

Name of meeting: Corporate Scrutiny Panel

Date: Monday 15th August 2022

Title of report: Access Strategy Update

Purpose of report: The report provides an update on Access Strategy developments and an update on recent performance.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	N/A
Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)</u>?	N/A
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	A report for information
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name	Richard Parry – 3 August 2022
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?	N/A
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	N/A
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr Paul Davies

Electoral wards affected: N/A

Ward councillors consulted:

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? There are no GDPR implications

1. Summary

In Autumn 2021 panel received a report on and discussed the Access Strategy. The report outlined the aims of the five-year strategic aims and ambitions.

The Access strategy is built around our four key principles, which define how we will achieve our aims. The principles are:

- **Getting the basics right** – Develop the design of service access, the language we use and understand what it means to people. Identify what people want to achieve and how they want us to help them get there.
- **Tackling access inequalities** – using access to services to address inequalities, vulnerabilities and loneliness including cultural, digital, financial, and other barriers.
- **Offering multiple contact points** – We recognise that people want choice in how they connect with us, and our communication will extend beyond the traditional channels to include our community coordinators, social media, community buildings and more.
- **Working with people** – Ensure regular reflection and improvements to our processes and arrangements by co-producing our services and how we deliver them with the people that access them, so that we are adaptable to meet needs and access to services is the best it can be.

This update for panel concentrates on the work we have been doing around the principle '**Getting the Basics Right**' and how our system's meet the ambition for meeting citizen needs through multi-channel approaches. It also brings the panel up to date on the impacts of 'post covid' on our telephony services, what we have learned and how we are preparing for the future including the winter months.

1.1 Getting the Basics Right

1.1.1 - Replacement Telephony System

One of the areas we have needed to improve is our telephony system. Our telephony system and switchboard have been in use for some time and require updating. The telephony system is not only used by Council Services (Kirklees Direct, Gateway to Care, Homes and Neighbourhoods for example) it is also used by our health partner Locala. We will be replacing our current telephony system, as we know there are significantly improved products available that will allow us to provide better services to citizens in Kirklees.

We are currently preparing for the telephony system transition to a holding position whilst in parallel working on a specification to go out to market before the end of the year. The specification will detail the requirements of the new system and switchboard services. Earlier this year we undertook pre-market engagement to give an idea of the opportunity and systems that are now available and that is helping us develop our specification requirements.

We anticipate our longer-term solution will go live during 2023/2024.

1.1.2 - Design of Service Access

One of the aims of the strategy is to provide more holistic services where there are identified need(s) and where the opportunity arises to do so in the appropriate way.

We have undertaken workshops to identify the key areas that citizens and our frontline staff have with access. During the autumn we are aiming to start work in some areas as a first phase of developing new approaches and processes. These will be person centred and we will be working with partners and groups to understand opportunities and to co-produce solutions.

It is likely that the areas we will concentrate on first are the blue badge process, requests for housing repairs and waste collections and contacts.

What this might mean, in practice, is that if someone contacts us to apply for a Blue Badge, we would explore how else the council might be able to support them (so would an assisted bin collection service be appropriate if they have significantly reduced mobility) rather than just dealing with the immediate request for a Blue Badge.

The outcomes will give us learning and help inform our next steps and future areas to consider.

1.2 Telephony Performance

In July we alerted elected members on the performance of our telephony team. This update identifies the issues we have faced, the learning, what actions we have taken as well as what we are doing to prepare for the coming 12 months plus.

Post Covid has proved difficult for citizens and for service delivery. Calls for many service areas into Kirklees Direct (KD), the councils telephone contact centre, has increased to pre covid volumes. Whilst we expected the call numbers to increase there have been a number of unexpected issues that have impacted on our ability to answer calls. For example:

1.2.1 The cost-of-living crisis:

Citizens are now presenting with more complex and additional needs and staff quite rightly are trying to help those citizens access the right services where they can at initial contact.

Some citizens are claiming benefits for the first time and need support to help access them appropriately and / or they have additional needs requiring information guidance and support to help minimise the impact for them.

The £150 energy payment resulted in many citizens requiring advice and guidance which also adversely impacted performance. Whilst a specific team was set up to deal with contacts and making these payments, call volumes exceeded expectations at times and affected other lines.

This means our calls are taking longer.

1.2.2 Recruitment and retention

In total over 50% of the staff who answer calls in KD have left their roles in the period July 2021 - June 2022. Whilst KD is positively renowned as a route into other careers in

the Council, 50% is a significantly higher turnover than we would normally see in a year. An average turnover per year would be nearer 10%.

The reasons for high turnover have been due to staffing recruitment and retention issues very similar to those being experienced nationally; ability to work remotely opening up wider geographical opportunities, career changes and accessing different modes of employment.

Additionally, many of our staff who have moved on in this time had lots of years of experience and were able to cover a number of the 40 services currently supported in the contact centre. It takes time for newer staff to complete training and develop the breadth of experience required to deliver expected performance levels.

The service has been proactive and since August 2021 Kirklees Direct have undertaken 5 recruitment drives in an attempt to fill vacancies.

1.2.3 Support from other services

Many services support the contact centre to answer calls, but these services are also having similar recruitment issues and of course have their own increased workloads to deal with. Some of those workloads having increased due to post covid activity requirements (for example administering the government £150 energy payment).

1.2.4 The actions we are taking

Staff support and training: fast tracking training and wrap around support for the recently appointed staff. This is now starting to have a positive impact on performance, and this was evidenced during late July, where we have started to see an improvement in the number of calls answered. We continue to pro-actively monitor performance.

Our **ongoing recruitment** will increase resources further and improve call answer rates. It will also allow for us deal with a level of increased demand should that occur over and above our normal winter pressures on contacts.

Future planning – we are working as a management team to plan resources and delivery to respond to known and anticipated pressures which may result in increased calls to the council. For instance, although we are aware the energy companies will be administering the further government payments for the cost-of-living crisis we are preparing for the potential impact for calls to increase into the council.

Using all our resources to provide information and support - Staff in KD, our customer service centres, our libraries and those working in communities will be able to support citizens through being issued with FAQs to support people appropriately where we can.

2. Information required to take a decision

This report is for information.

3. Implications for the Council

- **Working with People** – One of the key principles in the access strategy is working with people including co-production with people and partners when we are reviewing processes.

- **Working with Partners** - One of the key principles in the access strategy is working with people including co-production with people and partners when we are reviewing processes.
- **Place Based Working** – The actions we are taking (section 1.2.4 above) includes providing localised support through our libraries and those working in communities.
- **Climate Change and Air Quality** N/A
- **Improving outcomes for children** N/A
- **Financial implications for people living or working in Kirklees** – Whilst a significant majority of contacts are through our telephone contact centre we will be providing more localised support. This will be through our customer service centres, our libraries and through those working in our communities. As identified in 1.2.4 above
- **Other (eg Legal/Financial or Human resources) consultees and their opinions** N/A

Do you need an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)?

N/A

4. Consultees and their opinions

N/A

5. Next steps and timelines

See actions we are taking in section 1.2.4 of the summary

6. Officer recommendations and reasons

N/A

7. Cabinet Portfolio Holder's recommendations

Cllr Davies is supportive of the actions in section 1.2.4 of the summary.

8. Contact officer

Dave Thompson, Head of Access Strategy & Delivery & Jill Greenfield, Service Director Customer and Communities

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

N/A

10. Service Director responsible

Jill Greenfield, Service Director Customer and Communities