	Scrutiny Committee 11 March 2015
	Report from Operational Director Brent Customer Services
For Information	

Update on Community Access Strategy

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report provides Scrutiny Members with a summary of the Community Access Strategy agreed by Cabinet on 15 October 2014 and the progress that has been made in implementing this.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 To note the progress that is being made in implementing the aims of the new Community Access Strategy.

3.0 Detail

3.1 A new Community Access Strategy was agreed by Cabinet on 15 October 2014, setting out plans for fundamentally changing the way in which residents access services and information from Brent. The Community 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 Customer 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. The strategy is attached as Appendix A.

3.2 The Customer Access strategy has been designed to support the wider aims of the Brent Borough plan and corporate strategic objectives. This includes aims to:

- *prevent demand for public services occurring in the first place.*

- *ensure early intervention and a more personalised approach to meeting needs*

- *doing more to support independence and resilience*

- *integrating services around individuals*

- *building partnerships between local services providers and local services- to find new ways of providing services that are more finely tailored to individual, community and local needs.*

3.3   The key aims of the strategy are to:

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

- Develop customer access arrangements that are designed to meet the differing needs of our customers and are focused on our customers needs not our internal service boundaries

- Develop an improved digital offer, better customer confidence in digital access channels and significantly increase take up and use of digital access channels

- Improve the efficiency of customer access arrangements so as to better manage demand, remove duplication and failure and prevent demand arising in the first place

3.4   Underpinning the delivery of the strategy are key design principles which set out the framework within which access arrangements will be reshaped. These are:

- Access arrangements will be designed using customer and performance insight –to ensure that they are effective in meeting customer needs
- They will be easy to access, simple to use and responsive to residents' needs
- They will enable customers to "Tell us once" – allowing information provided to be used many times to meet customers' needs
- Enquiries will be resolved at first point of contact wherever possible
- Residents will be able to expect consistently high standards which ever service they contact- Brent's Customer promise to them.
- Access arrangements will be designed so that, wherever possible, residents can access them digitally.

3.5   The demographics in Brent have changed significantly over recent years, with areas of the borough becoming gentrified and large parts of the Borough now populated by those who are well educated, enjoying middle to upper incomes and with good employment skills. There are however pockets of deprivation, particularly in the south of the borough where the demographic breakdown of residents has remained stubbornly static. This is seen particularly in high density social housing where there are high levels of deprivation; inter generational unemployment and complex needs. The Customer Access strategy reflects the need to target our resources to those with most complex needs by reducing the requirement for more expensive contacts methods for those who are willing and able to self serve. Central to this aim is the need to ensure that residents are able to self serve through digital channels such as on line services or mobile applications, to enable them to manage their interactions with the Council and access services without the need to use more traditional channels such as telephone, face to face visits or writing in.

3.6   Currently telephone contact is the most widely used channel by our residents with an estimated 3.2 M calls per annum[1]. The Community Access Strategy aims to ensure that residents do not have to rely on telephone contact to access services or seek resolution of enquiries. Over time we expect to see reductions to telephone contact and a shift to digital access to services. We know that improvements to our website have resulted in increased visits however we also know that we need to improve our on line offer in order to make it easier and more convenient to use. Although there are a large range of services available on line, these can be cumbersome to access as residents have to log on to each one separately with a separate password for each one.

3.7   We also know that most Brent services are currently designed to reflect the Departmental boundaries that define our management structures. This means that residents generally have to navigate each service separately, which can be time consuming and inconvenient for them but also inefficient for Brent. The Strategy aims to change the way in which we design services, so that these better meet the needs of differing groups and involve residents in co designing them. The strategy also aims to find new ways of providing services that are more finely tailored to individual, community and local needs, in particular by commissioning the Voluntary and Community sector to meet needs. These are long term aims which will require strong leadership and engagement with all staff, but which form one of the most important strands of the strategy.

3.8   The delivery of the Community Access Strategy is being achieved through a programme of projects that are being overseen by the One Council Board. There are 4 major working streams in progress and these are:

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[1] There are 90,000 calls handled every month through the automated call distribution system, this includes parking enquiries managed by Serco. It is estimated that there are a further 180,000 calls handled outside of the ACD however this figure may include some internal calls.

- Improving telephony- to ensure that residents experience a consistently good response
- Channel shift – improving our digital offer to residents so that where they can self serve, it is easy and convenient to do so
- Modernising face to face contact- so that this supports our changing access arrangements, in particular providing assistance to residents who may need help to self serve.
- Thematic reviews- to redesign the way in which services, working with partners and the VCS and joining up service delivery so that individual and community needs are better met.

A small project team has been established to work with services across the Council to deliver each work stream and detailed progress is monitored by the Community Access Board which is chaired by the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Growth, the sponsor for the programme.

3.9   The scope and progress for each work stream is as follows:

3.10   **Improving telephony**

The key aims of this work stream are to:
-improve residents' experience when they telephone us
-reduce the number of published numbers on the web to make it easier to identify the correct number to ring
-centralising the management of call handling where appropriate to enable resources to be better aligned to manage peaks and troughs in demand.
- develop our telephone offer so that it can support residents to use on line self service facilities

3.11   **Achievements and progress to date**

- Call answering rates have been increased from an average of 80% to 90% for high volume services using Automated Call Distribution (ACD) These include Council Tax, Benefits, Registration and Nationality, Environment and Neighbourhoods, Parking , initial Adult social Care enquiries and some Housing enquiries. Total monthly calls received via Automated Call Distribution are circa 90,000 including switchboard calls. There are an estimated 180,000 calls that are handled outside the ACD system on a monthly and call answering vary greatly from team to team. Average answer rates for non ACD calls are around 60%.

