

REPORT TO:	COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM:10
DATE OF MEETING:	16 JANUARY 2020	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (CORPORATE RESOURCES)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	ELIZABETH BARTON, HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICES elizabeth.barton@southderbyshire.gov.uk or 01283 595779	DOC:
SUBJECT:	NEW INITIATIVES IN THE CUSTOMER SERVICES TEAM	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: FM 11

1.0 Recommendations

That Council approves:

- 1.1 The adoption of SignLive on a one-year trial basis.
- 1.2 The introduction of the Sunflower Scheme for hidden disabilities.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to update Council and gain approval for two new initiatives that aim to improve the customer services the Council delivers to its residents and businesses.
- 2.2 The changes and initiatives include:
 - The adoption of SignLive on a trial basis.
 - The introduction of the Sunflower Scheme for hidden disabilities.

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 As part of its ongoing commitment to enhance the customer services the Council provides to its customers, this report outlines a proposal for two new customer services initiatives:
- 3.2 The adoption of SignLive on a one-year trial basis. SignLive offers an instant communication solution for deaf or hard or hearing customers who use British Sign Language (BSL). Many deaf people are not confident using spoken or written English or text-relay services, and experience communication barriers when trying to connect with service providers such as the Council. With SignLive, the Council will be able to make an instant connection with and improve its customer services offer to its deaf customers.

- 3.3 The introduction of the Sunflower Scheme that indicates to customers with hidden disabilities that our team are aware, trained and ready to offer additional help and support.

4.0 Detail

SignLive trial

- 4.1 Eleven million people (1 in 6) in the UK are deaf or hard of hearing. This is set to rise to 15.6 million by 2035. Of these, 40% of people over the age of 50 have hearing loss, and 70% of people over the age of 70 have age-related hearing loss.
- 4.2 British Sign Language (BSL) is used by 151,000 individuals in the UK (not including professional BSL users, interpreters, translators, etc unless they use BSL at home).
- 4.3 Officers currently have limited means to communicate with deaf customers. The current approach is via email or letter, telephone, and via written notes or through a friend or family member (if available), when on site or in the community.
- 4.4 SignLive offers the Council an opportunity to connect with deaf customers by offering Council officers instant access to a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter who can support customer interactions on a mobile phone or tablet.
- 4.5 If the proposal is approved, the Council will ensure officers can access the service on their mobile phones and provide a small stock of tablets (using existing technology) that officers can borrow in advance of meeting a customer who requires the support of SignLive. Should a deaf customer choose to come into the offices, there would be a dedicated space in the reception/enquiry area where officers would be able to communicate effectively with a customer via the BSL interpreter.
- 4.6 Internal training and communication will support the roll out of the scheme to staff, which will also be reflected on signage at reception, on the Council's website, and appropriate literature to ensure customers are aware.
- 4.7 The implementation of SignLive underpins the Council's desire to provide first class customer services, have respect for everyone and support our most vulnerable customers. It also showcases the Council's open, inclusive and forward-thinking approach.**

Introduction of Sunflower Scheme for hidden disabilities

- 4.8 Living with a hidden disability can make daily life more demanding for many people. Those who require additional help are not always able to ask for it or find it difficult or uncomfortable to explain their situation. Because hidden disabilities are by their very nature not visible or immediately obvious, it can also make it harder for people to serve, help and support them appropriately.
- 4.9 The hidden disabilities Sunflower Scheme was first launched at Gatwick Airport in 2019 and is starting to be recognised globally. It has been adopted by all major UK airports, many supermarkets, railway stations, leisure facilities, in the NHS and by an increasing number of large businesses and organisations.

4.10 The scheme supports people with hidden disabilities in two key ways:

- it provides people living with hidden disabilities (or their carers) an easy and discrete way to alert an organisation that they need extra help and support – through the wearing of a Sunflower lanyard, wrist band or badge.
- it provides help and support to organisations so they can better serve people with hidden disabilities.

4.11 If the proposal is approved, the Council will ensure front facing officers are trained on the meaning of the scheme and how to offer additional support, as well as how to access ongoing support in relation to serving customers with hidden disabilities.

4.12 Internal communications will also support the roll out of the scheme to staff, which will also be reflected on signage at reception, on the Council's website and appropriate literature to ensure customers are aware.

4.13 The implementation of the Sunflower Scheme underpins the Council's desire to provide first class customer services, have respect for everyone and support our most vulnerable customers. It also showcases the Council's open, inclusive and forward-thinking approach. The Council is already committed to other similar schemes such as Safe Places, a scheme that offers people with learning disabilities a safe place to go if they feel threatened or harassed, Breast Feeding Awareness and Dementia Friends.

