

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET BOARD

15th OCTOBER 2015

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES - K.JONES

SECTION A – MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED - All

Digital by Choice Strategy – Outcome of Public Consultation Exercise

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:

To consider the outcome of the public consultation exercise undertaken to establish support, or otherwise, for the Council's draft Channel Shift Strategy "Digital by Choice".

Following consideration of the public consultation responses, to approve the "Digital by Choice" strategy and submit the Strategy to Council for adoption.

Executive Summary

- The Council's draft Channel Shift Strategy "Digital by Choice" was developed to update the existing Access to Services Strategy;
- The Strategy aims to ensure that citizens access the channel most appropriate to their needs, but at its core, it aims to significantly extend the range of services available on-line and to increase citizen uptake of the on-line options;
- A greater on-line presence reflects shifts in society in general, widening access to services and helping the Council to reduce the cost of services;
- However, the Strategy also recognises that for some transactions, face to face and more traditional channels remain important;

- Additionally, the Strategy recognises that there are digital inclusion challenges that need to be responded to in order that everyone in the borough has access to the opportunities that access to the internet and associated technologies brings;
- The public consultation exercise generated 48 responses. There were also a range of activities to solicit feedback from staff and partners. Overall, respondents were supportive of the proposals.

Background

On 9th July 2015, the Policy and Resources Cabinet Board authorised the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services to undertake a public consultation exercise on a draft Channel Shift Strategy “Digital by Choice”.

Consultation commenced on 17th July 2015 and concluded on 18th August 2015.

The draft Strategy was placed on the Council’s on-line consultation portal “Objective”. A press release was issued to draw attention to the consultation exercise.

In addition to the on-line consultation portal, the draft Strategy was sent to each of the Council’s equality networks with a request for responses. Groups were encouraged to comment on the aspect of the Strategy which focuses on the Council’s equality duties in particular.

A Member Seminar was held during the consultation period to give Members an opportunity to understand the rationale behind the proposals.

The Strategy has also been subject to consultation with trade union representatives and the Council’s wider workforce.

48 responses were received via the on-line portal. A range of views have also been gathered from the other methods of consultation undertaken.

Consultation Summary

Broadly, consultees were supportive of the aims, objectives and proposed programme of activities set out in the draft Strategy.

Public respondents were drawn from residents of the county borough, staff, elected Members, business owners, volunteers, a carer, service users and partners. Internally, views were sought from elected Members, senior officers, trade union representatives, staff members.

About half of the public respondents reported that they already used a range of on-line services. Half of those responding would prefer to use on-line services. A further 10% would prefer to use on-line services if they were available and knew how to use those services. A third of respondents preferred to continue using existing channels.

85% of respondents said that they agreed with the overall aims of the Strategy. Comments provided encouraged the Council to find ways of engaging more people to use on-line services, helping people to overcome the barriers they face. There were some comments that the Council should embrace on-line services as a corporate endeavour rather than the approach being left to individual services. There were comments also that there still needed to be some choice for those people where on-line is not the most appropriate way to deal with their needs or where people are unable to use the technology.

77% agreed with all or most of the priorities set out in the Strategy. A further 15% agreed with some of them. Only 6% (3 people) didn't think the priorities were right. To support these ratings, people again commented on the need to tackle digital inclusion and to ensure there are provisions for people unable to access services through on-line channels.

87% felt the performance measures proposed would enable the progress of the Strategy to be assessed. There were a small number of comments on this aspect of the Strategy emphasising the importance of this being applied corporately.

60% of respondents felt the equality impact assessment was accurate. 20% felt it could be improved but did not suggest how it might be improved. The Council has recently consulted on its draft Strategy Equality Plan and there are activities built into that Plan that will ensure

that the equality impact of adopting a Channel Shift Policy will be done in a manner which properly discharges the Council's equality duties.

In terms of other comments, respondents encouraged the Council to become a leading council in this area and to ensure that services are designed to be accessible from mobile phones. Five respondents indicated that they would wish to be involved in user testing of new services.

One respondent commented that the draft Strategy would benefit from an Executive Summary and that will be taken on board as part of the implementation work.

As far as internal respondents are concerned, there were no objections to the Strategy. There is agreement on the areas that are prioritised for action in the first tranche of work.

At the recent partnership event on 7th September 2015, partners were invited to comment on the proposed priorities within the "Digital by Choice" Strategy and there was again broad support for the direction of travel. In discussion, partners echoed many of the comments in the public survey concerning the need to address digital inclusion and to ensure there is access for those who cannot or will not use digital channels.

Accordingly, as a result of considering the responses during the consultation period, it is proposed that no changes are made to the draft Strategy considered on 9th July 2015. An Executive Summary will be written as part of the implementation work and the points made on digital inclusion will be taken on board as part of the work to develop a digital inclusion strategy that will sit alongside the Channel Shift Strategy.

Financial Appraisal

The Channel Shift Strategy will be targeted at areas of service delivery where cashable savings can be realised from extending on-line service channels.

Savings targets are and will be included in the Budget Strategy as cashable savings opportunities linked to the Strategy are identified.

There is a need to protect investment in ICT infrastructure and capability to ensure the Strategy can be delivered. There will be some on-off expenditures necessary to facilities and skills development to facilitate the delivery of the Strategy which will need to be contained within existing cash limits.

Equality Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and was included with the report on 9th July 2015.

There are no changes to the equality impact assessment proposed as a result of the consultation exercise.

It is important to note that there are specific aspects of the Strategy which address equalities and more particularly the need to address digital inclusion. There is a clear link between this Strategy and the Council's draft Strategic Equality Plan designed to ensure that the Council discharges its equalities duties in the appropriate way.

6. Conclusion

There is broad support for the draft Channel Shift Strategy "Digital by Choice". No objections to the Strategy have been raised during the consultation period.

Consequently, it is recommended that the draft Strategy is now approved without amendment and submitted to Council for adoption.

Recommended

1. That Members consider the outcome of the consultation undertaken on the draft Channel Shift Strategy " Digital by Choice" and approve the Strategy without amendment.
2. That Members recommend the draft Channel Shift Strategy " Digital by Choice" to Council for adoption.
3. That Members authorise the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services to take the steps necessary to implement the Strategy.

REASON FOR PROPOSED DECISION:

To replace the existing Access to Services Strategy which is now outdated, creating a corporate policy framework which recognises the shifts in social trends towards greater use of on-line services, whilst also recognising the work that is needed to tackle digital inclusion and reduce the cost of public services.

Appendices:

- Equality Impact Assessment
- “Digital by Choice” Channel Shift draft strategy

Background Papers

1. Policy and Resources Cabinet Board 9th July 2015 – Digital by Choice Channel Shift Strategy

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Digital by Choice

Channel Strategy

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

2015/16-2017/18

Executive Summary

Neath Port Talbot Council has worked hard over many years to deliver high quality services for its citizens at best value for money.

Our initial Access to Services Strategy delivered:

- Three One Stop Shops, one in each town. Between them they deal with 70,000 enquiries face to face per annum and regularly record customer satisfaction ratings of over 95%;
- A Corporate Contact Centre that deals with over 220,000 telephone calls per annum;
- A Corporate web presence containing over 3,000 pages of public information and providing access to a range of online services; together with a
- Corporate ethos of “citizen first”.

These achievements were developed further through the Council’s programme of LEAN/systems thinking reviews. Over thirty services participated in this corporate transformation programme. Service delivery was critically examined from the end user perspective and then redesigned to ensure that we focused service delivery on “what matters” to the end user whilst designing out waste and reducing service cost. The Council’s pioneering work in Wales was recognised with awards from both APSE and the WLGA “Excellence Wales”

initiative and formed the basis of an innovative community of practice founded by the Council which has subsequently been supported by Welsh Ministers.

