

Name of meeting: Corporate Scrutiny Panel

Date: Monday 28th November 2022

Title of report: Access to Services and Customer Services and Libraries

Purpose of report: The report provides an update on Access to Services and Customer Services and Libraries

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 – 17 November 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 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 scrutiny panel focusses on the work we have been doing on improving citizen access to services through our telephony team and customer service centres, in our library footprint and support for digital inclusion.

Place based working is more than about geography it is also about providing more holistic services to citizens and improving relationships.

As an item for scrutiny the aim of this report is to generate discussion and provide information which will help councillors decide whether to investigate issues, debate issues and hold the executive to account.

The focus of the report is to detail our ongoing work to review and improve access to services and our place-based approach to doing so; to highlight how we deliver access to services across the council, work we are currently undertaking around this and our actions for the future.

1.1 Improving the Citizen journey

As reported in the update to panel in August 2022, we have undertaken workshops with staff and citizens who are users of our services. We have now agreed the three areas we are going to focus on this is based on where feedback obtained shows current processes are causing frustrations and uncertainty, have the opportunity to provide more holistic services at first point of contact and in some instances are causing failure demand due to those current processes.

The three areas are the Blue Badge application process, waste enquiries and Housing new tenancy applications.

Focus groups have been set up to review the citizen journeys on these areas and they include citizens who are users of the services provided and will therefore be co-

produced. Members of the co-production board are also involved in line with our working with people principle.

What this might mean, in practice, is that if someone contacts us to apply for a Blue Badge, we will 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.

We expect changes to these initial three citizen journeys to be implemented in early 2023.

1.2 – Providing more Holistic Support

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.

In the August update for panel, we identified the work we were doing in our telephone contact centre, customer service centres, in our libraries and communities teams where people are presenting with more complex needs particularly around the cost of living crisis.

Whilst information on the support available is on the council website and is updated regularly, information and conversations and support are continuing to be provided through our telephone, customer service centres, library service teams and through staff working in communities.

Panel may recall that in our August update we identified the challenges we had around our telephony service. Particularly on increasing call volumes, telephone system replacement and induction training and support for our new staff where we had encountered significant challenges on recruitment and retention.

We are pleased to report that the positive impact we had started to see in August has continued. Whilst the additional support for citizens is still impacting on increasing calls received and the time to provide appropriate support in those calls, we are now seeing a real positive impact on improving conversations and support and increasing call answer rate volumes to levels that are really encouraging. For example, in August our call answer rates were reported at around 73-75% whereas now we are seeing answer rates of over 85% being consistently achieved.

Citizens are thanking the staff for providing them with the information and support.

1.3 Library Services

1.3.1 A place-based approach is central to the way in which the council works. Focussing on placing citizens at the heart of what we do, building genuine relationships with communities; engaging with them to establish what they really want and need and working in a way that encourages co-production in developing the best and most relevant solutions that result in positive outcomes for all our communities.

1.3.2 The access strategy outlines what we will do to improve the way in which people can access services in the easiest way for them with a focus on a place-based approach.

- 1.3.3 Libraries are central to supporting this approach; they sit in the heart of communities; they are a valued and trusted local resource; they provide a safe and welcoming space for everyone that provides universal access to services, support and activities.
- 1.3.4 Libraries are also a key hinge point in delivering the councils commitment to supporting warm spaces. Opening times and key services available at each location are being promoted on the national [Find a Warm Welcome Space Today](#) website. Staff are ensuring spaces are created to accommodate longer multi-functional visits. They are working to the Inclusive Communities Framework ensuring the service is inclusive to all who may need to utilise it.

1.3.5 Libraries Vision:

Kirklees Library Service provides inclusive and accessible services and spaces, utilising partnerships based in the heart of communities, enriching, and positively impacting on the lives of people across Kirklees. We run a universal service with equality of access and offer projects and activities to targeted groups and communities.

- 1.3.6 We deliver services that reflect and are relevant to the local communities via our buildings and our outreach offer. We represent place-based working at its best involving local communities in delivery through our volunteering program and Friends groups, utilising local knowledge, contacts, and unique skills to add value to our offer.
- 1.3.7 Our workforce is skilled in engaging and building relationships with local communities enabling them to understand and respond to their specific needs. We work with a huge range of local partners in delivering co-produced services and offer our spaces to organisations and local groups to deliver their own activities and opportunities.
- 1.3.8 Many of our libraries sit in asset transferred, community owned buildings and we work collaboratively with these organisations to provide a joined up and relevant offer to local citizens. For example, in Meltham the Library is situated alongside the Post Office, this enables both the footfall for the post office and the library to mutually support each other's offer. The building offers a multifunction use with a community space, local business, and a Library.
- 1.3.9 Some of our libraries are located in shared council buildings providing ease of access to address multiple needs. We work with wider council services and partners to offer additional support within our spaces offering both regular and ad hoc sessions further increasing flexibility of access.
- 1.3.10 Libraries have an ambitious capital plan to rebuild, redesign and improve our locations with accessibility a key focus; a program to assess and address issues which create barriers to universal access as reflected in the Council Plan's priorities.
- 1.3.11 Our priority locations for large scale improvements (Heckmondwike, Holmfirth, Mirfield and Huddersfield) will all comply with accessibility requirements in terms of design and construction; they will reflect the unique needs of our service and the needs of communities supporting sustainability and flexibility of use into the future. For example, dementia and autism friendly features will be standard, as will support for those with visual and hearing impairments, physical access will be improved including the provision of changing places. We are conscious of the current economic pressures and the impact these may have on progression timescales.
- 1.3.12 Alongside this we have an ongoing whole service accessibility program; key elements have been assessed and action plans are being created relating to the areas mentioned above as well as considering features to support wider excluded groups.

