
**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	16 September 2019
Subject:	Channel Shift Programme - Update
Responsible Officer:	Charlie Stewart Corporate Director of Resources
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Resources Councillor Honey Jamie Councillor Kanti Rabadia
Exempt:	No
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out an update on the Council's channel shift programme through to 2021

Recommendations:

That the report be noted.

Section 2 – Report

Over the next six months, the Council is relaunching its digital presence through a significant and innovative upgrade to the website (harrow.gov.uk) and a re-platforming of the MyHarrow account.

These improvements will enable the Council to make a significant positive shift in channel migration and the current budget assumes savings in relation to channel shift of £560,000 per annum by the end of the 2021/22 financial year.

The telephony and email channels to a number of services provided by Access Harrow will be closed and residents will be able to access these services via the website and MyHarrow account.

SERVICE	YEAR OF CLOSURE
Education & School Admissions	2019/20
Public Realm	2019/20*
Planning & Building Control	2020/2021
Allotments	2020/2021
Revenues & Council Tax	2020/2021
Benefits	2020/2021

*On the assumption that the programme of technological enhancements in the service is complete.

Currently, the telephone and email channels for School Admissions, Education and Parking have been closed with customers using the website, MyHarrow account or self-service telephony to access the service.

Alongside these developments, plans are being developed to support those with no access and to promote digital inclusion.

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 Call Centre platform was heavily integrated with line-of-business technology, ensuring free flowing data between systems without double-keying.

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 with the impact that resources in the front line have been reduced.

Since its inception in 2006, Access Harrow has contributed substantial cashable of savings 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 & Integrated web forms

The Council's website offers access to many services through integrated 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, available 24/7, for residents to access personal and sensitive information. 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, Parking, Planning and Housing Rents alongside access to the library catalogue, updates on service requests and non-sensitive details such as waste services – all available through a single sign on and password.

There are currently over 135,000 active MyHarrow accounts across the Borough generating more than 45,000 log-ins each month.

Our web forms take data directly from the website to the line of business system ensuring that the request is submitted to the relevant team in real time. Technological advancements have been made in transferring more complex forms to the web including automations to process without human intervention.

For example 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.

An average of over 40,000 integrated web forms are completed each month

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 included reviewing our correspondence to promote digital channels; the cross-selling of digital services in the performance monitoring of all our call centre agents and the e-newsletter promoting any enhancements to the MyHarrow account and website; pre-empting any reasons for contact (gritting in winter, annual billing, rent increases, etc and to refresh our brand.

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.

In certain instances, the Council has decided to impose channel restrictions to facilitate a push to digital services such as Parking. Residents requiring a parking permit order one through their MyHarrow account and anybody receiving a PCN can pay via the automated telephone service or at the self-service kiosks in the One Stop Shop and review the infringement online before either paying or appealing via the website.

Outcomes

In all, migrating visiting customers to transact online has helped reduce contact via the more traditional channels of face to face, telephone and email.

Over the last five years, demand in these areas has fallen as follows:

Face to Face	69%
Telephony	37%
Email	49%

During the same period, access via digital channels has risen as follows:

MyHarrow Account	209%
Web Forms	140%
Web Visits	55%

In addition, there are over 5,000 visits to the Civic Centre each month to use the self service area where support and guidance are available to access Council services digitally.

Overall, the percentage of enquiries and transactions carried out with the Council through self-service is over 91%

The online strategy has enabled us not only to adapt services to meet customer expectations when utilising their channel of choice but also to contribute to the Council's MTFS.

A New Approach

The existing supplier behind the MyHarrow Account, Gandlake, notified us that they would be exiting the market once our current contract expired in 2020.

This gave us the opportunity to assess our current platforms and infrastructure and reassess the vision for being a truly digital Council.

The Digital Services team engaged with our customer base to understand what was expected from a new web site offering. The key requirements from our residents were as follows:

- A more personalised approach with quicker access to the most appropriate services and relevant information.
- Greater access to a wider range of services
- Improved design, navigation and log-in process
- Ability to escalate or contact if required
- A website rather than an App

The Council's new website will be launched incrementally with phase I being deployed in the autumn. This will look at getting the basics of the site right and will include:

- New navigation
- New search engine
- Improved accessibility
- New homepage
- New events and news section
- All content on new templates
- Access to greater statistics

The website will also include a level of personalisation on the homepage and service landing pages based upon

- Location
- Browsing history
- Type of device
- Season

The new platform for the MyHarrow Account will be live in the New Year in readiness for the annual council tax bills.

Following the feedback from our customer base, the system will benefit from:

- Improved customer experience when using the account
- Better sign up and log-in process
- Better navigation within the account, making information easier to find
- Responsive design

Alongside the existing functionality, the new MyHarrow Account will include additional features including:

- Access to a booking system
- The ability to make all Council documents electronic
- Self-service document scanning
- A module to introduce electoral registration
- The ability to text and email alerts
- Signals to link personalised data between the website and the account

Mitigations - The future of face to face contact

Although the Council is aiming to digitise access to Council services there is an appreciation that a small percentage of the local population either have no access to the internet or are unable to use IT effectively. A number of mitigations are being developed to support them.

The Council's One Stop Shop, based at the Civic Centre, has a self-service area boasting sixteen PCs available for residents to access online services in a supported, safe environment.

A digital inclusion post will be introduced to work with community groups and the voluntary sector to assist people in using the online services. This post will also host workshops at the Civic Centre and the library network to teach residents how to access relevant services online.

Further work will be undertaken to investigate the use of artificial intelligence and precision call routing to provide a telephone service where appropriate.

Environmental Impact

A reduced carbon footprint through

- less staffing at the Civic Centre
- reduced spatial requirements in the Civic Centre
- less travelling to and from offices
- reduction in printing.

Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? **No**

Separate risk register in place? **Yes**

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

Risks associated with the replacement system are effectively managed through the controls established at the commencement of the project. These are documented on the project risk register and managed through the Project Management arrangements.

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? **Yes/No** (delete as appropriate)

Data Protection implications

The processing of personal data collected through the website will be managed in compliance with the GDPR and data protection legislation and via appropriate actions as identified on the Risk Register

Council Priorities

The digital services strategy supports the Council's vision and priorities, especially modernising Harrow Council.

- A reduction in staff costs will help deliver excellent value for money services
- Reduce the borough's carbon footprint through a reduction in paper forms and postage
- Use technology and innovation to modernise how the Council works through utilisation of robotics, automation and the latest digital capabilities
- Improving access to digital services through a modern, customer-focused and innovative digital offering

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Sharon Daniels	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 28 August 2019		

Name: Stephen Dorrian	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 27 August 2019		

Name: Charlie Stewart	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Corporate Director of Resources
Date: 28 August 2019		

MANDATORY	
Ward Councillors notified:	NO

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers: None