	Cabinet 13 October 2014
	Report from the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Growth
	Wards affected: ALL
The New Community Access Strategy	

1.0 Summary

This report sets out proposals for transforming the arrangements that we have in place to enable residents to access information and services more easily and more efficiently. The aim of the new strategy is both to improve residents' experience when they do contact Brent and increase the efficiency of our overall operating arrangements. Central to the new access strategy will be:

• the use of resident insight to design access arrangements that are better tailored to the needs of different demographic groups in Brent;
• significantly improve access to services and information through digital channels and thus enable residents to transact with the Council easily and conveniently without having to phone, visit or write in;
• to improve residents' experience when they telephone us so that their enquiry is resolved quickly and efficiently;
• to target a more personalised approach to those with more complex needs;
• to develop a "Tell us Once " approach for residents enabling information they provide for one service to be proactively shared with other services they may require and thus eliminate the need for this to be provided more than once.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the new Access Strategy and the planned implementation of this, as set out in Section 3 of this report.

3.0   **Detail**

Background

3.1   The Access Strategy has been designed to support the wider aims of the Brent Borough Plan and corporate strategic objectives. The overall aims of the strategy are to:

- Develop a consistent and excellent experience for our residents whenever and however they make contact with us;

- Develop access arrangements that are designed to meet the differing needs of our residents and focused on their needs in a more joined-up way;

- Develop an improved digital offer, better resident confidence in digital access channels and significantly increase take up and use of on line access channels;

- Ensure that residents only need to 'tell us once' rather than being required to provide the same information on multiple occasions.

- Ensuring the access strategy supports resilient communities and builds the independence and capacity of our communities

- Ensuring the access strategy improves the efficiency of contact management and delivers cashable savings.

3.2   The Access Strategy sets out Brent's vision for transforming the way in which residents are able to access information, advice and services. It builds on the work already undertaken through the Future of Services project and seeks to create modern and relevant access arrangements that are tailored to meet the needs of differing demographic groups, help us to respond positively to the financial pressures we face and to target our most personalised contact arrangements to those who are most vulnerable and have more complex needs.

3.3   Underpinning the strategy is a high level set of key design principles that will inform the reconfiguration of existing contact handling arrangements:

- Resident and performance insight will be used to determine how access arrangements should be designed to best meet residents' needs;

- Access arrangements will be simple to use and responsive;

- Residents will be able to 'tell us once' - and the information that is provided once will be used many times;

- Enquiries will be resolved at first point of contact;

- Access arrangements will have a consistent look and feel and service standards will be consistent across all services;

- Access will be 'digital by design' - meaning that residents will be able to access services and information whenever they want without having to telephone, write or visit our buildings.

The New Community Access Strategy

3.4   It is proposed that the Council opens up online opportunities for residents, businesses and visitors in a way that it hasn't done before. Although people will still be able to contact us by telephone and face to face, the strategy proposes that for many residents, the first point of contact will be online. This reflects the increased use of technology by residents and the ease of online access through smartphones and tablets. Many of our most vulnerable and older residents will still want to contact the Council by telephone or face to face and the proposed new arrangements will support this, but increasingly experience is showing that they also rely on family members for assistance and that those family members expect to be able to do things online too.

3.5   The strategy reflects the need to target our increasingly limited resources to those with the most complex needs. A clear way of achieving this is to support those who are willing and able to 'self serve' through online transactions to do so and diverting some of the efficiencies achieved by doing this to providing a better telephone and face to face service for those with more complex needs.

3.6   Central to the success of the Access Strategy will be the development of a more joined up approach to services that will be designed from residents' perspectives. The approach will need to drive cashable savings and efficiencies within Council services by consolidating and in some cases centralising access arrangements, whilst at the same time simplifying arrangements for residents to access the Council.

The New Operating Model

3.7   A new Operating Model will be implemented to support the achievement of the new access strategy. This will set out the organisational arrangements we will need to have in place to support the delivery of the new Access Strategy. It will set out how we will do things in Brent and more particularly how we will engage with our residents, businesses and visitors as a Council.

