

Customer Service
Strategy
Evidence
2015 - 2020

DRAFT

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How Was the Customer Service Strategy Developed?

The council's previous Customer Service Strategy in 2008 was revisited, the approach and key strategic principles were found to remain relevant and unchanged.

That said it was desired for the new strategy to be enhanced, focussing on evidence based priorities.

Step 1 - Desk Research

To gather and identify:

- trends in customer preferences for accessing services
- demographic research and trend identification for the district
- customer profile identification for the district
- the likelihood of customers to use different access channels using Ofcom data on communications use
- links to corporate strategy and priorities

Step 2 – Presentation of Evidence and Workshop Issues

Workshops to present this evidence and fact to the organisation, to discuss the identified issues and trends and potential impacts:

- 4 Staff workshops
- 2 Senior Management Team workshops (all Heads of Service and senior managers)
- A Corporate Management Team workshop (directors and Chief executive)
- Councillors in Hertford
- Councillors in Bishop's Stortford
- Executive Members workshop

Step 3 – Analysis and Presentation of Strategy

Gather outputs and present key strategic priorities, linked to corporate strategy and the evidence base.

Setting the Scene – District Picture

East Hertfordshire district covers an area of 477 square kilometres (184 square miles), approximately a third of the area of the County of Hertfordshire. It is 'peri-urban' lying on the northern fringe of Greater London, in the southwest of the East of England Region. East Herts is an attractive, predominantly rural, generally affluent area consisting of five market towns and over 100 scattered rural settlements.

East Herts is ranked within the ten most affluent/successful districts in England and has low unemployment with a claimant count rate of only 0.8%. The 2013 Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey ranked East Herts as having the third highest quality of life in rural Britain and the 2014 Telegraph index of the best places to live in England and Wales using official data on average weekly incomes, crime rates, health, home ownership, and economic activity ranks East Herts as the 5th best place to live in England and Wales.

Key Demographic Trends

Growing Population

Over the next 20 years (2014-2034) the population in East Herts is predicted to grow by around 27,000 to just under 170,000 (ONS, 2014). Large scale developments across the District aim to achieve 15,000 new homes by 2031 which may lead to further spikes in population increase.

An Aging Population

Over a fifth of the population of East Herts is over the age of 60. The number of older people aged 65+ is estimated to rise by 44% between 2004 and 2021 based on the revised Office for National Statistics 2004-based Sub-national population Projections. Life expectancy is above the national average.

There is a significant movement of people away from the District amongst the 18-20 age groups over the past 10 years, with a more gradual influx of people migrating in thereafter. Past later thirties, migration movements in and out of the District remain close to even. It is not until late 80s where we see another great influx of people coming in to the District to live (ONS, 2014).

Working East Herts

The positioning of East Herts mean that it has excellent commuter networks into London and other major commuter hubs. Some 36,164 people declared that they commuted out of East Herts to work in 2011 (Census) which represents 48% of the working population. This has led to an increase in train use over the past 10 years of 47%.

The employment rate in people aged 16-64 in East Herts is very high at 81.5%, compared with England at 71.3%. In terms of Job seekers allowance counts, East

Herts only has 1% of its population claiming, compared to 2.2% of the population of England (ONS, 2013).

A High Socio-Economic Standard of living

The proportion of East Herts residents that sit in the higher Social Grades A and B (49.7%) is considerably higher than that of England (38.37%). The district also has half the average national proportion of residents that would be classified in the Social Grade E (5.88%) and much of this is confined to pockets within East Herts (Census 2011).

Low Levels of Increasing Diversity

The population of East Herts is slowly becoming more diverse but at a much slower rate than England. The % white population has decreased 1.64% to 95.47% in the past 10 years, compared to a reduction of 4.31% in East England and 5.51% in England. There have been small increases of less than 1% in the number of Asian and Black ethnic groups (Census, 2011).

Even though the white population of East Herts has decreased, the % of 'white other' has increased 1.38% over the past 10 years with a significant concentration of 'white other' in the Bishop's Stortford Town centre area. (ONS, 2014).

Mobility in East Herts

Transport and access to services is an issue in East Herts. The district has the third highest number of people aged 65 plus, living alone with no transport and people aged 65 plus with poor mobility, specifically there is rural isolation characterised by elderly people living alone, with poor mobility, without their own means of transport.

A considerable amount of evidence exists to show that parts of rural East Herts suffer from a lack of access to services such as health facilities. "The Hidden Need, Overcoming Deprivation in Hertfordshire" (HCF 2006) showed that "there are quite large remote areas where more than 10% of households do not own a car." Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan Accessibility Strategy 2006/07 – 2010/11 demonstrated that rural parts of East Herts showed pockets of poor access to services.

Population Profile

Experian is a global information services company, providing data and analytical tools around the world. Mosaic, Experian's cross-channel consumer classification is utilised widely in public and private sectors to help understand the demographics, lifestyles, preferences and behaviours of the UK adult population in extraordinary detail. Over 850 million pieces of information are used to create an easy to understand segmentation that allocates 49 million individuals and 26 million households into one of 15 Groups and 66 detailed types.