But despite these achievements there is more to do. Citizens are rapidly taking up new digital options in the way they live their day to day lives. Digital services can:

- Provide simpler and better access to services for citizens
- Increase choice for citizens;
- Support the move to greater integration of services within the Council and between agencies;
- Support the drive for more self-service and personalisation in service delivery;
- Reduce the cost of services substantially; and
- Generate greater customer and organisation insight through better management information.

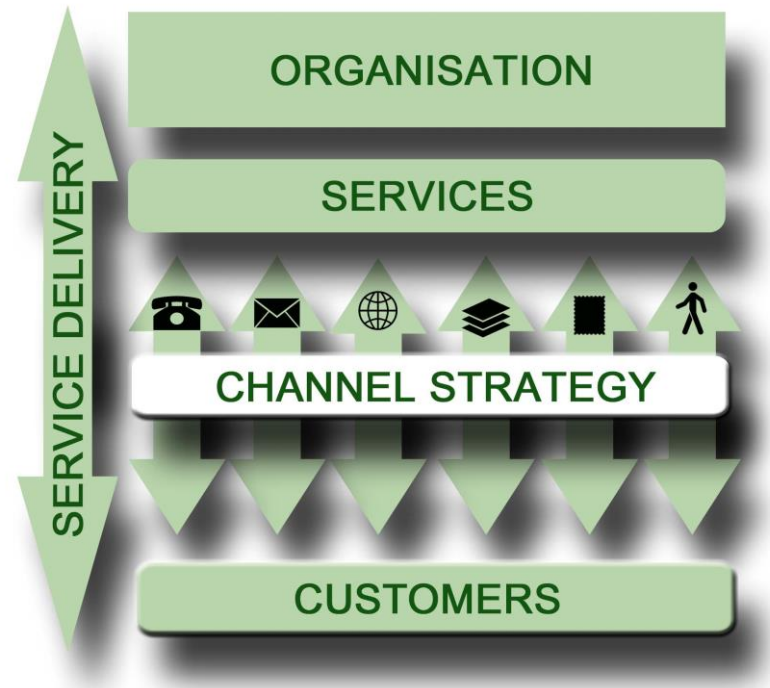
This Digital by Design Channel Shift Strategy has been developed to provide a corporate response to the emerging digital agenda. Implementation of the Channel Shift Strategy will ensure that the Council and its citizens accesses the benefits of digital technologies, whilst also ensuring that use of other, more traditional channels are appropriate, efficient and effective. This Strategy also underlines the importance of having a local and coherent response to digital inclusion to increase competitiveness within the local economy whilst also reducing inequality amongst our local population

We have made a good start: bringing six new transactional services online in the last eighteen months; improving access to resources available through our corporate website; and also experimenting with a new joined up face to face service at our Pontardawe One Stop Shop “Hub”. This Strategy explains how we will build on our early successes and position Digital by Choice as core to our thinking and work moving forward.

Part 1 - Introduction

WHAT IS A CHANNEL STRATEGY?

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



A channel strategy is an organisation's plan for the channels it will use to deliver services to, and interact with, its customers. A channel 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.

A channel strategy is not simply a plan to move service provision to online channels.

WHY IS A CHANNEL STRATEGY IMPORTANT NOW?

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

In order to meet the needs of customers Neath Port Talbot Council must provide services that are:

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

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

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

The public sector 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 government/public sector channel strategy. The Cabinet Office Digital Efficiency Report Research (6 November 2012) suggests that online transactions are 20 times cheaper than by phone, 30 times cheaper than by post and as much as 50 times cheaper than face to face. Digital forms a central part of the Welsh Government's plans to transform public services. The draft document entitled Digital First is about delivering public services that are focussed on the needs of the citizen. It promotes the need for digital services that are so straightforward and convenient – at any time and on any device - that all those who can use them will choose to do so whilst those who can't are not excluded.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The need for insight

The process of developing and implementing a channel 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 to be/need to be used in future; and
- Other organisation-specific micro/macro factors that may have an impact on service provision and delivery including the value and waste in each system. For Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council these factors include systems thinking and budgetary constraints.

It is also important to understand the wider online services revolution, as expectations of online services are driven by customer experiences of using similar services of other organisations. Additionally, we need to understand the opportunities and challenges presented by access to superfast broadband across our local communities and the skills and confidence of local people to engage with a digital agenda.

Organisational challenge

In considering a channel strategy, there is often a considerable challenge and change to existing organisational structures. A channel 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 super-imposed or retro-fitted 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. Particularly at local level, an integrated channel strategy is required that takes into account the varied ways in which local people may want to interact with the council.

The majority of our customers use the telephone to contact us (approximately 20,000 calls a month through the corporate contact centre alone) but only during the limited council office opening times (primarily 8.30 -5 Monday – Friday) so if we highlight opportunities to deliver services through more efficient alternative channels it should have a big impact for both the Council and its customers. That said we need to be aware of the customer journey through the entire system, no matter what channel is used.

Focus on the Customer

We are striving to be an organisation that focuses on customers with a strategy that delivers “what matters”, makes savings and supports culture change within our organisation and across our communities. We recognise that the Council website is increasingly a first port of call for customers, making it important that the redesign of the website makes this the default option, making the service more effective for customers and improving efficiency as customers do not have to use other channels to get the service they are seeking. As we bring more services online we use our LEAN/systems thinking methodology to support and encourage the change in culture that is needed and to ensure we realise the full potential of delivering a greater range of services across digital channels.

Part 2 – Basic Principles & Scope

PURPOSE OF STRATEGY

To outline the broad principles for the ways in which **Neath Port Talbot 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 needs of the citizen at their core.

SCOPE

1. This strategy document sets out the basic principles by which **Neath Port Talbot Council** will deliver its services to the public through the contact channels currently available.

Contact channels in scope include:

