

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **5 November 2019**

Title: **Access to Services - a Borough Wide Review**

Portfolio Area: **Customer First – Cllr Jeff Moody**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: **Council**

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Recommendations: Hub Committee recommends to Council to:

- i.** Increase promotion of online services for those able to self-serve
- ii.** Continue to support those most in need with home visits
- iii.** Continue to build upon partnership working
- iv.** Develop assisted self-service at the Council's Tavistock Reception
- v.** Refocus and extend the coverage of Council outreach borough wide
- vi.** Hub Committee review the effectiveness of the above recommendations within 6 months of their implementation.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report is presented by Cllr Jeff Moody the portfolio lead for Customer First and provides a set of recommendations to support access to Council services throughout the Borough through a range of different channels. Namely: web, telephone, face to face contact and through partner agencies.

2. Background

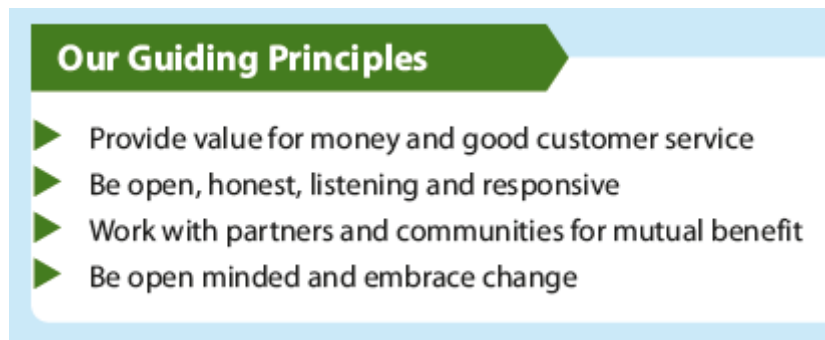
- 2.1 There has been significant Member debate over recent months regarding the future of the Council's Northern Outreach Service, which is currently operated every Wednesday, between 10am-4pm, at the Ockment Centre in Okehampton.
- 2.2 It was recommended by Hub Committee on 16 July 2019 that the Northern Outreach Service close. Some Members expressed concern at this recommendation and felt a wider review of access to Council services Borough wide was needed, rather than just focussing on Northern Outreach. Furthermore it was felt a greater understanding was needed as to how vulnerable residents access the Council's services. As a result the recommendation to close the Northern Outreach Service was "called in" to both Overview and Scrutiny and full Council. Consequently it was resolved at full Council on 17 September 2019 that, at its meeting on 5 November 2019, the Hub Committee consider the Borough wide accessibility of Council services and makes recommendations to the Council meeting on 10 December 2019 on future service delivery.

2.3 In May 2018 the Council adopted a new Corporate Strategy with six strategic themes, namely:



2.4 In particular this report seeks to align itself to the Council delivering efficient and effective services theme, as well as the Wellbeing theme which seeks to help those most in need.

2.5 The core purpose of the Corporate Strategy is to make a positive impact on the lives of local people by providing valued and easy to use service. The Corporate Strategy is also underpinned by the following principles:



3. Outcomes/outputs

3.1 Access to services

At present customers access the Councils services in the following ways:

	Call Centre	Website	Tavistock Reception	Northern Outreach
Daily average	240 calls	50 transactions 600 searches	30 visitors	3 visitors
Average cost	£2.68 per call	14p per transaction	£7.43 per visitor	£49.34 per visitor

**Average data over a 6 month period using staff hourly pay rates plus on costs; internal monitoring mechanisms and national SOCiTM (Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation) benchmarking data.*

- 3.2 The above table clearly shows the most cost effective way for customers to engage with the Council is online.
- 3.3 A significant proportion of customers choose to telephone the Council to access services.
- 3.4 Face to face contact is not favoured by as many customers and is the most expensive to deliver.

3.5 **Caring Council**

Whilst it is recognised the Council needs to deliver services as efficiently and cost effectively as possible it is also important that the Council meets the needs of the vulnerable. At present the Council does this in a number of ways:

i. **Rural deprivation data**

The Council's Environmental Health team used rural deprivation data to target guidance and assistance including the awarding of fuel poverty grants. Areas of highest deprivation for West Devon ranked highest to lowest is as follows:

- Princetown
- Bere Alston
- South of Mount Tavy Road, Tavistock
- Exbourne
- Northlew/Folly Gate
- Bridestowe
- Hatherleigh

ii. **Locality service**

The Council uses its locality officers to visit vulnerable people in their homes. On a daily basis the locality team receive requests from members of the public, partners and council officers to help those most in need. Examples of locality visits include:

- Visits to award council tax reductions for the disabled;
- Disabled facility grant checks to ensure installations have been carried out to standard;
- Support to residents needing assisted collections for waste and recycling;
- Providing support to rough sleepers;
- Following up on online "report it" requests where members of the public have reported concerns about their neighbour and have asked the Council to visit and provide support;
- Benefit visits for residents that are housebound and need help to provide information to support their benefit claim.

iii. **Safeguarding**

Staff are trained to recognise safeguarding issues and there are clear guidelines to follow on the Council's intranet should staff have any concerns. The Council also has named safeguarding leads who refer cases to relevant agencies

including the Police, School Forums, Care Direct (Devon County Council's Adult Social Care) and MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) which is Devon County Council's Children's social care.

