REPORT TO:	**FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**	**AGENDA ITEM:12**
DATE OF MEETING:	**05 SEPTEMBER 2024**	**CATEGORY: DELEGATED or RECOMMENDED**
REPORT FROM:	**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION**	**OPEN**
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	**CATHERINE GRIMLEY** catherine.grimley@southderbyshire.gov.uk	
SUBJECT:	**CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY**	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	**ALL**	**TERMS OF REFERENCE:**

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 That the Committee considers feedback received as part of the public consultation and approve the Customer Access Strategy 2024-2028 (Appendix 1).

2.0 Purpose of the Report

2.1 To gain approval of the Customer Access Strategy 2024-2028 as set out in Appendix 1.

3.0 Executive Summary

3.1 South Derbyshire District Council has developed its Customer Access Strategy with the aim that it will help to shape how the Council will serve its customers in the years to come. The strategy will help to define the projects and initiatives it needs to deliver in order to achieve its ambitions.

3.2 This strategy outlines how the Council will develop a variety of access channels for customers and continue to improve the quality and consistency of services, outlining principles which will guide the design and delivery of services. Most of all though the Council will commit to seeing customers as people and ensuring that systems work for them.

3.3 The draft strategy is heavily informed by the following existing strategies and plans:

- Council Plan 2024-2028
- Transformation & Business Change Plan 2020-2024
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2025

3.4 The Customer Access Strategy and associated project plan is the proposal for the channels to deliver services to, and interact with, customers. It explains how the Council will meet the contact demands of customers using the resources available with the needs of the customer being the priority. It is also imperative that the Council

continues to move forward with the digital changes needed to meet the needs of customers.

3.5 The new Customer Access Strategy 2024 to 2028 (appendix.1) will set out how, while facing increasing budget pressures, the Council will further strengthen customer relationships, improving experience and increasing satisfaction by working closely with customers to ensure services are provided in the way customers require them.

3.6 The strategy sets out the context for the current work intended to make the Council easier to connect with for residents, visitors, businesses and other stakeholders. Customers are at the heart of everything we do, reflecting their feedback in the design and delivery of services, and to provide appropriate support to those who need it, ensuring that customer experiences are easy, effective and convenient.

4.0 Detail

4.1 The starting point for the creation of the strategy began with an assessment of existing current customer access across the council. This was followed by an assessment of the commitments laid down in the key informing strategies and newly approved Council Plan. The Council has a key priority of transforming the Council and this strategy will help to reinforce the key aim of ensuring our services have the right resources, are modern, responsive, efficient, and effective.

4.2 Since approval of the draft strategy at the 8th June 2023 meeting of the Finance and Management Committee, the Council has consulted with a large number of stakeholders. South Derbyshire Community Voluntary Service (CVS) have assisted with the consultation process for the draft strategy. This was a hugely successful example of partnership working with the CVS who were able to reach a large number of customers with protected characteristics who the Council were particularly keen to ensure we received feedback from.

4.3 As part of the consultation, the document was shared in face to face meetings, online virtual meetings and paper copies of the strategy and associated survey were also included (along with freepost envelope to return) within the food parcels that the CVS distribute.

4.5 A full list of who and where the draft Customer Access Strategy document was directly shared with can be found in Appendix 2 of this report along with consultation feedback.

4.6 In addition to the consultation exercise undertaken by the CVS, the Customer Access Strategy was promoted on our website alongside an accompanying online survey in order to gain feedback on what is most important for our customers moving forward, their preferred method of contact now and how that may look like in the future.

4.7 Feedback on the strategy document was very positive with no suggested changes or additions to feed into the original draft strategy that was previously presented at committee.

4.8 The most preferred way of contacting the Council was through digital means and feedback received through the consultation showed that customers are keen to see further accessibility enhancements on the website and additional new technologies such as a webchat facility would be welcomed.

4.9 Respondents were also keen to ensure that face to face options to access services are maintained. The strategy demonstrates that this will be the case and face to face service delivery will continue to be available.

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 The Customer Access Strategy will be supported by a detailed and measurable project plan aligned to our Council Plan and Transformation Strategies.

5.3 The key project plan will now be developed that incorporates the Council Plan targets and the customer access guiding principles to ensure that we are recognised for excellent customer service.

5.4 We have started to develop our 'Customer Service Standards' mandatory training which will be rolled out for all Council employees from September 2024. This will focus on improving the Council's responsiveness to customers (including Councillors), improve accountability and embed customer experience principles as part of the organisation's culture.

5.5 We will publish and report on our journey to improve customer experience and continually engage with and listen to customers to improve their experience when contacting us for help, information, advice or support.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7.0 Corporate Implications

7.1 Employment Implications

There are no employment implications arising from this report.

7.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.3 Corporate Plan Implications

The Customer Access Strategy will contribute towards the following Council Plan targets:

- TC1 Ensure our services have the right resources, are modern, responsive, efficient and effective.
- TC1.11 Increase the number of customers who interact digitally as a first choice.
- TC1.12 Achieve an appropriate Customer Service accreditation for the Council.
- TC1.13 Launch the Customer Access Strategy and embed the Customer Service Standard.
- TC1.10 Deliver against our digital and customers Transformation Action Plan.

7.4 Risk Impact

There are no risks arising from this report.

7.5 **Community Impact**

None.

7.6 **Equality and Diversity Impact**

7.7 A preliminary EDIA has been completed as part of the Customer Access Strategy Consultation process. The strategy will have a positive equalities impact by enabling an increased focus on digital inclusion and accessibility. Enabling those residents who are able to self- serve to do so will also help us to focus our support on those who need it.

Social Value Impact

7.8 The Customer Access Strategy will improve social value outcomes by enabling residents to have improved access to services, information and advice in the way that suits them most.

Environmental Sustainability

7.9 There are no risks arising from this report.

8.0 Conclusions

8.1 This strategy highlights that one approach doesn't fit all and that the council should continue to offer choice to our customers on how they interact with us. For the vast majority of people this is now done through digital access channels at a day and time that is convenient with them. The Council must make the best use of technology, but must also ensure that those who cannot or choose not to access services digitally receive the same level of excellent customer service.

8.2 The successful delivery of this strategy will result in a real positive change to the way in which customers will access services. New technologies will be exploited to make access even easier and a wide range of departments will be working closer together in order to integrate service delivery.

9.0 Background Papers

9.1 Appendix one – Customer Access Strategy 2024-2028

9.2 Appendix two – Consultation reach and feedback summary.