- Face to face

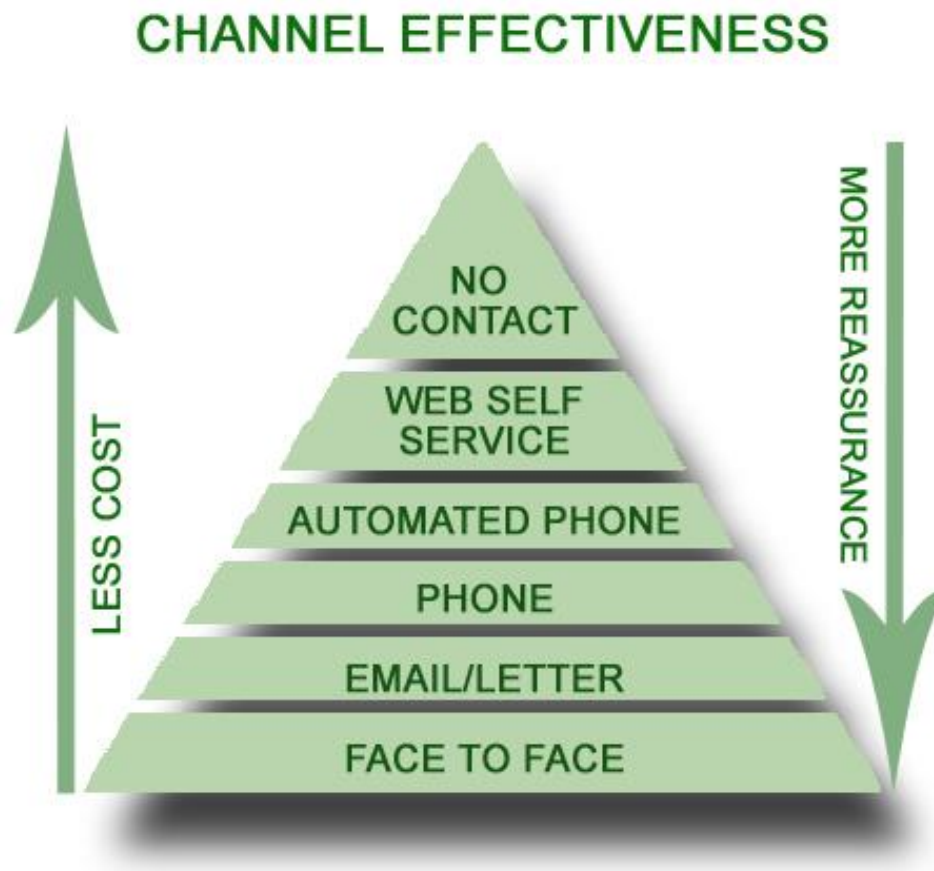
- Email
 - Internet, including web and social media
 - Telephone including Intelligent Voice Recognition and automated switchboard response
 - Mobile technology including SMS text messaging, apps and mobile web)
 - Post
2. This document focuses on three key types of contacts between the authority and the citizen
- **Transactions** (e.g. registering a death, reporting a problem or paying a bill)
 - **Interactions** (e.g. obtaining advice, public consultations, petitioning)
 - **Information Provision** (e.g. cycle maps, leaflets, web pages)
3. This strategy should be relevant to the nature of the services provided by the authority and ensure that its services are provided through a range of contact channels appropriate to the citizens' individual needs and preferences in a non-discriminatory way.

CHANNELS HIERARCHY & DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The choice of contact channels available to the public 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 digital social media (for example: Facebook TM and Twitter TM, mobile internet and more recently mobile phone applications (apps)).

Without a channel 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.

There is however a generally accepted model for the effectiveness of the major channels of contact available today as shown below



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

For example:

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

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

But of course the conundrum doesn't end there. There may be little hope of shifting the channels that a certain group uses if that group simply doesn't access that channel. For example, internet penetration is currently very low amongst those not in work, the financially excluded, older people and people who do not read or speak English – all traditionally high users of Social Care services. Conversely, mobile telephone penetration is very high amongst teenagers, so SMS messaging might be a good channel to advise of last minute secondary school closures in bad weather. Customer insight goes a long way in the design of any channel strategy.

There are unfortunately even more factors to consider including “channel hopping”, (an individual's propensity to use different channels for the same transaction depending on what is convenient to them at the time) and the public's increasing confidence in new channels that develops over years and sometimes months, creating a continually changing landscape.

The key factors to an effective channel strategy therefore would be

1. **Detail** - the deliberate design of the channel strategy for **each type of service**, bearing in mind the level of human interaction required and the needs of the targeted customer base;

2. **Fluidity** – the constant reviewing of the effectiveness of the channel strategy for each type of contact bearing in mind changing technologies, channel hopping and changing customer habits;
3. **Simplicity** – the optimum channels for the organisation should be the easiest to use for the customer to drive a shift in customer behaviour;
4. **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;
5. **Cost effectiveness** – particularly in the current economic climate, finding ways in which to deliver services effectively but at lower cost is increasingly important.

PROOF OF CONCEPT

Digital Channels

Demand data analysed by NPTCBC during specific bad weather events highlighted that over the last 2 years there has been a natural shift to online services e.g. school closures during snow. Previously there had been a reliance to ring the council switchboard to ascertain this information which often created queues and lost calls and at times not always helpful to the enquirer being restricted to the Council's opening and closing times. Now, messages about school closures when there are adverse weather conditions are accessed via social media, most particularly Facebook TM and Twitter TM, backed up by prominently displayed messages on the Council's main website and more traditional press releases.

In mid 2013, the Improving Customer Experience programme was established as part of the council's strategic 'Rising to the Challenge' transformation programme. The remit of the programme is to build upon LEAN/systems thinking programme of service reviews, extending the initial work to embrace digital innovation. Six transactional services have been redesigned as online services – increasing customer choice and reducing cost. Even with limited marketing, take up of the online service option has reached over 50% of all transactions for refuse, recycling and van permit transactions with pest control and bulk waste collections reaching 25% of all customer transactions.

Generally accepted SOCITM benchmark costs per customer interaction are:

- Face to Face £8.62
- Telephone £2.83
- Web £0.15

This early work has enabled the Council to test the robustness of the new technologies that underpin the development of digital channel options and to demonstrate the benefits of increasing the range and take up of digital service delivery options.

Integrated Working

In response to the UK Government's Welfare Benefit Reform programme, the Local Service Board commissioned work to explore the support that might need to be in place to support benefit claimants from changes to processes that would require claims to be made on-line and for the frequency of payment of benefits to move from fortnightly to monthly.

Detailed mapping of services available in the Pontardawe area revealed significant support available to citizens in terms of benefits entitlement; money management; digital skills development and employment support. A pilot project, funded by the European Social Fund was initiated at the Council's One Stop Shop in Holly Street, Pontardawe. This brought all face to face services together under one roof. Citizens can now access wrap around support in one place and co-location of front line workers has removed duplication between agencies, whilst improving signposting between agencies and up-skilling front line workers. The project was formally evaluated and the concept will now be rolled out to other areas of the borough.

Part 3 – Neath Port Talbot Council's Channel Strategies

LOCAL CONTEXT

Neath Port Talbot Council comprises an area of 44,217 hectares, with a mix of urban and rural settlements. Urban areas include the towns of Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe, while inland, there are the Afan, Neath, Dulais, Upper Swansea and Amman Valley communities many of which have their origins in coal mining. With a population of 139,880 (2012) it has the 8th highest population density in Wales and is the eleventh largest council. The population of the County Borough is projected to increase by 8,900 (6.5%) by mid-2023 (the eleventh highest expected population growth).

Neath Port Talbot has much to be proud of, with many successful projects and initiatives delivering good outcomes but we are facing a number of challenges. Seventeen areas within Neath Port Talbot are within the top 10% of the most deprived communities in Wales with 4 Communities First Cluster areas. Demands on local public services are significant and rising.

We have a good track record of responding to the needs of our communities, with a mature approach to working in partnership with a wide range of people and organisations. For example, the Council is working closely with the University of Swansea to facilitate the development of a new university campus within the county borough boundaries; there is an extensive programme of housing development and community regeneration delivered through registered social landlord partners which is improving the quality of housing supply as well as offering a range of opportunities to improve the quality of life of tenants; local community and voluntary sector organisations have worked with the Council to take over the operation of many smaller community services, such as community centres and the maintenance of sports facilities; and close work with private sector investors in the area have realised significant community benefits for local people, including work experience, apprenticeships and supply chain opportunities.

In terms of Digital Inclusion, The National Survey for Wales 2013/14 indicates that over 77% of local people use the internet for personal use. There is a growing use in internet useage in most age groups, but, there are still significant numbers of people aged over 65 who do not use the internet. There are a number of initiatives in place to support more people to access technology, however, there is scope to improve their effectiveness by establishing a clear framework that identifies need and targets resources to impact on need.

OVERARCHING CHANNEL STRATEGY

The Council's Corporate Improvement Plan 2015-2018 contains six improvement objectives. Objective six makes a commitment to:

“Improve customer/citizen access to services and functions provided by the Council, or on behalf of the Council, and to improve the efficiency of those services.”

