

This Report will be made public on 14 July 2020



Report Number: **C/20/22**

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 22 July 2020  
**Director:** Tim Madden, Transformation and Transition  
Ewan Green, Director of Place  
**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Ray Field, Portfolio Holder for Digital Transformation

**SUBJECT:** Customer Access Strategy

**SUMMARY:**

A central part of the Council's transformation programme is the relationship with the customer. The Customer Access Strategy seeks to set out the Council's future approach to that relationship enhancing new technology and the benefits of the digital age whilst also ensuring those most in need are not excluded. This strategy sets out this approach and the move to channel shift and will form the basis of how the relationship on the future.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

Cabinet is asked to agree the recommendations set out below because:-

- (a) This is an important element of the Council's transformation programme and will help shape the relationship between the Council and its customers in the future. Included is the action plan which sets out how this will be developed over the medium term.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Cabinet is asked to:**

1. Note and consider the report.
2. Agree to the Customer Access Strategy as set out in Appendix A.

## 1. Background to strategy

- 1.1 The Council started its transformation programme in April 2018. An update to the programme was presented to Cabinet at its meeting of 19 February 2020. The report can be found at <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s32622/Transformation%20report%20-%20TM%20v2.pdf>.
- 1.2 The report covered the objectives of the transformation programme and the underlying principles which supported it. The programme itself covers a number of key themes including the use of new technology, a change in the behaviours of the organisation, a cultural shift as to how the Council operates and an organisational restructure. At the heart of this is the relationship between the Council and the customer.
- 1.3 The Customer Access Strategy attached at Appendix A sets out the Council's proposed future relationship with customers and how it interacts with them. This approach adopts a number of the key principles set out in the transformation programme and also sets out the key channels through which customers access the Council for services.
- 1.4 The strategy itself looks at the respective channels where customers access the council and the merits and costs of those respective channel. Underpinning the strategy is the use of technology to support ease of access for the customer. In particular, the recent introduction of the 'My Account' service will personalise and make accessing services easier for many of our customers.
- 1.5 The strategy sets out an action plan for the medium term with key milestones and deadlines to ensure that continual improvement is achieved. It also references the need to ensure all channels are available for those unable to utilise those other channels.
- 1.6 The strategy was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 9 June 2020. The key comments from that committee were:
  - The need to look at different ways to make payments online
  - Concern over some broadband issues on the Marsh
  - Elderly residents may not have access or knowledge to use online services which means face to face or telephone contact is paramount
  - The committee noted that generally, members agreed most people prefer to use online services. It's convenient, 24 hour service, simpler and ultimately saves the Council money which can then be invested in other services to help people less able to use technology
  - A comment was made that the district website can be quite difficult to navigate and there is scope to improve this.
  - The pandemic has provided a good incentive for better online services and customer access.

The committee agreed the above comments to be fed back to the portfolio holder and Cabinet.

- 1.7 Subsequently to that committee, the strategy has been amended to reflect the corporate “house” style and has incorporated the intention to develop a workstream relating to digital exclusion. Internally, an officer group has been established to champion the strategy across all areas of the council to ensure the principles identified in the strategy are embedded throughout the working of the council.
- 1.8 The final proposed strategy is attached at Appendix A for Cabinets consideration and approval.

## **2 LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS**

### **2.1 Legal Officer’s Comments (TM)**

There are no legal implications arising out of this report

### **2.2 Finance Officer’s Comments (TM)**

There are no financial implications arising out of this report

### **2.3 Diversity and Equalities Implications (TM)**

The equalities and diversity implications of this strategy have been carefully considered, as it ensures the traditional access channels will still be available for those customers who are unable to utilise the online channels.

## **3. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councilors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

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*Appendices*

*Appendix A –Customer Access Strategy*