OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 18 JULY 2017

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. **9**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE -   CHANNEL SHIFTING

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER - COUNCILLOR MRS LYNDA NEEDHAM

1.   SUMMARY

As consumers increasingly move to carrying out their day to day transactions online and on the move with smart phone devices, the Council has recognised the opportunity to also move towards a model which allows customers to self-serve and potentially reduce the volume of more expensive telephone and face to face transactions. Not only would this help us to cope with the increased demand on services, but potentially release capacity and save the Council money. Many residents would also appreciate the ability to transact with the Council in a more convenient and accessible way, whilst still maintaining the more traditional methods of service for those that want or need it

Our Corporate Plan 2017 -2021 identifies that with an increasing population in the District, services will see an increase in demand.

One of our Corporate Objectives is 'To ensure that the Council delivers cost effective and necessary services to our residents that are responsive to developing need and financial constraints.

These statements both fit with the channel shift agenda.

2.   STEPS TO DATE

Progress on channel shift has already been made in some areas, for example implementing a new self-service portal and building a new website focused around the top tasks people visit the site for, which is also responsive to mobiles and tablets. These services are promoted online through social media and in printed publications such as Outlook magazine. However, encouraging customers to access cheaper channels when they need to contact us remains a challenge. Customers have to be convinced that the simplest and most convenient way to find the information they need is online and that once they have the information they need that they are able to 'self-serve' in a way that is convenient to them.

Earlier in the year, the progress on the Channel Shift project was reviewed and although some progress had been made, it was recognised that there was still much to do and some corporate priority needed to be given to the project. Two officers, one in the Communications team and one in the Customer Service Team now have channel shift specifically built into their job descriptions and this is a primary focus of their roles. In March 2017, a number of recommendations were produced and taken to SMT, detailing some short and longer term plans to progress channel shift corporately, (the paper is referenced as a background paper).

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

3.1 Audiences

Residents can not be seen as one homogeneous group when considering channel shift options. For example there are groups of residents who are confident internet users but need further encouragement to switch to digital channels, alongside another growing number of residents who use digital as their preferred channel. On the other hand, there are other harder to reach groups too - those who lack confidence or basic IT skills, or are unable to access the internet (for a variety of reasons), that need a different level of support and engagement.

3.2 Ensuring a coordinated approach

Channel shift is organisation wide and may involve moving transactions from back office services. There are good examples of where this is already happening such as in the Revenues Service. Some processes can now be completed online by the customer using intuitive forms that integrate directly into the back office system. This almost completely removes any human intervention, which has released significant amounts of officer time. This means that the service now processes these transactions (where all of the information is provided) overnight, providing a speedier more cost effective service. Prior to this the Revenues Service could have a backlog of up to four weeks.

Corporate channel shift should have a focus on bringing that work together in a coordinated way, making sure we are making best use of technology we already have and making enhancements where applicable. The aim is for back office systems dealing with customers to integrate with self-service and CRM systems, to ensure residents and staff enjoy benefits of joined up service delivery, eliminating duplication of work and time wasted working in different systems that don't connect. This offers the potential to make efficiencies in a number of customer transactional services.

3.3 Potential options

We recognise that there are many good examples where technology has been developed and is already available to support and enable channel shift and is being used by other Councils, particularly when we are looking for larger areas of change. Listed below are some examples of technology that we have started exploring in more detail:

3.3.1   Seamlessly moving from telephone to online

We have been exploring a service which enables customers to move seamlessly from the traditional telephone channel to our website, by providing an optional text with an embedded link to a specific transactional e-form or to some specific information that will resolve the customer's enquiry. Currently we have recorded announcements that promote our web offering, but by default many customers continue to use the telephone as the main or only channel. By proactively moving customers from one channel to another, with no effort required by the customer, this will not only release capacity but will encourage the use of online services as a channel of choice for future transactions / interactions.

Using a third party supplier would probably be a temporary arrangement that will help us migrate to the use of our own phone system. This service is used by a number of other local authorities and can be accessed through a framework agreement. We are currently researching this with support from colleagues in IT to explore the capabilities of our own technology.

3.3.2   Scan station

This system is in use in Kirklees Council and allows customers to visit the Council office and scan their documents (needed to support an application of some sort) using a mounted tablet that links directly to the back office system. Currently this service is provided by one full time member of staff manually scanning documents. Not only does this have the potential to release capacity and deal efficiently with seasonal peaks, but will also provide a stepped approach to supporting customers to be able to complete transactions of this kind online from the comfort of their own home.

3.3.3   Email Mailing List

We are considering options to capture a digital mailing list combined with a regular e-newsletter to increase digital engagement with residents, enabling key information to be proactively sent out quickly and efficiently to a wide reaching audience.

4.   NEXT STEPS

Work is already underway to formulate a detailed project plan to track progress on the developments already identified and to make sure that we are involved in relevant system discussions with IT and Service Managers at the earliest opportunity, to ensure a joined up approach for corporate channel shift.

5.   APPENDICES

None

6.   CONTACT OFFICERS

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7.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

1) Channel Shift - Plan for Progress