A focus of related improvement work is to increase the number of services available on-line and to improve the quality and efficiency of those services. This Channel Strategy provides the framework within which the improvement work will be undertaken. The emphasis in this overarching strategy is to use the most appropriate channels to deliver services based on demand and customer choice, but, where appropriate the Council will seek to increase on-line transactions, interaction and information services and encourage take up of the on-line option. Using the strapline Digital by Choice we mean digital services that are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them will choose to do so whilst helping those who can't overcome any barriers that cause them to be digitally excluded.

- Neath Port Talbot Council will make access to its services available through appropriate and cost effective contact channels designed with the needs and preferences of its individual customers and tax payers in mind.
- Neath Port Talbot Council will seek to encourage greater usage of the most effective contact methods by creating a series of well targeted channel shifts.

- Neath Port Talbot Council will not discriminate against any individual by limiting the choice of available contact methods.

OWNERSHIP OF NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL'S CHANNEL STRATEGY

Neath Port Talbot Council's Channel Strategy will be endorsed by the full Council. Its implementation will be the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services. The delivery of the strategy will involve all service areas to ensure that there is a consistency of service delivery standards across all of the contact channels and the associated services that the council offers.

REVIEW PERIOD OF NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL'S CHANNEL STRATEGY

Neath Port Talbot Council will carry out a full review of this Strategy in before the 31st March 2018. The focus of improvement work will however, be reviewed annually as part of the Corporate Improvement Plan cycle.

GOVERNANCE OF CONTACT CHANNELS AT NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

Channel	Corporate Owner
Telephone/Contact Centre	Customer Services Manager
Website	PO Communications and Digital Services
Email – Generic	Head of ICT
Letters – Generic	Head of Legal Services
SMS	PO Communications and Digital Services
Face to Face	Customer Services Manager
New Media	PO Communications and Digital Services
Mobile Telephone	Head of ICT

Lead responsibility for cross cutting issues are allocated as follows

Cross Cutting Theme	Corporate Owner
Digital Inclusion	Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services
Equalities	PO Corporate Strategy
Avoidable Contact	PO Communications and Digital Services
Payments	Head of Financial Services
IT infrastructure	Head of ICT

Skills and training	Head of Human Resources/Corporate Training Manager
Marketing, communication and engagement	Corporate Communications Officer

THE AVOIDABLE CONTACT STRATEGY

We need to make sure that we get services right first time.

Why should we minimise avoidable contact?

Local authorities are fundamental points of contact for the citizen when seeking access to public services. They provide key services for their local communities that greatly affect the quality of life for individual citizens and the overall community.

Local authorities and their customers have limited resources and therefore need to be as efficient as possible. By identifying customer contact that is 'avoidable', the local authority and its partners are better placed to redesign the way services and information are presented to customers and business processes arranged to provide an effective service response. Getting this right should mean that customers do not have to make unnecessary contacts, such as chasing delays in service, providing additional information etc, which are both frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the provider.

Case study:

Following the transfer of the housing function to NPT Homes, the Council's contact centre was still dealing with around 1,000 calls per month from housing tenants. The Council worked with NPT Homes to identify why tenants were still contacting the Council, rather than NPT Homes directly. Through joint work, calls were reduced from over 1,000 per month to under 300 per month. This change means that tenants are getting a better response to their needs as they are contacting the right people first time, whilst the cost to the Council of handling calls received in error have been reduced.

We will capture good quality management information to enable us to understand the demands placed on our services by customers. We will use the management information to identify services where there are high levels of avoidable contact and we will redesign services on a systematic basis to reduce that avoidable contact. We will work with our partners and internal departments to design processes that reduce the need for customers to make contact with the public sector multiple times to complete one transaction. For example, notifying a change of address once, rather than contacting multiple

sections. Re-designed systems will also be simpler for staff to use, reducing the opportunity for errors to be made.

The 3 Key Actions That We Will Take To Reduce Unnecessary Contact

1. We will build on our successful systems thinking programme to promote the importance of having clear insight across all council services about the volume and nature of demand on services and implement our data capture system in services where there are high volumes of customer contact to measure avoidable contact.
2. We will prioritise Customer Services, Council Tax, Community Care and Street Care services within our corporate improvement programme, redesigning services to reduce avoidable contact, whilst also seeking to increase the volume of services that can be offered on a self-service, digital basis.
3. We will build on the work we have completed at the Pontardawe “Hub” where we have co-located a range of agencies into our Holly Street premises to make it easier for citizens on low income to access benefits advice; money management services; employment support and digital skills training. Our ambition is to replicate this model across the county borough.

Performance Measures

- No of services measuring demand using recognised methodology
- Ratio of avoidable contact to value demands in each service prioritised within the programme
- Capacity released by redesigning services – cashable, non-cashable and cost avoidance
- % customers satisfied/very satisfied with service response provided first time
- % customers accessing self-service option
- % staff satisfaction with service processes

CHANNEL SHIFT STRATEGY

To increase the range of channels offered to customers via digital platforms for interactions, transactions and information services. To encourage and support greater use of self-service and digital channels whilst continuing to offer existing channels where this works best for the customer.

What is Channel Shift?

Channel Shift is the process by which organisations seek to encourage customers to access or interact with services via channels that they would not normally choose.

Deliberate channel shift is the design and marketing of alternative channels because they are the most appropriate channels for the type of contact, customer or organisation in question. Channel shift forms one part of an overall channel strategy, and implemented well it can lower costs, build reputation, empower the citizen and improve the overall service proposition.

Shifting customers to particular channels involves behaviour change on the citizen's part, but once they are aware of the channels available, they will use the one that works best for them.

Case study:

In 2014/15 the Council made additional services available on-line and promoted the new channels to customers. By the end of March 2015, there was a good take up of the new on-line service option as follows:

- Refuse and recycling equipment requests – 53% of all transactions
- Bulky household waste collection requests – 24.5% of all transactions
- Pest control service requests – 26% of all transactions
- Obtaining a van permit for the civic amenity site – 58% of all transactions

The 3 key actions that we will take to create Channel Shift

1. We will develop and implement a marketing strategy to bring about the behaviour change that is necessary for more people to choose self-service and on-line service options and train our front line staff and partners to promote the use of more effective and efficient channels, equipping customers with the skills and confidence to use on-line service options in greater numbers.
2. We will identify which transactional services delivered by our Customer Services, Streetcare, Council Tax, Community Care and Payments departments can be offered on a self-service/on-line basis and we will implement the system changes necessary to achieve this.
3. We will create a public information catalogue and move to a Digital by Default policy for all public information, ensuring the catalogue is available in formats suitable for downloading to a range of digital devices, whilst only printing hard copy versions where it is necessary to do so.

Performance Measures

- The number of new services available on-line during each financial year.
- The % of total customer transactions where there is an on-line service option where customers have opted for the on-line option
- % customers satisfied/very satisfied with their initial service response.
- % Customer Services staff trained to support customers move to digital options
- % public information leaflets and plans available in downloadable formats
- No. of “hits” to the public information catalogue
- Capacity release – cashable, non-cashable and cost avoidance

DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY

To ensure that citizens who do not have access to digital channels at home or work are helped to overcome those barriers.

What is a Digital Inclusion Strategy?

Not being able access digital channels matters as those most affected are likely to have the greatest need for public services. Being able to access services through digital channels can reduce the price people pay for services as traditional services can attract higher charges than on-line options; can open up opportunities to receive services in a different way, for example on-line services often have a home delivery option; or to have opportunities to access new service opportunities, for example using technology to communicate with people remotely, using Skype TM, Facetime TM or other such on-line media.