The population profile of East Herts is shown in the table below, groups ordered by the percentage of the population they make up. This allows the Council to consider the needs of East Herts residents in more detail and how they may engage with Council services. The high socio-economic standard of living in the district is evident with over half of the population falling into working professional households with those in less affluent groups making up a minority of the population.

Successful professionals living in suburban or semi-rural homes	19.5% (8.23% nationally)
Couples with young children in comfortable modern housing	17.83% (5.78% nationally)
Middle income families living in moderate suburban semis	13.72% (11.18% nationally)

Despite the rural nature of the district and the growing elderly, the mosaic profiles reveal that the number of households isolated or elderly reliant on state support are lower than the national average and a small proportion of the population:

Residents of isolated rural communities	3.22% (4.46% nationally)
Elderly people reliant on state support	2.99% (5.53% nationally)
Active elderly people living in pleasant retirement locations	2.54% (4.4% nationally)

East Herts is a district of contrasts with smaller, concentrated households with different service needs:

Families in low-rise social housing with high levels of benefit need	0.6% (5.53% nationally)
Lower income workers in urban terraces in often diverse areas	0.57% (7.16% nationally)
Young people renting flats in high density social housing	0.23% (5.55% nationally)

Whilst a large proportion of our residents may access and need the Council's services in one way, the district has pockets of isolation, and different needs which must also be addressed.

Full Mosaic Profile of East Herts

MOSAIC Group Brief Description		East Herts Number Households %	East Herts Number Households
D	Successful professionals living in suburban or semi-rural homes	19.5	11,489
F	Couples with young children in comfortable modern housing	17.83	10,506
E	Middle income families living in moderate suburban semis	13.72	8,080
H	Couples and young singles in small modern starter homes	9.78	5,760
G	Young, well-educated city dwellers	8.63	5,083
C	Wealthy people living in the most sought after neighbourhoods	7.21	4,248
B	Residents of small and mid-sized towns with strong local roots	5.23	3,084

K	Residents with sufficient incomes in right-to-buy housing	4.64	2,733
J	Owner occupiers in older-style housing in ex-industrial areas	3.31	1,952
A	Residents of isolated rural communities	3.22	1,898
M	Elderly people reliant on state support	2.99	1,763
L	Active elderly people living in pleasant retirement locations	2.54	1,494
O	Families in low-rise social housing with high levels of benefit need	0.6	351
I	Lower income workers in urban terraces in often diverse areas	0.57	338
N	Young people renting flats in high density social housing	0.23	133

Source: Experian Mosaic Database – Public Authority 2014

Spatial Profile of East Herts District Council

East Hertfordshire covers an area of 477 square kilometres (184 square miles) and comprises approximately a third of the area of the County of Hertfordshire. Although predominantly a rural district, East Herts can best be described as 'peri-urban' lying on the northern fringe of Greater London. The district is also located with the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough sub-region. East Herts is perhaps unique in that the three New Towns of Stevenage, Harlow and Welwyn Garden City lie immediately on its borders with approximately the southern third of the district designated as Metropolitan Green Belt.

One of the reasons for East Herts' rural character is that the district is bypassed by the strategic transport corridors; the M11 and the West Anglia Main Line to Cambridge to the east and the A1 (M) and East Coast Mainline to the west. In addition the M25 London Orbital Motorway lies further to the south whilst London Stansted Airport lies just across the boundary in Essex to the east, with London Luton Airport lying further to the west in Bedfordshire. The rural nature and scattered settlement pattern of the district in addition to high levels of affluence has resulted in high levels of car ownership with 66% of the working population travelling to work by car.

East Herts is ranked within the ten most affluent/successful districts in England and has low unemployment with a claimant count rate of only 0.8%. Whilst the local economy is based upon small and medium sized businesses there is a predominance of managerial, professional and technical occupations amongst the residents. Given the district's location within the London Commuter Belt, some 17% of the working population commute to and from the capital. The district has a population of 131,000 and has witnessed significant growth in recent years. The local population is one of the healthiest in England and Wales and levels of recorded crime are generally lower than the national average. Educational attainment is also generally very high with a third of the district's comprehensive schools in the top 50 nationally.

Bishop's Stortford is the district's largest town and sits astride the River Stort on the border with Essex and acts as a minor sub-regional centre for both east Hertfordshire and west Essex. Hertford, the county town, lies at the confluence of four rivers and is the principal employment centre within the district primarily because of the presence of local government administration. Ware and Sawbridgeworth are smaller historic market towns each with their own character and local economy, sitting astride the River Lea and adjacent to the River Stort, respectively. Buntingford situated on the River Rib is currently the smallest town in East Herts but is surrounded by an extensive rural hinterland and functions as an important rural service centre. The rural area contains numerous historic villages and hamlets of varying sizes with many still functioning as farming settlements providing vital community services for local residents.

