



## **Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee**

8 November 2016

### **Report from the Operational Director Brent Customer Services**

For Information

## **Update on the 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.
- 2.2 To note that a new Digital Board has been set up to oversee the development of a new Council wide Digital Strategy covering both digital services to residents and internal working arrangements within the Council. The Community Access Strategy will be incorporated into these wider digital plans which support the acceleration of our digital offer and take up.

### **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 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. It is one of the

major enablers for the delivery of the Brent 2020 vision and the achievement of key outcomes such as:

- *Preventing demand for public services occurring in the first place.*
- *ensuring early intervention and a more personalised approach to meeting needs*
- *doing more to support resident 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 whichever 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 1.8 M calls per annum<sup>1</sup>. 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 the past year over 54,000 residents have created a digital “ My Account “allowing them to access services and transact with the Council using self service facilities which can be easily accessed 24/7. Residents can now actively manage their Council Tax Account, Benefit claim and rent account ( BHP ) using one user name and password, with plans to incorporate a further 10 services over the next 12 months. This places us in a good position to now consider our approach to channel migration (i.e increasing resident usage of self service and reducing contact via more traditional channels) and the development of a channel shift plan. This is one of the many work strands that will be undertaken through the new Digital Board over the coming months.
- 3.7 We also know that most Brent services have historically been 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 stated aims are 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 Brent 2020 strategy has incorporated this approach in the recent Outcome Based Reviews that have been undertaken and its aim to better manage demand for services by taking a more holistic approach to delivering better outcomes to resident.
- 3.8 The last report to Scrutiny in March 2015 set out the plans for delivering the strategy during 2015/16. A small project team was created to help deliver across 4 work streams:
- Improving telephony- to ensure that residents experience a consistently good response

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<sup>1</sup> There are 97,000 calls handled every month through the automated call distribution system, this includes parking 15,000 enquiries managed by Serco. It is estimated that there are a further 54,000 external calls handled outside of the ACD this figure excludes internal calls.

- 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.

3.9 The key achievements delivered in 2015/16 were as follows:

### 3.10 Improving telephony

The key aims of this work stream was 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

- Call answering rates have been increased from an average of 80% to 85% for high volume services using Automated Call Distribution (ACD) We have extended use of ACD technology for those services receiving high volumes of calls, to help facilitate improved management of these calls and this means that circa 60% of all calls are now handled using this technology. Where appropriate this is supported by an improved on line offer to residents , for example HMO licensing calls are now handled using the ACD system and licences can also be applied for on line. Total monthly calls received via Automated Call Distribution are circa 82,000 including switchboard calls. There are an estimated 54,000 external 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 69%.
- A new telephone reporting tool was launched early in 2015/16 to provide managers and staff with clearer visibility of calls being made through individual extensions and facilitate better management of these. The volume of these calls has also reduced as calls have been transferred to ACD technology. Call answer rates for non ACD calls have improved but are still well below the desired target of a 90% answer rate.

- A review of published numbers has been completed and as a result the number of published numbers has reduced from 229 to 72 and further reductions will be achieved as we continue to review telephone contact.

### **3.12 Channel Shift**

The aim of this work stream was 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. Each page of the web site now has 4 tabs “ Report it, Book it, Pay for it and Apply for it “ which enable residents to find these functions quickly and easily without having to navigate our website
- Improved access to our web site from mobile devices to ensure that on line services can be accessed easily from any device
- The new “ My Account “ went live in October 2015 enabling residents to access a range of services using one log in name and password. There is now a comprehensive on line offer available through My Account for Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Rents (BHP) and there are plans in place to incorporate more services in during 2017. Parking, Public Realm and Locata (choice based letting) are due to be available in the first quarter of 2017. A further 7 services will be incorporate between quarter 2 and quarter 4 of 2017/18.

### **3.14 Modernising Face to face contact arrangements**

The key aims were 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 has been 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. 50% of enquiries are now being resolved at this first point of contact without the need for the resident to see an officer in a booth. Residents also receiving advice about employment support available to them and more general advice about the help available to them from both Brent and partners such as the CAB, JCP and voluntary sector.
- 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.
- Residents can now access help from CAB, Job Centre Plus and Brent Start from the Customer Services Centre.

### **3.16 Thematic Reviews**

The key aims were 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 Achievements**

- A thematic review of care leavers was completed in early 2016 that involved a range of services across the Council who collectively support these young people as they embark on adult life. The main aim of the review was to reduce the time taken to find permanent housing for care leavers and to help them sustain their tenancy once housed. By remodelling the care leaver’s journey, it is possible to reduce the average time taken to house them from an average of 7 months to 2 months with a concurrent reduction to fostering costs of £133K per annum.
- A review of contact for planning, building control and licensing following the decision to decentralise Business Support. First contacts for these services have now been incorporated into the BCS Contact Centre with significantly improved answer rates.
- A review of the Client Affairs Team in Adult Social Care which is responsible for carrying out financial assessments when entitlement to social care is identified. As a result of this review a new improved process is in place that should support more timely assessment of financial contributions and as a consequence more timely billing and collection of this income. The Client Affairs Team has recently transferred to Brent Customer Services who are now bedding in new arrangements in order to improve this service to vulnerable adults and income collection for the Council.

### **3.18 Improving Residents’ experience**

3.19 The most critical aim of the Community Access Strategy is to improve our residents’ experience when they contact us. A range of activities have been undertaken in 2016/17 to help support this aim, these include:

- A baseline survey of resident satisfaction across all key channels. The table below shows the results from this and provides a base line from which to measure progress going forward.

|   | E mail | Telephone | Face to Face |
|---|--------|-----------|--------------|
| Rated us good for handling of their enquiry               | 60%    | 59%       | 74%          |
| Responded to their enquiry quickly                        | 80%    | 51%       | 78%          |
| Found the person who handled their enquiry helpful        | 66%    | 79%       | 88%          |
| Said their enquiry was fully resolved                     | 42%    | 58%       | 59%          |
| Checked our website first to try to resolve their enquiry | 63%    | 27%       | 42%          |

- The development of a new Customer Promise Score Card that provides a high level view of our performance against the Customer Promise standards published on our web site. This is reported monthly to CMT where actions to improve performance are discussed and agreed.
- A review of the Customer Promise and a re-launch of this in October/ November 2016 as part of the Brent 2020 Forward Together sessions held for staff. . The revised Customer Promise incorporates the feedback from residents, staff and Members and highlights 5 key commitments to our residents

**Respect** : We will show understanding of the person's situation and needs

**Ownership** : We will take responsibility for the person's query and aim to resolve it for them

**Honesty** : If we can't deliver , we will explain why and signpost

**Feedback** : We will encourage and act on feedback both good and bad

**Time** : We will provide and honour timescales for actions

The revised Customer Promise sits alongside the standards that already exist for telephone answering, correspondence and email handling and face to face enquiry handling.

### 3.20 The next stage of the Community Access Strategy



## **Brent 2020**

Since the launch of the Community Access Strategy in 2014 the One Council programme has been replaced with the new Brent 2020 strategy. The Community Access Strategy is identified as one of the key enablers for Brent 2020 alongside the Medium term Financial Strategy, Work Force Strategy and Partnership Engagement.

### **4.0 Digital Strategy**

A new Digital Board has been established as part of Brent 2020 and the delivery of the Community Access Strategy will now be overseen by this board as part of broader plans to accelerate our digital offer and take up.

#### **Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The Community Access strategy has delivered annual savings of £1.5M

### **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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