Addressing digital inclusion also matters for the delivery of efficient public services, because when people cannot access services online they invariably access them via alternative means which are generally more expensive. The Welsh Government has launched “Digital First (Wales)” ...” it is about delivering public services that are focused on the needs of the citizen. We want to make it much easier for people to find and use public services - at any time and on any device. This will remove barriers, create choice and make life simpler for people...”

The Welsh Government National Internet Survey for Wales shows a growing increase in internet usage across most age groups, but there are some groups where internet usage is considerably lower than most:

- 97% of people aged between 18-24 use the internet;
- 95% of people aged between 25-44 use the internet;
- 83% of people aged between 45-64 use the internet;
- 60% of people aged between 65-74 use the internet; and
- 25% of people aged between 75 and over use the internet.

The Welsh Government has made funding available to reduce the number of people digitally included and over the lifetime of this Strategy, the Council will work in partnership with other agencies to increase the number of people across communities confident to use the internet.

Case study:

As part of work to mitigate the impact of Welfare Benefit changes on local people, the Council, with partners, has accessed digital inclusion support from the Welsh Government's Communities 2.0 Programme. Training for Communities First front line staff has been accessed to enable those staff to assist people to acquire basic internet usage skills. Through the programme, it has also been possible to train volunteers to assist in increasing the number of people confident to access on-line services.

The 3 key actions that we will take to reduce Digital Exclusion

1. Identify and continue to promote public internet access at key locations including Civic Centres and Libraries, including mediated access.
2. Identify and where possible increase the support available to help people access on-line services confidently.
3. Develop a Digital Inclusion Strategy to complement this Channel Strategy

Performance Measures

- The number of public access internet points across the borough.
- The number of public access internet points where there is support available to those who need help to access the internet
- The number of agencies offering digital inclusion training
- The % of people accessing digital inclusion training across the borough
- Measures of broadband access/take up or i-procurement take up (to be further developed)
- The Local Service Board and Council endorses a Digital Inclusion Strategy by no later than 31st March 2016

EQUALITY OF ACCESS TO CHANNELS

To ensure service options are accessible to all, especially those people who have protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

What is Equality of Access?

In the context of this document, equality of access relates to the ease or difficulty that a citizen may experience when trying to access services from the Council. For example, someone with hearing difficulties may find the telephone unusable and may prefer to communicate through email. Equally, a customer whose first language is Welsh may wish to access any contact channel through the medium of Welsh.

The Equality Act 2010 places a number of statutory duties on all councils. The Welsh Language Act 1993 and subsequent legislation and guidance also places a number of statutory duties on all councils and these will increase over time as new Welsh Language Standards are applied across public services.

Case study:

Members of the Disabled Network Action Group worked with the Streetcare Division to ensure that calendars distributed to Neath Port Talbot householders, which contains important information as to when different types of waste should be presented for collection could be accessed by people with visual impairments.

The 3 Key Actions that we will take to enable equality of access

1. Involve end users of service, particularly those who have protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 in service redesign, especially end user testing of services before redesigned services are made generally available.
2. Ensure there is a Welsh language option for all channels, prioritising the development of the Welsh content of the corporate website.
3. Promote the availability of Language Line to those whose first language is not Welsh or English and the availability of alternative format information for people who may have a disability.

Performance Measures

- Equality impact assessments of redesigned services
- % corporate website pages available in both Welsh and English
- No of people accessing Language Line
- No of people requesting alternative format information.
- No of complaints and compliments received in relation to equality of access to services and the resolution of any complaints received

Part 4 – Strategies for Specific Channels

TELEPHONE STRATEGY

Improve customer response times at the Corporate Contact Centre whilst simultaneously encouraging a greater take up of on-line services and reducing avoidable contact.

The Corporate Contact Centre handles over 220,000 calls each year from members of the public and is the Council's out-of-hours contact point. Calls range from the straightforward, e.g. "can you please put me through to..." to more complex transactions e.g. "I want to complain about..."

During 2014/15 the Corporate Contact Centre experienced considerable change to its operations. On the one hand good progress was made in migrating volumes of calls to new on-line service options, such as bulky waste bookings; refuse and recycling equipment bookings; and reducing avoidable contacts from NPT Homes' tenants. In total the focus on reducing avoidable contact and moving customers to on-line services accounted a reduction of 51% in telephone demand related to the new on-line services being dealt with by the Contact Centre. On the other hand, the scale of changes introduced across the Council and occasionally changes made by other agencies (such as the temporary closure of Junction 41 by Welsh Government) created new and significant demands which at times outstripped available staff capacity. The Contact Centre also continued to be affected by the promotion of incorrect contact details with the main number 686868 sometimes used incorrectly, rather than the correct service number. As a consequence, performance at the Corporate Contact Centre was mixed at times.

Looking to the future, whilst an efficient and effective corporate contact centre will continue to play a key role in providing access to services for citizens, more needs to be done to ensure that the main contact number is used appropriately; that more customers are encouraged to use on-line service options; that greater use is made of available technology to drive up response times to telephone calls; and that there is a greater degree of agility in the Contact's Centre's response to unexpected peaks and troughs in demand. Taken together, these measures will drive down avoidable contact, drive up customer response times and improve service efficiency.

Case study:

In depth analysis of calls into the Corporate Contact Centre showed a higher than usual volume of calls from customers about changes to refuse and recycling collection arrangements. In addition to receiving significantly more calls, calls were taking on average longer to deal with due to the complexity of the enquiry. The combination of higher call volumes and increased call durations led to an increase in the % of calls abandoned by the caller prior to response and a reduction in the % calls answered within 15 seconds.

Communication between the Contact Centre and Team Supervisors in the Streetcare Section enabled the refuse and recycling service to address the causes of the issues reported by customers and the Contact Centre was able to organise technology and staffing resources to respond more effectively to the temporary increase in demand. The outcome of this joint approach was an immediate reduction in customer enquiries due to improved service response, together with an immediate improvement in Contact Centre performance.

The 3 Key Actions to Provide Easy Telephone Access

1. Introduce greater use of Interactive Voice Recognition technologies to deal with a higher volume of calls without the need for a customer services officer acting as intermediary.
2. Act on the telephone call data to increase the range of services available on-line and migrate more customers from telephone contact to digital service options. Priority areas to initially include Streetcare, Council Tax, Customer Services, Payments and Community Care services.
- 3.
4. Refresh the Council's call handling policy to ensure the right service numbers are published to ensure customers are accessing the right contact number first time and enabling avoidable contacts to be reduced.

Performance Measures

- Volume of calls received at the Corporate Contact Centre
- % of calls received at the Corporate Contact Centre abandoned
- % of calls received at the Corporate Contact Centre answered within 15 minutes
- Volume of calls migrated to on-line services following service redesign
- Volume of avoidable contact reduced following service redesign
- % customers satisfied or very satisfied with initial service response
- Capacity release at the Corporate Contact Centre – cashable, non-cashable and cost avoidance.
- Revised call handling policy in place

WEB STRATEGY

To develop the corporate website as the main access point for transactions, interactions and information services.

The corporate website experiences over 200,000 hits per month. Around 70% of visits to the website are to find information about council services but we are also growing the number of transactional services, such as booking and paying for a bulky waste collection on-line.

There is a sustained trend too for people to access on-line services on mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets and notebooks, rather than the personal computer. The development of on-line services that are suitable for mobile devices must therefore be at the forefront of system redesign.

The redevelopment of the corporate website sits at the heart of this Channel Shift Strategy. We want the corporate website to be the first point of contact for transactions, interactions and information services. We want customers visiting the website to find it easy to access the services they need with the minimum amount of effort. We also want the website to increasingly become the main access channel for the workforce, enabling all staff whether office or community based to have equal access to information and support services.