Using the Access Strategy as the foundation, the new operating model will define:

- Working practices
- Processes
- Information requirements
- Required capabilities and technology

The new operating model will set out the changes that will need to be made to existing arrangements to transform our contact arrangements. It will drive our approach to 'channel shift' by setting out how we will ensure more interactive transactions and information are available online 24:7, how we will support residents to use the internet, how we will encourage more people to use the web and/or phone and how we will maintain or improve face to face

interactions for those with the most complex needs. It is the new operating model which will drive improved performance and deliver on-going budget savings and efficiencies. Appendix A illustrates our current operating arrangements and the proposed new operating arrangements.

What will Change*?*

(i)   **Contacting the Council 24:7 – Online**

Central to the proposed new approach is a step change in the way in which residents can access services and information on line. To achieve this it is planned to implement a new web portal on our web site which will allow residents to create their own 'My Brent' account, authenticate themselves once and then be able to access a range of services without having to enter a separate password for each system. The new portal will act as a front door for all on line services - both existing and new. All existing on line services will be made available through the new portal through a phased approach between November 2014 and June 2016. The portal will also enable us to support proactive and 'intelligent' signposting for residents to other services that may be helpful to them – for example 'did you know that you may be entitled to Council Tax discount?', 'would you like to book a course?' or 'if you need help to find a job then these organisations might be able to support you'.

A procurement process is currently underway through a framework agreement led by Wandsworth. Recommendations about the preferred supplier are scheduled to be considered by the Cabinet on 11 November 2014.

Key Milestones

New web home page live	16 Sept 2014
Improved web search and analytics	31 October 2014
Procurement of web portal	Sept 14 – Mid November 2014
Portal implementation phase 1 : 4 key services plugged in (Revenues, Benefits, Waste and Recycling)	April 2015
Portal implementation phase 2 and 3 further 6 services plugged in (Indicative services : Parking, rents and repairs, pest control, land lord portal, " my location" functionality)	Sept 2015
Portal implementation phase 3-5 further 10 services plugged in (Indicative services : appointment booking, registrars , electoral registration, in year school admissions, free school meals, planning, housing registration, housing bidding, adult social care on line calculator, libraries)	June 2016

(ii) **Improved Residents' Experience - Telephones**

At the moment most residents choose to contact us by telephone and many either have to ring more than once before their call is answered or experience long waiting times. We need to ensure that residents do not need to telephone us by ensuring that they can easily access services and information on line. However we also need to ensure that when residents do telephone us their call is answered promptly and their enquiry is resolved quickly and efficiently.

The new operating model aims to improve our ability to answer all calls by centralising the management of telephone contact handling and rolling out much wider use of Automated Call Distribution (ACD) technology to support this. Currently only about 25% of all calls to the Council are handled through ACD technology with all other calls handled by numerous teams across the Council using smart phones and handsets. ACD technology better supports the management of high volumes of calls, with a much higher degree of flexibility in routing calls to groups of staff with the relevant knowledge and expertise to resolve the enquiry. It also provides comprehensive management information about volumes of calls received and the time and reason for the call. Using this and centralising the management of telephone call handling will enable us to develop a much better understanding of overall telephone contact, better align resources to handle that contact and then be able to use information about the calls to develop and improve our web offer. We aim to centralise call handling and implement ACD technology in a phased way - with the first phase commencing in the autumn of 2014. A clear phasing plan will be developed alongside the planned phasing of the new web portal. It should be noted that ACD calls can be routed through headsets, handsets or through smart phones and so this offers a high degree of flexibility in meeting the differing operational needs of services across Brent. It is envisaged that the vast majority of ACD calls will be routed through either headsets or handsets as these provide the best option for handling high volumes of calls.

The contract for the current ACD system is due to expire in March 2015 and thus a competitive procurement exercise is planned to test the market and procure a new contract by April 2015. Cabinet approval to undertake this procurement is being sought on the 13th October 2014. Cabinet approval is also being sought to extend the existing contract to September 2015 to prevent disruption to call handling during the peak period of Council Tax main billing concurrent with the new charging arrangements for green waste going live.

