- 3.0 **The Future** – CRM and Service Reviews
- 3.1 MDDC is currently in the process of implementing a new CRM system. Work commenced on this in quarter 4 of 22/23. Working with our system supplier work was done on understanding our customer behaviour and their use of digital means of interacting with us. A community survey also took place to understand MDDC's customer experience with an aim to informing the CRM project. The results of this can be found at Appendix 2.
- 3.2 The main objectives of the project are to enable self-service for customers to log and report issues and procure services as far as possible 24/7. If the

channel shift to digital can be achieved this will result in fewer telephone queries and avoidable contacts. This will leave staff able to deal with more complex customer requirements, shift initial service customer contact to Customer Services and reduce overall costs of customer transactions across a number of services.

3.3 Whilst channel shift is the aim, it must be noted that this does not mean that we will close our doors, or prevent our customers from calling us. The aim is to provide an omni-channel service, allow customers to access straightforward services, and track them easily online at their convenience whilst reducing the cost of those transactions to MDDC.

3.4 Estimated costs on average contact times for the different channels are as follows:

- Face to Face - £7.45 – based on 15 minute appointment slot
- Telephone - £3.15 – based on average call length
- Online/Self-Serve – estimated cost £1.50

**NB.** This is the cost of the customer services interaction and does not include any service delivery from the back office. The project aims to reduce front and back office costs by automating the processing of customer transactions and communications as far as we are able.

3.5 **CRM Timelines** – The new CRM customer portals are due to go live in the autumn. The customer will be able to request services and log enquiries via a portal. If the customer registers an account with us they will be able to view their waste collection dates, identify who their councillor is and track their most recent requests. The following services are due to go live in the Autumn:

- Bulky Waste collection requests
- Clinical and Assisted Waste requests
- Local Welfare Assistance signposting
- Complaints Logging
- MyAccount Rents for Mid Devon Housing (MDH)

## **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications within the report. However, changes to the way we provide the service such as an increase in opening hours will either increase cost due to additional staffing requirements, or incur longer call wait times for customers as we staff reception for longer hours.

## **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications within this report.

## **Risk Assessment**

There has been no increased/decreased risk identified as a result of this report as it is for information only.

## **Impact on Climate Change**

There is no impact or opportunity for improvement/adaptation in conjunction with MDDC Climate Action Plan as this report is for information only.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

There is no Equalities impact as the report is for information only.

## **Relationship to Corporate Plan**

The Customer Services department provides support to almost all services in their delivery of the corporate plan. The service aims to provide access via multiple channels and support our communities in access to council services.

## **Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks**

**Statutory Officer:** Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

**Date:** 08/08/2023

**Statutory Officer:** Maria De Leiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

**Date:** 08/08/2023

**Chief Officer:** Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

**Date:** 08/08/2023

**Performance and risk:** Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

**Date:** 10/08/2023

**Cabinet member notified:** yes

#### **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Lisa Lewis – Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement

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#### **Background papers:**

Member Briefing Slides

Community Survey Results