

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	14 th February 2017
Subject:	Digitalisation and access to services online
Responsible Officer:	Tom Whiting Corporate Director – Resources & Commercial
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Councillor Phillip O’Dell, Performance Lead Member Councillor Stephen Wright, Policy Lead Member
Exempt:	No
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out to highlight how the Council has offered Council Services through digital channels.

Recommendations:

That the report be noted

Section 2 – Report

Where we were

In 2012 Harrow Council was operating a high quality call centre dealing with over 90% of all customer contact, while answering over 120,000 calls each month with an average wait time of less than thirty seconds.

The centre prided itself on resolving 90% of enquiries without further interaction from the customer and had halved the level of avoidable contact (where customers have contacted us unnecessarily) to 17% (the equivalent of 15,000 calls each month).

Access Harrow was widely recognised picking up three awards for excellence in the call centre industry.

The Call Centre platform was heavily integrated with line-of-business technology, ensuring free flowing data between systems without double-keying. The same technology allowed staff to log on through a single sign-on reducing time spent logging onto multiple programmes.

The outcome of this quickly-answered, resolution- focussed approach was that the customer's channel of choice was the telephone.

The Challenge

Like many Local Authorities, Harrow has had to deal with steep financial challenges. In total, Harrow needed to reduce net expenditure by £83 million by 2019/20 against a directly controllable budget of £141 million and the impact is that resources in the front line have been reduced.

Since its inception in 2006, Access Harrow has made cashable of savings in excess of £2,000,000 (36% of its budget) through effective use of technology, performance management, multi-skilling of agents to create economies of scale and by process improvements.

In order to make further savings, the Council needed to deliver not only new technology for customers to access services more efficiently, but to change customer behaviour and move away from telephony-based customer service.

Our Customers

Working with Experian, holding focus groups with residents, data-mining our many databases and using web tracking software helped us understand customer demand and internet habits.

We identified customer groups that use internet banking and on-line shopping (retail and grocery); who were 'early adopters' and those that would need nurturing; understand where people moved between PCs, tablets, mobile phones and even games consoles; discover how people used social media; and which browsers were most commonly used to ensure that our own web capabilities were available on all relevant platforms.

What was clear was that the most of our customers had a strong propensity to transact online, and in the majority of their transactions outside of dealing with the Council, they were doing so where possible. However customers benchmarked the ability to transact online against well-established websites such as Amazon and expected a seamless experience when moving across different services.

The MyHarrow Account

The Council's website offers access to many services through web forms however certain services required customer authentication before being able to accept and share personal data.

The MyHarrow account was launched in 2011/12 as a single sign-in portal for residents to access personal and sensitive information. The account is available 24/7 (over 300 people logged in on Christmas Day) and offers integrated access to Council services. Customers authenticate themselves as they would for on-line banking ensuring that data was shared in a secure environment alleviating fear of personal information being accessed by other parties.

Once authenticated, customers can access services where authentication is required because of personal data such as Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Electoral Registration and Housing Rents alongside access to the library catalogue, local Planning detail, updates on service requests and non-sensitive details such as waste services.

The online service is responsive to the device being used, formatting according to tablet, mobile or PC; Apple or Android.

The single sign-in is a vital component and the technology pulls together all a customer's interactions with the Council under a single login and password.

An innovative system was never going to be sufficient on its own, customer behaviour needed to change too to ensure that the true benefits could be realised.

The reality is that the Council's online presence is created by need rather than choice. People do not check the harrow.gov.uk website in the same way that they would utilise bbc.co.uk so the service needed to generate interest in order for people to check in.

As the account is authenticated against an address (personal or business), the account utilises web services from other databases to personalise the site. Once logged in, the home page is populated with personalised location based your next bin collection date, open planning applications and licencing proposals within half a mile of your property and a link to your ward Councillors.

The Council's web team have developed a series of alerts available through the account. These ensure that customers can receive relevant information directly to their PC/tablet (by email) or phone (by text). The alerts available include notification of new planning application in your neighbourhood; a reminder to pay your Council Tax five days prior to the due date (assuming that you don't pay by Direct Debit); notification if we didn't collect your bin (along with the reason why); reminders to return library books or to pay any fines; details of any events in your area and a reminder to renew your parking permit.

