

Scoping document

Customer access strategy and consultation approach

Date: June 2023

1. Background

South Derbyshire District Council is currently developing its Customer Access Strategy.

The aim of the Customer Access strategy is to shape how the Council will serve its customers in the years to come, and to define the projects and initiatives it needs to deliver to achieve its ambitions.

The strategy is heavily informed by the following existing strategies/plans.

- Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024
- Transformation Plan 2020 – 2024
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2021 – 2025

2. What is an access strategy?

South Derbyshire District Council has a responsibility to provide excellent services to the public and value for money to the taxpayer.

The channels through which public services are delivered and by which the public has contact with the authority, (be that via telephone, online, in person or via other means) are a critical part of public service provision and there is an ongoing impetus for them to be managed effectively and efficiently for everyone.

An access strategy is our plan for the channels we will use to deliver services to, and interact with, our customers. It explains how we will meet the contact demands of our customers using the resources we have available bearing in mind the needs of the customer. It is imperative that we do move forward with the digital changes needed to meet the needs of our customers.

Our residents want to access our services quickly and efficiently from different locations using an increasing number of different devices. In response to this, the Council need to implement a Customer Access Strategy. This strategy sets out our commitment and approach to working with and for the people who live, work and visit South Derbyshire and who use our services. The strategy explains how we will meet the demands of our customers using the resources we have available. Channels that are efficient and effective deliver services that customers desire without wasting time, money or effort for either the customer or the Council.

We want local people to feel valued by their Council, trust us and have excellent customer experiences in their dealings with us, whatever channel they choose. It cuts across all services within the Council and as such will require support from all areas.

3. How the draft strategy and commitments have been formed

The starting point for the creation of the draft strategy began with an assessment of existing current customer access across the council. This was followed by an assessment of commitments laid down in the key informing strategies (detailed above) as well as other relevant council strategies.

From these exercises, a set of draft customer access strategy principles were developed to aid consultation and discussion. These were used to guide a period of internal consultation that has taken place between;

- Heads of Service and key staff
- Customer Services Team
- Leadership Team

From this process, a draft Customer Access Strategy was created that includes three customer access commitments that were built using internal feedback:

- **ACCESS** - We will provide clear, consistent and accessible services to all our customers
- **CONTACT** - Improving the way our customers can contact us
- **ENGAGE** - Engage our customers and keep them up to date

The draft strategy also details the projects that the Council envisages will help to deliver the above commitments. The draft strategy has been subject to a light touch equality impact assessment to ensure no protected characteristics as identified in the Equality Act have been negatively affected. A further Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out before the plan is finally approved.

3. Consulting on the draft strategy

The team now plan to consult with a wide variety of audiences to test the three customer access commitments and proposed projects within the draft Customer Access Strategy.

The stakeholder groups identified include:

- The Transformation Board
- Customer access focus group (comprised of staff)
- EDI Steering Group
- Council Members
- Local community representatives/groups
- Wider staff and trade unions
- Residents, customers and businesses, including key groups (such as housing tenants).
- Area Forums

Please note that the dates listed below are draft currently and will be subject to change, based on feedback and other emerging priorities.

1. Consultation with Council Members **June 2023**

The draft customer access strategy and plan will be presented to elected members at Finance and Management Committee in March. The ambition will be to test out the draft Customer Access Strategy and to identify any areas of concern or opportunity. The team will be asking Council Members to identify any concerns members have in relation to their ward residents and any access issues they have currently or have experienced in the past.

The plan will be updated based on feedback.

2. Consultation with the Council's Transformation Board (ongoing progress updates)

Many of the projects identified within the draft strategy are based on the delivery of technological solutions. The team plans to consult with the Council's Transformation Board, the remit of which is to deliver the Council's Transformation Plan, to ensure that the Customer Access Strategy dovetails into the Board's existing commitments and any new projects can be practically delivered.

The plan will be updated based on feedback.

3. Local community representatives/groups Commencing June - August

With the assistance of the CVS, community representatives and groups will be asked to consider our draft Customer Access Strategy. We are keen to understand if they think there is anything else the Council could do to ensure its services are accessible to all and in particular the groups that they represent.

We are also keen to engage with individuals or organisations that have an interest in any of the protected characteristics set out in our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan, hence our contact list will mimic those consulted as part of that exercise.

In order to ensure there is fair and equal access to the consultation we will need to offer a range of engagement options which include:

- Face to face - CVS to co-facilitate with SDDC.
- Virtually - via 'Teams'
- Telephone conference
- Email – CVS to distribute the consultation pack to all groups identified in the district

The Council will provide the CVS with a consultation pack including a covering letter from the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.

The CVS will.

- share the consultation pack with the groups identified
- manage the consultation process to ensure all attendees for each of the sessions are, recorded, diarised and shared with the Council
- contact and groups who have not responded to the consultation pack to encourage them to take part in the consultation by identifying most suitable method of consultation
- provide recommendations on best approach for undertaking consultation with the groups identified
- Identify if an interpreter is required and source accordingly
- Source a meeting room for face-to-face meeting
- attend the sessions as required
- facilitate the sessions and discussions as required

The customer access strategy will then be updated based on the report that CVS produce following their consultation.

4. Discussion at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group June 2023

We are also keen to engage with individuals or organisations that have an interest in any of the protected characteristics set out in our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan therefore the draft strategy will be discussed at the next EDI Steering Group.

The plan will be updated based on feedback.

5. Consultation with employee forum, and trade unions June – August 2023

We will consult with staff and the trade unions.

Trade Unions will be asked to highlight whether they are supportive of our draft Customer Access Strategy, and whether they foresee any employee relation issues arising from the plan.

Staff will also be asked to give their views on the draft strategy and plan as part of the wider public consultation (see below).

The plan will be updated based on feedback.

6. Consultation with residents, customers and businesses, including key groups such as Community Area Forums June 2023 onwards

Once all the feedback from the above consultation exercises has been gathered, the document will be published on the Council's website for wider consultation with residents, customers and businesses. The consultation will be signed off by Leadership Team prior to publication.

The primary consultation will take the form of simple a questionnaire that asks questions in relation to the plan. This will also be accompanied by a request for people to send in more in-depth views should they wish to.

Whilst not yet identified, where any specific mailing lists exist (for example business networking groups or tenancy groups) these will be written to individually to signpost the consultation and encourage them to take part.

Customers will also have the opportunity to feedback on our strategy through completing the questionnaire face to face at the Civic Offices or via the telephone with the Customer Services Team.

The consultation will run for approximately 12 weeks. The plan will be updated based on feedback.

7. Equality Impact Assessment June 2023

Following the above consultation, the final draft plan will be created that reflects the feedback gathered from all stakeholders.

This version of the plan will be subject to a further Equality Impact Assessment which will consider the impact of the plan on the community as well as protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010, which include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

8. Approval of the final strategy and action plan September/October 2023

Finally, the Customer Access Strategy and Action Plan will be shared with Leadership Team for final approval, before being submitted to Full Council for approval.

If you have any questions, please email catherine.grimley@southderbyshire.gov.uk

ENDS