iv. **Close partnership working**

The Council recognises the value of joined up thinking and the benefit of close working relations with key service providers in the Borough, including:

- **Community Safety Partnership**
For safeguarding issues as highlighted in paragraph iii.
- **Citizens Advice**
The Council's Environmental Health Team has a triaging arrangement with the Citizens Advice whereby Citizens Advice staff refer customers with poor living conditions to our Environmental Health Officers because they can often help with heating grants and how to tackle damp issues, etc.
- **FCC**
The Council's Waste and Recycling Services are delivered by FCC. The waste crew often notice when customers are struggling and will report for example when waste hasn't been presented. In turn a member of the locality team will visit the household and check that everything is okay and check whether an assisted collection is required.
- **Livewest and Devon Caring**
The Council's Disabled Facilities Grant Team work closely with both of these organisations to identify vulnerable individuals in need of grant funding to provide facilities in their home to support continued independent living.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

4.1 Maintain current service delivery

Section 3 above clearly shows the Council is supporting customers in a number of ways. However, the cost of delivering face to face contact via the Council's Reception facility and Northern Outreach is costly and it could be argued that both facilities are not located in areas of most need as highlighted in 3.5i above. It is also felt there is scope to increase accesses to service online and in turn self-serve.

4.2 Hone and refine service delivery

Whilst it is recognised that the Council is doing a range of activities to support customers it is felt current resources could be better deployed to encourage (where appropriate) more self-serve and where needed more face to face assistance.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 It is recommended that Council adopts option 4.2 above and seeks to hone and refine its service offering as follows:

- i.** Increase promotion of online services for those able to self-serve
 - Continue with website improvement.
 - Establish user customer focus groups to improve and simplify the Council website to make it more user friendly.
 - Market new online functionality through press, social media, existing Council mailings and partners to increase self-serve.
 - Continue to encourage and show customers how to self-serve (if able and interested) as part of face to face contact.
 - Thus underpinning the Council's Efficient and Effective theme.
 - Monitored through existing quarterly customer satisfaction improvement plan reports to Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

- ii.** Continue to support those most in need with home visits
 - It is recognised there will always be a need for some customers to receive home visits and it is proposed that the most cost effective way to deliver this at present is via the Council's locality service.
 - Thus underpinning the Council's Wellbeing theme and helping those most in need.

- iii.** Continue to build upon partnership working
 - Existing partnerships have proved beneficial but it is felt that there is scope to expand partnership working further. Recent discussions with local libraries and information centres has revealed that there is an appetite to sign post access to council services. It is recommended this is explored further and partners where interested are supplied with "How to Access Council Services" guides and training.
 - The Council is in the early stages of developing Dementia Friendly Services, it is recommended this is pursued in partnership with other local service providers.
 - It is proposed the Council uses its Partnership Funding arrangements to commission services to underpin strengthened partnership working. For example partnership contracts with say the Citizens Advice and CVS could as of the 1 April 2020 include clear customer objectives.

- iv.** Develop assisted self-service at the Council's Tavistock Reception
 - Close monitoring of the use of the Tavistock Reception has shown that many customers use the facility who could readily self-serve.
 - It is proposed the Council trials a "concierge" style service at Tavistock Reception in the new year, i.e. a service akin to what a customer might experience at a bank, whereby a member of reception staff would stand out front and sign post customers (where appropriate) on how to self-serve.
 - Thus underpinning the Council's Efficient and Effective theme.
 - Monitoring of this arrangement would be through existing quarterly Customer Satisfaction Improvement Plan reports to Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

- v. Refocus and extend the coverage of Council outreach borough wide
- Use of the Northern Outreach Service continues to be low despite front page coverage in the local paper on two occasions recently.
 - It is therefore recommended that the outreach service is refocused to concentrate on areas of deprivation as detailed in para 3.5i above and that these arrangements take place as of 1 April 2020.
 - It is therefore envisaged that existing outreach arrangements will remain in place until 1 April 2020.
 - Councillors play an invaluable role in providing support to local residents. Recent Councillor Surgeries in Tavistock and Okehampton are welcome additions to the Council's outreach offering and it is very much hoped they are continued.
 - It is envisaged by April 2020 Okehampton as well as larger settlements would benefit from an outreach/surgery service on a rota basis spread across the Borough. How this service is operated would be subject to demand and contracts with partners, as well as the availability of Members for surgery events.
 - When outreach takes place it is the intention to use (where possible staffed public buildings) that way if staff in the host building are amenable they can be trained on how to sign post to Council services when officers of the Council are not present. It is also envisaged "How to Access Council Services" guides be left for public reference too.
 - Monitoring of this arrangement would be through Hub Committee, 6 months after implementation.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	There are no direct legal implications to this report. The Hub Committee has a responsibility to provide Leadership to the overall activities of the Council and ensure the services the Council provides are efficient and effective.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	The recommendations featured in this report can be funded within the existing revenue budget. Improving the Council web offering and encouraging self-serve is the most cost efficient and effective way of delivery services to the majority of residents.
Risk	Y	Use of current outreach provision and the Tavistock Reception has been monitored closely for a number of months the recommendations made in this report are therefore grounded in evidence and have been closely considered.
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	Council Theme – Efficient and Effective Wellbeing Theme– Helping those most in need

Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	Y	Promoting online self-serve where possible and as a result reducing the need for customers to travel to Council offices.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		N/A
Safeguarding		N/A
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		N/A
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		N/A
Other implications		None