To incentivise the use of the account and related customer behaviour change, the Council has recently launched the "Harrow Deals" programme whereby local businesses can offer exclusive deals to account holders through an email alert (similar to Wowcher or Groupon). Once the alert has been received, customers can log in to their account and access the vouchers (either by printing or downloading to their device) and present them to the trader. These deals are updated on a monthly basis and are a key driver in stimulating the local economy.

Once logged in to the account, the session data is transferred when customers visit other areas of the website. For example, if you visit the web pages about rubbish and recycling, details of your bin collection will appear. In a similar fashion, when a customer completes a web form, their personal details (name, address, contact details) are automatically populated. Our 90,000 account holders (covering 75% of households) log in the MyHarrow account over 35,000 times each month saving the equivalent of 35 full time equivalent (FTE) staff or £875,000 per annum.

Webforms and process automation

All of the top seventy web forms are fully integrated end-to-end from the webform to fulfilment in the line of business systems.

If a customer notifies us of a change of address online, the details are pulled through the Civica workflow system into the Northgate Revenues system and automatically generate a new bill. Furthermore, to save unnecessary contact, the form will collect data for the Electoral Register, push a link to apply for a Parking Permit (if in a controlled parking zone), collect childrens' date of birth for school admissions and if moving into the Borough, open a MyHarrow account.

Like many Councils, Harrow promotes a clean and safe borough and asks residents to report any issues such as fly tipping, graffiti and abandoned vehicles. At Harrow, we experienced two problems – multiple reporting of the same issue and locating the exact location of the incident due to the lack of detail utilising Google Maps.

The secondary issue was easily resolved by moving to the Ordnance Survey mapping tool where greater clarity is available. The primary issue was initially resolved by displaying incidents that had already been reported with a note as to the current status. This was followed up by allowing residents to track their requests through the account, similar to Amazon or DHL. This additional functionality helped to close the feedback loop with customer requests and is now being trialled in other services.

Significant advancements have been made in transferring complex forms to the web. Housing Benefit forms have been made more user-friendly as only the relevant details are captured rather than providing each customer with a full application form. As the online version is completed, data is pushed directly into the back office systems and assessed utilising risk-based verification software. Any low risk assessments are automatically accepted and any required documentation is emailed directly to the claimant.

This innovation ensures a quicker response time for the claimant, saves the Council significant resources through reduced man-power in both the front and back office and a reduction in printing and postage.

The integrated web forms save the work of 24 FTE or £600,000 per annum and over 34,000 are completed each month.

The reduction in printing and posting application forms has saved in excess of £90,000.

Making online the 'channel of choice'

Providing excellent online services on its own is not enough to change our customers behaviour fast enough to achieve our challenging savings targets.

We are constantly looking for ways to 'nudge' and influence our customers to transact online. These initiatives have ranged from reviewing all our correspondence to promote digital channels to including the cross-selling of digital services in the performance monitoring of all our call centre agents.

Each month, all account holders receive an e-newsletter promoting any changes to the MyHarrow account and website; pre-empting any reasons for contact (gritting in winter, annual billing, rent increases, etc); the opportunity to be involved in forthcoming consultations; news stories from the Council and any future events. This method of engagement helps to refresh our brand and encourages account holders to log in to their account for further information.

In certain instances, the Council has decided to impose channel restrictions to facilitate a push to digital services. After receiving a penalty charge notice (PCN) a customer can either pay via the automated telephone payment

system or using the online process where they can view pictures of the incident and make an appeal if appropriate.

The Council has also ceased to print paper forms for school admissions, ensuring that parents use the web form either at home, at one of the Council's facilities (Civic Centre or library) or even at the school itself. This not only saves on printing costs but integration to the London Grid reduces the need to manually process the applications.

There are key trigger points throughout the year whereby promotions can be made to the whole borough, primarily annual billing, the update of the electoral register and annual Housing Benefit notifications.