Case study:

For citizens of NPT to use the Civic Amenity Site a Van Permit must be obtained from the Council to prove that they are not traders, disposing of commercial waste. The process used to only be possible during normal working hours with access through the Corporate Contact Centre or at one of our One Stop Shops. This meant that if a resident with a van wanted access to the CA site during the weekend or evening, they would have to plan in advance and telephone the council.

The service was redesigned in 2014 to allow residents to apply for a day permit to visit the CA Site online. This new online service means that resident have access to a permit 24/7 – far more convenient to customers. This new service not only means a better, more accessible service for residents but also a reduction in contacts into the Contact centre.

The 5 Key Actions to develop the corporate website

1. Complete the review of website content, ensuring it is accessible, up to date, fully bilingual and optimised for mobile devices.
2. Increase the number of transactional services available on line, prioritising services in Community Care, Streetcare, Council Tax, Payments and Customer Services.
3. Develop a secure “my account” service for citizens so that website access can be personalised to the needs of individual customers who need to make repeated visits to the Council’s on-line services or who want to track the progress of their service requests.
4. Introduce a digital by default policy for public information, including the development of an on-line catalogue of public information leaflets.
5. Establish the business case for moving to a single site that services external customers and staff. Establish a more robust basis for developing and managing micro sites.

Performance Measures

- Number of website hits
- Number of new transactional services delivered on line in each financial year
- % of transactional services available on line where the customer has selected the online service option
- % website pages reviewed in last 12 months and confirmed as up to date
- % website pages fully bilingual and compliant with the Council’s Welsh Language Scheme
- % customers satisfied or very satisfied with the experience of using the on-line services
- Number of citizens who have registered for “my account”
- Digital by default policy approved and implemented
- Strategy for intranet and micro sites agreed.

FACE TO FACE STRATEGY

Reduce the number of transactions, interactions and information services delivered face to face by the One Stop Shops overall, but increase the % of services delivered on one visit by those customers who need to access services face to face.

The original Access to Services Strategy approved by the Council introduced three One Stop Shops, based at Neath Civic Centre, Port Talbot Civic Centre and Pontardawe. The aim of the One Stop Shops was to enable customers to have all of their transactions dealt with in a single, face to face visit, rather than having to navigate services from individual departments of the Council.

In the first instance, the range of services provided by the One Stop Shops was limited to a small number of high volume services, such as Council Tax enquiries, Housing Benefits, Housing Management. Over time, the range of services delivered by the three One Stop Shops has extended to include many other services, such as applications for a Blue Badge and Bus Passes.

As customers opt in increasing numbers to access self-service options, the role of the One Stop Shops will change. It is expected that the service will see an overall reduction in the number of people accessing simple transactions, however, where applicants need to be seen in person because of service or legal requirements; need to produce original documentation for inspection; or be unable or not wish to access online or telephone channels, then the One Stop Shops will continue to play an important role in the overall Channel Strategy.

One of the more recent developments has been the co-location of other agencies in the Council's building at Pontardawe to enable "wrap around" services to be provided to people on low incomes. Customers accessing the services at Pontardawe are able to access benefits advice; money management advice; employment support and digital skills support all in one visit. Evaluation of this new service has been positive and it is planned to extend this model to other parts of the county borough.

Case study:

The Council, together with its Local Service Board partners formed a group to examine the impact of welfare benefit changes on local people. The loss of benefit income per adult of working age in Neath Port Talbot is ranked amongst the top ten areas in the UK.

Partners quickly identified that many people affected by these changes would need access to: discretionary housing benefit payments; help to draw down all of the benefits that they were entitled to; help in managing family budgets; help to carry out their claims on-line as the Department for Work and Pension expect most claims and evidence of job seeking to be done on-line.

The Holly Street Offices at Pontardawe provided an excellent opportunity to trial the bringing together of local agencies who deliver the support identified above under one roof. Supported by European Social Funding, the Council's Housing Benefits and Council Tax Service; NPT Credit Union; NPT Homes; Citizens Advice Bureau and Welfare Rights, together with support from library staff who can provide support in accessing online services are providing one-stop services for people on low incomes from the area.

The new service has increased knowledge amongst agencies of wider services on offer and reduced duplication. Customers using the service give it a high rating too. Where specialist support is needed, the partners have worked together to ensure referrals can be made to the relevant agency, or an appointment to see the person at Holly Street can also be arranged.

The 3 Key Actions to Develop our Face to Face Provisions

- Use the management information collected on demand to identify avoidable contact and any services that are not being delivered "one stop". Redesign services to achieve optimum channel efficiency. Ensure all end to end services, where possible, also have an on-line/self-service option.
- Ensure all customer services staff are able to support customers to use self-service/on-line options as default.
- Extend the model of integrated service achieved at Pontardawe to other areas of the county borough, working with relevant agencies to achieve co-location where this best meets the needs of customers.

Performance Measures

- Volume of callers to the One Stop Shops
- % callers walking off before seen
- Average wait times at front desk
- % face to face transactions at One Stop Shops dealt within in “one stop”
- % Customers satisfied or very satisfied with One Stop Shop experience
- Complaint and compliments received and resolution of complaints

POST/PAPER COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

To minimise the amount of post and paper communication and ensure its effective and efficient management

Whilst electronic methods of communication have been gradually replacing traditional mail, the Council still receives and sends a considerable amount of information on paper and through the traditional mail service.

For example, the Elections Service must make provision for over 23,000 voters who have elected to cast a postal vote. This is a considerable exercise which must be carried out diligently and to high cost and quality standards.

If paper communication is the most appropriate channel to communicate through then it is important to ensure the most economical means of reproducing the paper documentation is selected. The Council decided as part of its wider budget considerations in 2014/15 to close its own Print and Graphics Unit. The Council now relies on external purchasing of print and design materials, or prints required documentation through local print devices. To ensure best value for money a Print Commissioning Manager has been established within the Communications and Digital Services Division.

Therefore, whilst the amount of paper communication circulated through traditional mail methods may be reducing over time, post/paper communication remains an important channel for the Council which needs to be managed efficiently and effectively.

Case study:

The Corporate Mailroom Supervisor has developed a clear framework for officers of the Council to aid those needing to use post/paper communication in selecting the most effective and economic methods.

The framework has been promoted in various communications to staff and placed on the staff intranet as a “how to” guide,

The 3 Key Actions to develop our paper based provisions

1. Periodically audit incoming and outgoing mail to ensure the most economical methods are being used.
2. Gather data on the type and volume of paper demand incoming and outgoing to identify the potential for channel shift.
3. Analyse the volume, type and cost of print and design materials purchased and ensure clear guidance is in place to support decisions to print through local print devices.

Performance Measures

- Expenditure on externally posted mail, including costs of courier services
- % outgoing or incoming mail identified as suitable for channel shift
- % traditional mail responded to within 10 working days
- % printed materials identified as suitable for channel shift

EMAIL STRATEGY

Reduce the volume of e mails received from customers in respect of transactions, interactions and information services.

Establish ground rules for internal and business-to-business use of incoming and outgoing e mails to improve business efficiency and effectiveness.

E mail has become of the main means of communication within and between the Council, its partners and wider community. Used in the right way, e mail communication can be reliable, efficient and effective. However, there is growing concern that some e mail practices, including the increasing use being made by commercial organisations of mailing lists to market goods and services directly to individual officers, can reduce efficiency and effectiveness by bombarding in-boxes with irrelevant/unwanted communication, resulting in wasted hours sifting through significant volumes of information. There is also some evidence that e mails are used in place of more appropriate channels, such as telephone or face to face communications with the result that communication is impaired.