Key Milestones

Procure new ACD contract	October 2014- March 2015
Extend use of ACD Phase 1 　　　　　　　　　Phase 2	October 2014- September 2015
80% of external calls handled through ACD	October 2015
Telephone handling centralised Phase 1 Phase 2 Phase 3	 October 2014 –March 2015 April 2015 –September 2015 October 2015- June 2016

80% of calls handled centrally	June 2016
Number of published numbers reduced from 89 to 40	September 2015
From 40 to 30	June 2016

(iii)   Modernising our Face to Face Offer

Currently residents can access face to face services at both the Civic Centre and at Harlesden Job Centre Plus.   The latter is a temporary provision pending the opening of the new Library at Willesden Green.   Current face to face provision is based on a traditional model consisting mainly of one to one interviews between a resident and an officer with a much smaller self service offer.   This is reflected in the current physical configuration of both service centres which consists of larger numbers of individual interview booths with a much smaller number of self service kiosks.

The Civic Centre Service Centre includes dedicated self service space on the ground floor which has proved to be very popular with visitors. Members of staff are available within this area to assist visitors to use the self service facilities and also to encourage use of on line services where these are available. The current configuration of the Service Centre will need to be adapted to meet the increasing demand for self service with a concurrent reduction to the numbers of visitors requiring a more traditional face to face interview. Proposals are therefore being drawn up to change the layout of the service centre at the Civic Centre to reflect the need for greater self service provision in the future and to relocate the reception from the mezzanine floor to the ground floor to ensure that visitors' needs can be quickly assessed when they approach the ground floor area.

It is also proposed that the arrangements for the proposed service centre at Willesden Green are changed so as to better support the new community access strategy. The proposition is that the new library at Willesden Green will offer self service facilities within the wider library space, enabling visitors to access services on line and to use freephones where there is a need to speak to an officer. Library staff will be able to provide basic support to residents who may need some help to log on to the self service facilities. Once logged in, staff will be available via free phones to help guide visitors through the on line process, where this is required. Weekly surgeries will also be available on an appointment basis for more vulnerable residents who need additional support to see an officer for a face to face interview.

In the two years since the old Willesden Green Library Centre has closed there has already been a significant shift in the availability of on line services and residents' willingness to transact on line and this trend is set to continue. An analysis of the take up of the interim service centre at Harlesden shows comparatively low levels of residents accessing face to face facilities compared to the Civic Centre, with 20% of residents going to Harlesden and 80% to the Civic Centre. Most visitors to Harlesden do so to report a benefit change in circumstance or to claim benefit for the first time. In fact 83% of demand at Harlesden is related to benefit transactions or enquiries. With the launch of the E-benefits application form earlier this year, 50% of new applications are now being submitted on line without support from a Brent

officer. The remaining 50% of applications are being completed on line with assistance from a Brent Officer. Consequently there has already been a reduction in face to face visitor which at Harlesden represents circa 41 % since 2012/13. (from an average of 1836 per month in 2012/13 to 751 per month in August 2014). This reduction is forecast to accelerate when the on line benefit change in circumstances form launches in the autumn of 2014. Face to face provision needs to reflect this shift in demand patterns and better support the move to on line service take up.

Consolidating provision for face to face interviews into one Service Centre at the Civic Centre would bring the Council into line with many other London Boroughs and would deliver a significant financial saving at a time of severe financial pressure.

For those residents with complex needs that require face to face contact there will be a drive to improve their experience. A series of measures are currently being considered, including:

- 'Tell us once' – so that residents no longer need to re-provide the same information every time they try to access a different service;

- Better integration of services – for example, so that residents can have a single conversation about their employment, benefits and housing needs rather than experience 'hand offs' between different departments as currently happens. The Council is keen to explore how other organisations can be integrated into this model;

- Improved signposting – to services provided by other organisations, particularly in the voluntary and community sector, who may be able to provide better or additional support than the Council;

- Peripatetic face to face access – we will continue to offer home visits to our most vulnerable residents and appointments for face to face interviews at the library at Willesden Green on a weekly surgery basis. Options for working with key stakeholders such as registered social landlords and the voluntary sector are also being explored which could facilitate joint surgeries at the Civic Centre, Willesden or other locations on a more ad hoc basis.

There are other implications for this approach in respect of the new Library at Willesden, including the opportunity to make use of the surplus space in the new building for alternative uses that are of public benefit and in keeping with the ethos of the building. It is proposed that the Council enter into a local dialogue about options for alternative uses in the space. Any use of the space will need to be income generating and as a minimum will need to cover the proportionate running costs such as Business Rates, heating, lighting, cleaning and maintenance.