The future of face to face contact

The Council's One Stop Shop has undergone a transformation to ensure visitors receive the same 'digital' experience when attending the Civic Centre.

A new self-service area was created with sixteen PCs for residents to access online services in a supported, safe environment.

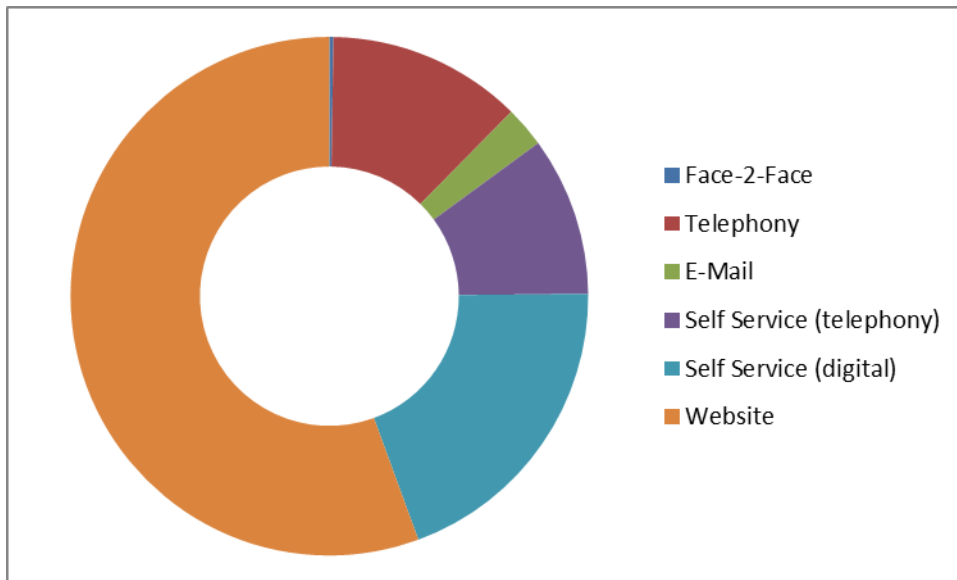
Customers are drawn away from the Reception area and advisors to the new area by a boldly coloured carpet and the subtle use of lighting. The area is supported by 'web wizards' who are trained to demonstrate how easily services can be accessed online providing support and training for customers who may be digitally excluded, building up their confidence to transact online.

These staff members are trained to help residents migrate to self-serve channels, having a thorough understanding of what is available through the Council website and MyHarrow account rather than being service focussed. If necessary, the team will hand off to an advisor should the issue be overly complex or sensitive.

Outcomes

In all, migrating visiting customers to transact online has helped reduce face to face demand by 88%, against a backdrop of complex changes in welfare reform. This reduction has enabled the Council to make savings in excess of £500,000

As the pie chart below demonstrates, Access Harrow has moved away from acting as a traditional call centre to an omni-channel contact centre



When including unique web visits, the percentage of transactions carried out through self-service is over 85%

Now only 12% of transactions are handled by an advisor over the telephone, although the level of customers self-serving through telephony system is 10%.

Over 18% of customer demand is handled by the MyHarrow Account and the integrated web forms

The online strategy has enabled us not only to adapt services to meet customer expectations when utilising their channel of choice but also allowing the Council to preserve traditional channels for those who need them most.

Environmental Impact

There are no significant environmental impacts identified

Risk Management Implications

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in the report.

Equalities implications

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? **Yes/No**

Whilst 85% of transactions are carried out over self-service channels, it appreciated that not everybody has the confidence to use digital channels.

The channel shift strategy is to move ‘those who can’ to self-service so that our limited resources can provide a service to the most vulnerable.

The Digital Services team work closely with the voluntary sector, such as the Somali Centre, to ensure that online access is user friendly.

The One Stop Shop provides a supported self-service area for people who lack confidence in using technology and need assistance.

Council Priorities

Working together to make a difference for Harrow

- Building a better Harrow
- Be business-like and business-friendly
- Protect the most vulnerable and supporting families

The digital services strategy supports the Council's vision and priorities.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Legal and Finance clearance is not necessary

Ward Councillors notified:	NO
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Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers: None