5.0 Financial Implications

Introduction of SignLive trial Total cost: £2,040 for the one-year trial

5.1 The costs of the SignLive trial are as follows:

Cost per month	£170
Cost per annum	£2,040

5.2 It is proposed the above costs will be funded from Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services budget.

5.3 There would be no hardware costs for the trial as the Council's current technical infrastructure can support the one-year trial.

5.4 The SignLive application works on corporate mobile phones, for example when officers (planning or housing for example) are out in the field/no access to wifi. The SignLive application can also be made available (through wifi) to customers within the Council building on existing tablets (for example at reception, the enquiry desk or interview rooms) that will go 'end of life' by the end of the trial.

5.5 If the trial is successful and used/liked by customers, it is likely new tablets would be required to roll SignLive out permanently. Costs for this start from £600 per annum for an internet enabled tablet, however the agreement to do this will be subject to a future council report and the success of the trial.

5.6 There is no budget requirement for training as this will be delivered in-house by the Customer Services team.

Introduction of Sunflower Scheme for hidden disabilities Total cost: £800 (year 1), plus £300 per annum thereafter.

5.7 The Sunflower Scheme is free to join.

5.8 The Council can display signage on its buildings (for example behind reception and the enquiries desk) and on entrance doors to indicate the Council recognises/ supports the Sunflower Scheme. It is recommended a budget of £500 is put aside for signage. It is proposed this will be funded from Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services budget.

5.9 The Council can choose to supply Sunflower lanyards, pin badges and wrist bands to customers on request for free. A starter pack is approximately £100. It is recommended a budget of £300 per annum is put aside for provision of Sunflower scheme items. It is proposed this will be funded from Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services budget.

5.10 The Council can access free training videos for staff to build knowledge of how to better serve someone with a hidden disability through the Sunflower Scheme. A programme of in-house training, access to the videos, and one-to-one support provided by the Customer Services team will be rolled-out to all staff if the scheme is adopted.

5.11 At this stage it is not recommended that any budget is set aside for training as it will be delivered in house. Face to face/bespoke training courses are set to become available through the Sunflower Scheme, but costs for this are not yet known. It is possible that the Council may bring forward further proposals to access this training through its learning and development programme in the future, should a need be identified.

6.0 Corporate Implications

Employment implications

6.1 There are no employee implications for existing staff for any of the projects included in this report.

Legal implications

6.2 There are no legal implications.

Corporate Plan Implications

6.3 In its Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 the Council has made the following commitments:

- Provide modern ways of working that support the Council to deliver services to meet changing needs.
- Ensure technology enables us to effectively connect with our communities
- Have in place methods of communication that enable customers to provide and receive information.

The initiatives outlined in this report underpin these commitments.

Risk Impact

- 6.4 **SignLive & Sunflower Scheme are not appropriately communicated to customers.** The team will work in partnership with the Council's Communications team to ensure that customers are fully informed of both schemes and that they are aware extra support is available.
- 6.5 **SignLive & Sunflower Scheme are not appropriately communicated to members and staff.** The team will work in partnership with the Council's Communications and Organisational Development teams to ensure that members and staff are aware of the schemes, are appropriately trained and are confident to support customers using either of the two schemes.

7.0 Community Impact

Consultation

- 7.1 In relation to the introduction of SignLive, the Council has consulted Derbyshire County Council which currently uses SignLive about its experiences. The Council's Organisational Development and Communications teams have also been consulted in relation to the roll-out of the scheme.
- 7.2 In relation to the introduction of the Sunflower Scheme, the Council has consulted North Yorkshire County Council which currently promotes the Sunflower Scheme about its experiences. The Council's Organisational Development and Communications teams have also been consulted in relation to the roll-out of the scheme.

Equality and Diversity Impact

- 7.3 The introduction of SignLive and the Sunflower Scheme will better support customers with disabilities, who are recognised as a protected group under the Equalities Act 2010.

Social Value Impact

- 7.4 The implementation of SignLive will positively impact on our deaf community and the reputation of the council.
- 7.5 The implementation of the Sunflower Scheme will positively impact on residents with hidden disabilities and the reputation of the Council.

Environmental Sustainability

- 7.6 N/A

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 In conclusion the introduction of SignLive and the Sunflower Scheme will enhance the quality of services delivered by South Derbyshire District Council.
- 8.2 The proposals also underpin the delivery of the Council's new Corporate Plan 2020-2024.

8.3 The proposals also underpin the Council's ambition to be inclusive and supportive to all.

10.0 Background Papers

None