(iv)   An Improved Experience for our Residents

Underpinning all four of the above will be a review of current service design and processes with a view to delivering an enhanced user experience, so that

residents can expect their initial enquiry to be resolved at first point of contact rather than be passed to a number of different officers and services. Residents should also be clear about who will respond to their enquiry, by what method (email, phone call, text, and letter) and by when. This will require on-going reviews of end to end service design, processes, job roles and staff skills – all of which will be integral to the delivery of the Community Access Transformation programme.

Key Milestones

Increase self service in Service Centres (north and south) Phase 1 Phase 2	 By October 2014 By January 2015
Reconfigure physical lay out of Service Centre at Civic Centre	By January 2015
Vacate Harlesden Service centre	1 July 2015 (subject to the library at Willesden opening by July 2015)
New Willesden offer live	30 June 2015 (subject to confirmation)

(v)   **Tell us once**

Services will be redesigned so that they make much better use of shared data with the aim of ensuring that residents only need to provide key information once. For example, if proof of income /savings is required for a range of different services the resident should only have to provide those details on a single occasion. Opportunities for sharing data between services will be identified and used to help inform development of the Council's client index system. Work is already underway to support service to identify opportunities to support the 'tell us once' approach.

Key milestones

Scope work streams " Tell us Once "	December 2014
Review processes in scope Phase 1 Phase 2 Phase 3	 April 2015 June 2015 Sept 2015
Implement process and system changes to support process redesign for each phase Phase 1 Phase 2 Phase 3	 June 2015 Sept 2015 Dec 2015

(vi)   **Shorter processes**

We will have fewer hand offs and there will be a clear understanding of timescales and the methods of responding. We will also deliver an improved user experience. Residents and businesses will know what to expect and by when and their queries will be resolved.

3.8   Summary of the high level implementation plan

Appendix B sets out the high level implementation plan for delivering the new operating arrangements and achieving the aims of this strategy.

4.0   Financial Implications

4.1   The estimated one off costs of web improvements including the new web portal, new home page and other web improvements is £668,000 but this will be subject to the outcomes of the portal procurement. The forecast running costs of the new portal will be circa £57,000 per annum.

4.2   Indicative one off costs of £90,000 have been identified to support improvements to telephony, developing shared data capability through the client index and minor physical changes to the Service Centre at the Civic. These will be firmed up as the implementation plan is developed.

4.3   Indicative project delivery costs of £220,000 - £250,000 have been identified as part of the early resource scoping for the overall implementation plan. These will be evaluated further during the development of the detailed implementation plans and revised as appropriate. These costs will be incurred over the initial 12 months of the project only and include a senior programme manager, a telephone project manager and 3 full time project officers. Funding is being sought from the One Council Board to meet project delivery costs.

4.4   Options for exploiting technology to support more effective remote and mobile working are also being evaluated. The cost of this will be dependent on the preferred solution and the extent to which this will deliver a better resident experience and cashable savings. Funding will be sought through the One Council Board if a robust business case can be proven.

4.4   An explicit aim of the Access Strategy is to improve the efficiency of our current arrangements and deliver savings. These savings will be identified at each phase of delivery and will be tracked centrally to ensure visibility of total savings realised and ensure that there is no double counting of savings. Based on channel shift achieved in specific services and previous projects relating to contacts made with the Council, it is estimated that cashable savings in the region of £1.5million can be achieved. This estimate is based on reductions to the telephone contact, channel shift to digital channels and streamlining of processes through use of shared data. The indicative savings estimate will be reviewed at each phase of implementation and will be subject to confirmation that it can be achieved over and above any other savings that have already been identified.

5.0   Legal Implications

5.1   The Council's constitution and due governance requirements have been complied with. There are no legal implications.

6.0   Diversity Implications and Equality Analysis

6.1   An equality impact assessment for the new community access strategy is attached as Appendix C. The overall impact assessment indicates that the extension of on line access to services could benefit many protected groups providing easy and convenient access on a 24/7 basis. As all channels of contact will remain available, the strategy offers all residents, including those in protected groups enhanced and improved access arrangements. The reconfiguration of the Services centre at Willesden will reduce the availability of face to face interviews with officers, however these will still be available at the Civic Centre and at Willesden by way of a weekly surgery. Residents using self service computers located in the library at Willesden will also be able to speak to an officer using free phones to assist them with any enquiries or to support them through the self service process. During the early stages of the opening of the new Willesden library, staff will be available to provide details about the options available for face to face enquiries from both the Civic Centre and Willesden.