E mail costs a great deal of money. Both in terms of the time spent composing, reading and responding to communication but also in terms of storing and retrieving the data. The scope to reduce unnecessary expenditure and to improve effectiveness needs to be explored as part of this Channel Strategy.

Case study:

An analysis of the Council's website identified a number of "contact us" e mail accounts that had been set up to enable customers to notify the Council of comments, suggestions about service delivery or in some cases to receive service requests.

On closer examination it was found that most of the "contact us" mail boxes were not connected to any business process and were often not monitored by anyone in particular. Generic "contact us" e mail boxes have now been removed and replaced by more appropriate mechanisms that enable customer data to be captured and automatically processed so that enquiries receive an efficient and appropriate service response.

The 3 Key Actions to develop our email provision

1. Identify the main causes of inefficiency in e mail usage and draw up policy guidance to encourage a shift away from poor e mail practice.
2. Establish good e mail recording keeping practice to minimise storage and retrieval costs
3. Research the options and business case for developing and alternative to e mail to internal communications

Performance Measures

- *Number of e mail demands identified as being suitable for channel shift*
 - *Volume of e mail transactions shifted to alternative channels*
 - *Volume of e mails stored by the Council*
-
- Option appraisal and business case on alternatives to e mail completed

NEW MEDIA STRATEGY (INCLUDING EMERGING SOCIAL MEDIA)

Establish a clear purpose for the use of new social media to improve better access to information to improve the communication, reduce costs and widen access to services

The growth in use of technology and the pace at which technology is adapting is well documented. For many, there has been a significant shift from traditional ways of communicating and accessing services including: mail to e-mail; newspapers to blogs; phonecalls to instant messaging; to name but a few.

If the Council is to connect effectively with its communities then we must embrace these innovations and make clear and wise choices as to where they feature within our service delivery arrangements.

Social media provides an excellent means of gaining insight into the way some people perceive the Council. It also provides a highly effective method of getting key information across to large groups of people very quickly – for example: school closures; road closures etc. Social media provides for a highly personalised response to customers due to the two-way flow of information. Although councils needs to be prepared for views that may not always be positive, used in the right way, social media can create stronger links with citizens, enhance the council's reputation and reduce service costs.

Case study:

The Corporate Communications Team were early adopters of social media, using Twitter™, Yammer™ and Facebook™ to support the Council's service response on occasions where there is severe weather. Yammer enabled the on-call team to communicate effectively from home without making the hazardous trip to the office, ensuring that an early and responsive service was available throughout the day. Use of the corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts enabled clear messages to be sent to parents, pupils, businesses and the general public and to update the status of information throughout the day.

The 3 Key Actions to develop social media use

1. Evaluate the current use made of social media to identify who is currently using the channels and the effectiveness of current use.
2. Ensure that social media channels are integrated with other channels, ensuring an integrated, multi-channel approach to public information
3. Benchmark current practice against industry best practice to inform further development of the Council's social media activities

Performance Measures

- The number of corporate social media accounts
- The number of other service-based social media accounts
- The number of followers etc of corporate accounts
- The overall tone of social media conversations
- % of public information broadcasts by the Council that make use of social media channels
- % social media followers engaging with the Council

PAYMENT CHANNELS STRATEGY

Maximise the number of customers paying for council services via electronic channels

Collecting income due to the Council efficiently and effectively is a key activity. The total income raised and the cost of collecting and administering the payments is a significant activity for us.

There are many different ways in which fees and charges are administered and there are multiple ways in which people can pay over the sums owed to the Council. Current methods include: cash, telephone payment, on-line payment, cheques, debit cards, credit cards, direct debits and standing orders, to name but a few.

Setting appropriate, fair and reasonable fees for services is even more crucial at a time of continuing austerity. Similarly, maximising the collection of income owed whilst minimising the cost of income collection is of growing importance. Examining our current practices is a priority action within this Channel Strategy.

Case study:

Customers paying in cash at the Holly Street offices at Pontardawe were surveyed to understand if there was appetite to pay for goods and services through other, cheaper channels. The assumption made prior to the review was that people were paying in cash as they had no means of paying by any other method.

Face to face interviews with customers calling at the cash desks revealed that a large percentage of people had on-line bank accounts and would be quite happy to pay by direct debit or standing order. Customer services officers worked with those customers to set up the new methods of payment and this enabled the Council to close the cash desk service at the location.

The 3 Key Actions to develop our Payment Channels Provisions

- Draw up a policy that ensures equitable, reasonable and economic fees and charges across the Council
- Use data on existing transactions to identify those transactions where there is greatest opportunity and impact in shifting customers to different payment channels
- Draw up a corporate policy to ensure there is a legal, proportionate and consistent approach to debt recovery across the council.

Performance Measures

- % income owed collected
- % payment transactions undertaken via digital channels
- % value of payments undertaken via digital channels
- Cost of income collected/transaction
- Ratio of cost of income collection processes to value of income collected
- % customers satisfied/very satisfied with payment arrangements

Part 4 – Glossary of Terms

Customer

A person using a public service.

The person could be using the service for personal reasons (e.g. to register the birth of a child), for business reasons (e.g. filing company information) either for themselves or on behalf of someone else.

Service

A service is a provision of information or a transaction that an organisation delivers to its customer.

Examples of public sector transactional services are the state pension and vehicle registration.

Service delivery

The processes by which a customer receives or accesses a service. Service delivery often involves multiple stages, for example a public sector service delivery process may involve:

- Enquiries and requests for information (e.g. “What benefits am I entitled to?”)
- Service fulfilment (e.g. registering for benefits and payment of benefits to customer)
- Follow-up and after care (e.g. reviewing a benefit entitlement after a change)

Public sector service delivery can involve a complex chain of actions across multiple organisations.

Channel

A means of communication by which a service is delivered or accessed.

Examples of direct channels used by the public sector include post, telephone, mobile telephone, web, and face-to-face (services delivered in physical locations, such as Civic Centres).

Channel strategy

An organisation's plan for the channels it will use to deliver services to its customers. A channel strategy explains how an organisation will meet the demands of its customers using the resources available.

Efficient

Channels that are efficient deliver services without wasting time, money or effort for either the customer or service provider.

Effective

Channels that are effective deliver services which meet the desired outcome, with minimal difficulty for the customer or service provider.

Insight

An insight into a customer is a deep truth based on an understanding of customer behaviour, experiences and attitudes, and their needs from a service. Organisations with insight into their customers can deliver the services their customers need, through the right channels.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) REPORT FORM

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Report Form

This form should be completed for each Equality Impact Assessment on a new or existing function, a reduction or closure of service, any policy, procedure, strategy, plan or project which has been screened and found relevant to Equality and Diversity.

Please refer to the ‘Equality Impact Assessment Guidance’ while completing this form. If you would like further guidance please contact the Corporate Strategy Team or your directorate Heads of Service Equality Champion.

Where do you work?
Service Area: Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services
Directorate: Chief Executive’s Office

(a) This EIA is being completed for a...

	Service/ Function	Policy/ Procedure	Project	Strategy
Plan	Proposal			
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

(b) Please name and describe below...

Draft Digital by Choice Channel Shift Strategy

(c) It was initially screened for relevance to Equality and Diversity on ...

12th June 2015

(d) It was found to be relevant to...