- Automated call distribution has been implemented for a number of services to facilitate improved management of call handling and drive performance improvements. These include 3 teams in Brent Integrated

Business Support (licensing, housing, and planning), Transportation and the new Private Landlord licensing scheme. Work is now underway to extend use of ACD technology in Brent Housing Partnership, followed by other services with high volumes of telephone contact currently managed through hunt groups.

- Handsets have been rolled out to all desks in the Civic Centre to enable staff handling high volumes of customer calls to have access to these from any desk in the Civic Centre. (Handsets provide greater functionality for managing and covering high volumes of calls).
- We have migrated the majority of staff to one single voicemail service, to ensure that messages do no get overlooked because of the availability of two voice mail systems (Voda phone and the Corporate voicemail system).
- All 2500 staff across the Council have been briefed on the Council's Customer Promise to resident's and their responsibility in ensuring that our promise to answer all calls is met. Work is in progress to develop detailed reporting for calls managed outside ACD systems (we have extensive management information available for calls managed through the ACD system)
- A schedule of telephone reviews is planned for 2015/16 that will seek to address issues impacting on residents' experience and centralise call handling where this will support improvements and deliver efficiencies.

3.12 **Channel Shift**

The aim of this work stream is to:

- Significantly improve residents experience when they use digital channels to access services and information
- Increase the range of services available through digital channels
- Increase take up and use of digital channels by residents to access services and information and in so doing reduce telephone demand.

3.13 **Achievements and progress to date**

- Redesigned home page based on feedback from residents, members and staff- to ensure that this signposts key services, updates and information
- Improved search and navigations on Brent web site – so that residents can find what they want quickly and easily without having to navigate through different web pages
- Improved access to web site from mobile devices to ensure that on line services can be accessed easily from any device
- Procured a new Customer Portal that will enable residents to create their own personalised " My Brent " account enabling them to log in

and authenticate once and then be able to access a range of on line services without having to log in separately to each service.

3.14 Modernising Face to face contact arrangements

The key aims are to:

- Significantly increase the availability of self service facilities so that residents who do not have access to the internet or need help to use self service, can still access on line services with assistance
- Integrate enquiry handling for residents so that wherever possible their enquiries can be resolved by one officer
- Reduce waiting time to be seen by an officer by resolving quick enquiries on the ground floor of the Civic Centre without the need for the resident to take a ticket and wait for an interview booth to become free.
- Develop a more rounded offer for residents that incorporates the Voluntary sector and other key partners such as the Job Centre Plus
- Develop a greater employment focus for residents visiting the Customer Services centre by promoting help and opportunities available via plasma screens, incorporating surgeries for Brent Start (adult education) and promoting information and help available from libraries.

3.15 Achievements and progress to date

- The Customer Services Centre at the Civic Centre has been physically reconfigured so as to increase space available on the ground floor to provide more facilities at the first point of entry and to enable the reception to be relocated from the mezzanine floor. The number of self service computers has increased from 8 to 28 and 3 new information points have been installed providing visitors with signposting, assistance and help.
- A new triage service is being piloted with a team of seven officers from housing, benefits and customer services cross trained to be enabling them to handle a range of enquiries covering housing, council tax, benefits and employment. The pilot has been running for about 8 weeks and early results are really encouraging with 50% of enquiries resolved at this first point of contact without the need for the resident to see an officer in a booth. The pilot will run for a further 4 weeks before full evaluation and decisions will then be made about how to develop this approach further.
- Plasma screens now display information about employment opportunities and help, including courses available via Brent Start,

information and help available from libraries and support available from the employment team. As the triage pilot is developed, this will also incorporate proactive signposting to employment help.

- A networking event has been scheduled for 12 March between the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) and Brent staff. A range of VCS organisations will be participating to promote the services they offer and enable Brent staff to find out more about these. The aim of the event is to build greater awareness of the VCS offer amongst Brent staff and to build contacts and links with them.

3.16 **Thematic Reviews**

The key aims are to:

- Review and redesign services to better meet the needs of differing resident groups
- To ensure that planned reviews and projects instigated outside the Community Access strategy, fully incorporate the design principles and aims of the strategy
- To engage residents in the co design of services
- To identify and deliver efficiencies in service delivery arrangements
- To identify opportunities for sharing data between services so that our residents only need to " Tell us once " and to develop a more joined up approach to meeting the needs of differing groups of residents

3.17 **Achievement and progress to date**

- The Community Access Board has endorsed the broad approach to thematic reviews and an indicative schedule for the prioritised delivery of these.
- Community Access leads will form part of project boards for planned reviews for Regulatory services, Parking and Homelessness. These reviews are all either now in progress or about to commence.
- A review of care leavers and isolated elderly residents has been agreed and work is commencing on both in March 2015.
- Telephone handling for all services will be covered by these reviews, either as part of planned review e.g. Regulatory services and care leavers or as a specific review of telephony.

3.18 A detailed Project Initiation document has been developed and agreed by the One Council programme board along with a detailed project plan with all actions that are planned for the next 18 months to ensure successfully delivery of the strategy.

4.0   Financial Implications

4.1   The Community Access strategy aims to deliver annual savings of £1.5M by
        March 2017. The cost of the project including procurement of the new
        customer portal is £ 1.185M.

5.0   Legal Implications

5.1   There are no specific legal implications

6.0   Diversity Implications

6.1   Equality impact assessments have been completed for the overall strategy
        and for specific work streams within this. There are no adverse impacts
        identified at this stage because all contact channels remain open to residents
        and thus the improvements to on line services offer enhancements to our
        existing offer.

7.0   Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1   There are no staffing implications identified at this stage. Full impact
        assessments will be undertaken to review equalities impacts for proposed
        staff changes as soon as these are identified.

Background Papers

Community Access Strategy (Appendix A)

Contact Officers

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