All of our residents and businesses will be able to contact us by any of the three channels:

(i)   Web
(ii)   Telephone
(iii)   Face to face

We will be able to contact residents via telephone, text messages and social media. The new strategy will improve access arrangements as summarised below:

(i)   50% of benefit claimants are in work and need to access services outside of their working hours and the web enables 24:7 access to services.
(ii)   Carers of frail older people and disabled people assist and/or lead on the assessments for care with agencies as they are the resident's main advocate. Adult Social Care have identified a trend which shows that carers prefer to transact online. Online assessments are not yet available in Brent.
(iii)   Residents complain of currently having too many log-ins and passwords.
(iv)   There is duplication across services as residents have to repeat information to each service that they interact with. The Community Access Strategy will introduce a "Tell Us Once" approach and assessments will be streamlined. Further, verification processes will be streamlined.

        Brent's current website is not completely digital, for example pdf forms have to be printed.

We found out that residents:

(i)   Find it difficult to contact us by telephone, as the current mixed telephony systems do not work well.

(ii)   Are required to have a separate login and password for each service accessed on the Council website and they would like to have just one log-in and one password.

(i)   Find the current website "clunky" and difficult to use. Web searches were said to be difficult and pdf forms appear on the web site. Residents would prefer to transact digitally rather than have to print a pdf form.

The Community Access Strategy will address this.

6.2   The Web

The web will offer new and therefore more opportunities for protected groups. The web currently has, and will continue to have a "translate" option so that everything on the website can be automatically translated into another language.

Residents with hearing and visual needs will benefit from the web as all computers/phones (standard operating systems and browsers) allow with extra large font/text (visual impairment) and with sound/audio (Visual impairment).

The carers (including family and friends) of older frail residents will benefit from transacting and finding out about services online. Many carers try to balance caring with work and careers. They will be able to access the Council 24:7. This will reduce the need for frail and vulnerable residents from having to travel for assessments and appointments. Pregnant residents and residents with dependents will find the web more accessible and available at times which suit them.

It is important to note that whilst the strategy aims to significantly increase use of on line services, telephone and face to face access will remain available for those who may find it difficult to do so.

6.3   Text Messages and Social Media

The Council will be able to target residents and send out information in the form of texts and also social media messages. This will particularly appeal to young people, as they communicate using these mediums. Texting for example will be used to remind people of appointments and may assist residents with memory challenges.

Social Media such as Twitter will be used along with text messages to target particular geographical areas for example, "X school will be closed today due to snow."

6.4   Telephone

The Council will ensure that telephones are on the Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system. Currently 75% of incoming calls are not on this system and in some areas up to 60% of calls are not answered or residents hang up. We do not have Management Information (MI) reports for non ACD calls but will have this when all incoming calls are routed through the ACD system. This will enable us to use the Management Information to continuously improve access and services.

The strategy will have a positive benefit on all residents making telephone contact as call answering performance improves.

6.5 Face to Face (F2F)

Face to face services will be available at The Civic Centre and in Willesden. There will be a focus upon assisted self service so that residents are supported and learn how to use the internet. Computers for self-service will be available at both face to face Centres. Appointments with staff will also be available

Face to face interviews will support residents with more complex needs.

(i)   Circa 50% of benefit claimants are in work and need to access services outside of their working hours and the web enables 24:7 access to services.

(ii)   Carers of frail older people and disabled people assist and/or lead on the assessments for care with agencies as they are the resident's main advocate. Adult Social Care have identified a trend which shows that carers prefer to transact online. Online assessments are not yet available in Brent.

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Face to face interview will continue to be available for residents who need a more help and assistance in resolving their enquiry.

7.0   Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1   There will be staffing implications arising from the implementation of the new strategy in terms of changes to staff numbers and roles.

7.2   The proposals to reconfigure Services Centres at both Harlesden and Civic Centre will result in changes to the physical layout of these access points.

Background Papers
The Community Access Strategy 2014
The PWC Telephony Report 2014
The Capita Target Operating Model report July 2014

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