We are working with other services and organisations utilising their expertise and resources as well as those with lived experience; we are members of various networks which will support the longer term continued development of the accessibility of our locations and services.

1.3.13 Our libraries at Birkby Fartown and Almondbury demonstrate how the above has been put into practice. For example, the Birkby Library provides vital community spaces accessible when the Library is closed to public access. This space is utilised by groups such as Family Links who support vulnerable women in the community. These programmes provide a valuable base to build and expand on, providing feedback for our future focus. In order for us to fully deliver on these priorities across the whole service an appropriate level of capital funding needs to be maintained over the life of the program.

1.3.14 We also work in a targeted way to address wider barriers to access. One example of this is our Libraries of Sanctuary work; we collaborate with other council services, VCS and wider sector partners to support the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants; as a key part of the Welcome to Kirklees initiative we offer both our own and partner activities to promote understanding of services, awareness of support available and how to access these; we provide welcome tours and social activities that help new arrivals feel comfortable in approaching us for support and signposting.

1.4 Libraries and Digital Inclusion

1.4.1 Digital inclusion is key in ensuring the access strategy is effective and libraries play a vital role in delivering this; we have free public access I.T and Wi-Fi in all our libraries; we provide workspace and power points for people to use their own devices and we are currently piloting a more flexible approach utilising more mobile devices which will influence our strategy going forward enabling broader and more diverse choices for access.

1.4.2 Libraries are a key partner in the Kirklees Digital device loaning and data provision scheme connecting those who are digitally excluded enabling them to access services and information more flexibly; be more informed, more independent and able to manage their lives more effectively. One of our key aims for the year ahead is expanding the number of devices and library locations we offer this from maximising reach and impact.

1.4.3 To further maximise the effectiveness of our digital offers we also provide I.T skills support both informally within our locations and through more structured learning delivered both by ourselves and partners.

1.4.4 We have recently introduced our Business & IP Centre in Dewsbury Library providing access to information and expertise that is not easily obtainable in localities, encouraging entrepreneurship and skills development. Our proposal to utilise UKSPF funding to deliver a Makerspace alongside this facility will provide a range of equipment, tools and other resources, generally too costly for individuals to buy, alongside staff support, expertise and activities which will facilitate creativity, generate ideas and provide opportunities for groups to develop their own programs of activities.

1.4.5 The library workforce is highly skilled in assessing and resolving a whole range of issues presented to them, utilising effective listening and conversational techniques; they understand the challenges individuals face and go above and beyond to help. They have a huge base of knowledge enabling effective referral whether to our own activities and support or those delivered by other services and partners; they are committed to finding the right

solution and will support people in accessing these in the way that is most appropriate to them.

- 1.4.6 Working with partners and wider services is essential in providing added value and diversity to our offer providing free access to events, activities and opportunities that we could not deliver without their input and expertise; activities that support our council outcomes and improve the quality of life for individuals and communities. For example, our many regular groups and social activities support health and wellbeing by providing opportunities to share experiences and knowledge, reduce loneliness and isolation, supporting early intervention and prevention.
- 1.4.7 As highlighted, Kirklees Libraries are already delivering a highly effective place-based approach and are supporting and enabling access to services in a range of ways as part of this approach. We are continuing to work on key projects and initiatives and are committed to exploring other opportunities to improve our offer further. To enable us to do this in a sustainable way and respond to future changes and demands effectively and efficiently we need continued investment and appropriate levels of resourcing.

1.5 Next Steps

- 1.5.1 Panel are invited to visit the Almondbury and Birkby Fartown libraries to see how these have been developed, their focus on inclusive design particularly around dementia friendly environment and support they are providing local citizens.
- 1.5.2 Focus will continue on coproducing improvements in citizen journeys with the initial three pilot areas giving learning and insight.
- 1.5.3 Identify what other levels of support for citizens can be provided in a place-based way.

2 Information required to take a decision

This report is for information and discussion.

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 are providing more localised support on key themes (cost of living crisis for example). This is through our customer service centres, our libraries and through those working in our communities. As identified in 1.2 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 1.5 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 1.5 of the summary.

8 Contact officer

Dave Thompson, Head of Access Strategy & Delivery & Jill Greenfield, Service Director Communities and Access Services & Mags Rogerson Head of Local Integrated Partnerships

9 Background Papers and History of Decisions

N/A

10 Service Director responsible

Jill Greenfield, Service Director Communities and Access Services