Age.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Religion or belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Gender reassignment.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Marriage & civil partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Pregnancy and maternity..... v

Welsh language..... v

(e) Lead Officer

(f) Approved by Head of Service

Name: Mrs Karen Jones

Name: as lead officer

Job title: Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services

Date: 12th June 2015

Section 1 – Aims (See guidance):

Briefly describe the aims of the function, service, policy, procedure, strategy, plan, proposal or project:

What are the aims?

The draft Digital by Choice Strategy has been developed to update the Council’s Access to Services Strategy

It aims to establish a corporate approach to the way in which the Council will design access to services through a range of different channels, with an overall aim of increasing the number of services available on-line and encouraging a significant take up of the on-line service options, with a corresponding reduction in other, more expensive channels.

Who has responsibility?

The Strategy will need to be approved by the full Council as it is listed in the Council’s policy and budget framework.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services is the Lead Member and the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services is the Lead Officer.

Who are the stakeholders?

There are many different stakeholders – the principal stakeholders are the staff affected by the service changes that will flow from the Strategy and the members of the public who access council transactional and information services.

Section 2 - Information about Service Users (See guidance):

Please tick what information you know about your service users and provide details / evidence of how this information is collected.

Age.....	√ <input type="checkbox"/>	Race	√ <input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	√ <input type="checkbox"/>	Religion or belief.....	√ <input type="checkbox"/>
Gender reassignment.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sex	√ <input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage & civil partnership	√ <input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>

What information do you know about your service users and how is this information collected?

The draft strategy is a corporate strategy and will therefore bring a range of services within its scope. The level of detail available about service users will vary from service to service but it believed to include the level of detail shown above. Gaining the best customer insight is an integral feature of the approach that will be taken to service redesign – the method adopted will seek to establish who is currently using the service

and to involve representative service user grouping in the design and implementation of each change. By taking this approach we hope to identify groups with protected characteristics and to take into account any specific needs throughout the service redesign lifecycle.

We also recognise that as far as on-line services are concerned, there are significant numbers of people who are digitally excluded and that older people are more likely to be digitally excluded compared with other groups. We have used Welsh Government survey data to establish this. We intend to develop a digital inclusion strategy to complement this Channel Shift Strategy so that those currently excluded are helped to overcome any barriers. It is planned that the draft digital inclusion strategy will be ready for public consultation in early autumn 2015.

Pregnancy and maternity ✓ Welsh language..... ✓

Any Actions Required?

Ensure the methodology develops the customer insight for each service area to ensure that service redesign meets the needs of those who would wish to access that channel.

Bring forward a draft digital inclusion strategy for consideration in early autumn to help remove barriers to using on-line service options for those who are currently digitally excluded.

Section 3 - Impact on Protected Characteristics (See guidance):

Please consider the possible impact on the different protected characteristics. This could be based on service user information, data, consultation and research or professional experience (e.g. comments and complaints).

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Needs
further				
investigation				
Age	➔ ✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	➔ ✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender reassignment	➔ ✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Marriage & civil partnership **→** ✓

Pregnancy and maternity **→** ✓

Race **→** ✓

Religion or belief **→** ✓

Sex **→** ✓

Sexual orientation **→** ✓

Welsh language **→** ✓

Thinking about your answers above, please explain in detail why this is the case? including details of any consultation (and/or other information), which has been undertaken to support your view?

It is believed the impact will be overall positive for each group with protected characteristic as the aim of the strategy is to increase customer choice by offering services across a wider range of channels. By including service users in the design and testing of new service options, it will should be possible to identify any potential barriers to access that groups with protected might experience and to specifically cater for those.

In terms of the Welsh Language, the service redesign will specifically seek to ensure there is equality with English language options and to address some of the non-compliance areas identified, for example, with the Council's website resources.

What consultation and engagement has been undertaken (e.g. with the public and/or members of protected groups) to support your view?

We have held workshops in drawing up our Strategic Equality Plan where there is some overlap between actions in this draft Strategy and that Plan which involved members of the older persons' forum, youth council, BME forum, lesbian gay and transgender forum, disability network and wider equality organisations.

We adopted user testing for the redevelopment of our website and on-line service developments several years ago and have used the learning from those arrangements to inform this proposal.

Any actions required (to mitigate adverse impact or to address identified gaps in knowledge)

We will consult on this draft equality impact assessment as part of the public consultation specifically with groups who have protected characteristics to check the accuracy of this impact assessment.

Section 4 - Other Impacts:

Please consider how the initiative might address the following issues. You could base this on service user information, data, consultation and research or professional experience (e.g. comments and complaints).

Foster good relations between Different groups	Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
Elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation	Reduction of social exclusion and poverty

(Please see guidance for definitions)

Please explain any possible impact on each of the above.

This draft strategy aims in the main to reduce social exclusion and poverty as on-line service options increase choice, life opportunities and can reduce cost. The development of a digital inclusion strategy to complement this Channel Shift Strategy is key to securing this objective.

In terms of advancing equality of opportunity between different groups, widening choice of channel should mean that we are better able to cater for the needs of different groups for whom face to face and telephone contact may present barriers.

What work have you already done to improve any of the above?

We have tested the concept of increasing our on-line presence and seen a significant take up of the new service options by the local population. This ranges from 25%-to just over 50% of total transactions

We have been user-testing our web developments over a number of years and have been able to make adjustments to our approach in light of feedback received.

Is the initiative likely to impact on Community Cohesion?

It is likely that there will be no discernable impact on community cohesion

How will the initiative treat the Welsh language in the same way as the English language?

The approach embraces the Council's existing Welsh Language Scheme and anticipates some of the new requirements that will flow from the Welsh Language Standards.

Actions (to mitigate adverse impact or to address identified gaps in knowledge).

-
- No additional actions to those identified early in this impact assessment

Section 5 - Monitoring arrangements:

Please explain the arrangements in place (or those which will be put in place) to monitor this function, service, policy, procedure, strategy, plan or project:

Monitoring arrangements:

The outcome of public consultation will be reported to Members with the final draft strategy early autumn.

Performance indicators are included in the draft strategy and will form the basis of monitoring

Actions:

Ensure performance data is captured to enable progress against the strategy to be secured

Section 6 – Outcomes:

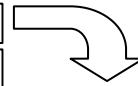
Having completed sections 1-5, please indicate which of the outcomes listed below applies to your initiative (refer to guidance for further information on this section).

Outcome 1: Continue the initiative...

Outcome 2: Adjust the initiative...

Outcome 3: Justify the initiative...

Outcome 4: Stop and remove the initiative...



For outcome 3, detail the justification for proceeding here

Section 7 - Publication arrangements:

On completion, please contact the Corporate Strategy Team for advice on the legal requirement to publish the findings of EIAs.

Action Plan:

Objective - What are we going to do and why?	Who will be responsible for seeing it is done?	When will it be done by?	Outcome - How will we know we have achieved our objective?	Progress
Conduct a public consultation exercise on the draft strategy to establish the level of support for the direction of travel and associated priority work areas	Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services	End August	A report detailing the results of the consultation exercise will be produced and this will accompany final proposals that will be submitted to Members in September 2015	
A digital inclusion strategy will be developed to complement this strategy	Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services	September 2015	A draft strategy will be submitted to Members in September with a view to seeking authority to consult on its content	Discussions with LSB partners have already commenced to ensure there is a partnership input to the development of the strategy
Establish data Systems to enable Members to gauge the progress made in implementing the Digital	Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services	September 2015	Statistical data is available to Members as part of the monitoring	Some data has already been developed to support the early work of the

by Choice Strategy			arrangements put in place to gauge the progress and impact of the strategy	programme. This will now be expanded to enable progress across the entire scope of the strategy to be measured and reported upon.
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