SOURCE: Everybody Matters: A Sustainable Community Strategy for East Herts 2009 - 2024

Demographic Profile of East Herts

East Herts has 30 wards with very different characteristics. East Herts has a population of 137,687 and has risen 2.6% from the previous (Census 2001). The population consists predominantly of people aged 30-59 (43.6%) and under 16 (20%). Over a fifth (21.5) of the population is aged 60 and over and this has shifted the average age of East Herts to 40, up 2 years from the 2001 Census (Census, 2011).

Ethnicity

East Herts has an ethnic minority population of 9.75% which has risen 3% in the past 10 years (Census, 2011). The largest ethnic minority groups are White Other (4.04%), White Irish (1.18%) & Asian or Asian British: Indian (0.73%)

The largest ethnic minority population is in Bishop's Stortford All Saints (19%) which includes 8.9% White Other and 3.7% Asian/Asian British. The 5 highest wards for ethnic minority are all the wards in Bishop's Stortford. Braughing has the lowest ethnic minority population at 4.4%, of which 2.1% are White Other. 63% of East Herts population are Christian. 28% have no religion.

Economic Activity

The employment rate in people aged 16-64 in East Herts is very high at 81.5%, compared with England at 71.3%. Amongst the economically inactive, 10.9% of the population do not want a job. In terms of Job seekers allowance counts, East Herts only has 1% of its population claiming, compared to 2.2% of the population of England (ONS, 2013).

Qualifications

A third (33%) of people in East Herts are qualified to degree level or higher, comparing to 27% in England. However, 17% of people have no qualifications

Health

The general health of people in East Herts is very good compared with England and Wales as a whole. Only 3.4% of people reported in Census described their health to be 'bad' or 'very bad' (6.4% England). 13.1% of people have a limiting long-term illness, compared to 17.6% in England. Incapacity benefit sits at 3% of the population, compared to 7% in England.

Housing

Home ownership declared in Census was 71.8% of which 45% of these are owned outright. 12.7% of properties are classed as social housing) rented from council, housing association or registered social landlord). 28% of households in East Herts comprise of one person only, of whom 11% are over 65's. 28% of households have dependent children.

Transport

Almost 12% of people in East Herts work from home which is an increase of 28% in the 10 year Census dates. The majority of people travel to work by car as a driver or passenger (61%) and Train (13.5%) although train usage has increased 47% over the Census dates. Car non-ownership in households has reduced slightly to 12.8% but 34.6% of households have two cars in their household.

SOURCES:

ONS, local profiles, employment theme, 2013

Neighbourhood Statistics using Census, 2011

Local Government Association (using Census 2011 data)

ONS, Regional Labour Market: JSA01 - Claimant Count for Local and Unitary Authorities, (November 2014)

Setting the Scene – Access Channel Analysis and Profiling

Minorities in East Herts

Whilst there is clear majority of reasonably affluent families and older families in East Herts, there are also minorities who are in need of support and services. These matter to members and all employees alike. All agreed we could find out more about the minorities and especially those more vulnerable in our District and the services these minority groups need and/or should be offered.

Growing Population

The population growth in East Herts has been steady and consistent, an 8% growth between 2003 and 2014. The age profile is shifting as people live longer which will impact service delivery both in terms of access to services as public transport services are poor and complexity as an aging population may have more complex needs in terms of health and welfare. This is a key area as it requires joined up service delivery with other agencies, partners and volunteers.

East Herts will have two significant population changes in the short to medium term which need to be planned for given the changes on demand for our services with housing developments in Buntingford and Bishop's Stortford.

It is evident that migration to East Herts from European countries has increased recently, which is placing some demands upon front line service delivery in the format of translation requirements.

Aging Population

The aging population in East Herts is changing demand for services. Links with Health and Well-Being are strong and this will be a complex, multi-agency and multiple partner service delivery environment.

There will be a need to join up more services and help their delivery to older people who may be more isolated and are more likely to be managing their health as a result of longer life expectancy particularly issues such as dementia and mobility. In the short to medium term access channels shift may be halted, with predominance for telephone and email as opposed to interactive website and internet based self-service.

Travel

East Herts remains accessible largely by car. Public transport options can be quite limited and this adds to the potential isolation and vulnerability of an aging population or minority groups without access to their own method of transportation. Services that can only be accessed face to face or that the Council only offers face to face, may subsequently exclude some customers.

Access Channels

All organisations have multiple access channels which offer choice. This sometimes means the same customer contacts the council over several access channels to raise the same issue out of frustration. This results in a more inaccessible service.

We do not design services to be delivered or offered by the access channel of preference by customers, we do not consider reasons why the preference may change and we do not encourage or promote channels as a primary route of access. The Council could plan better by profiling our communities as a whole and for particular services. There may be occasions where this approach to 'demand management' will maximise the availability and access to services, although this may conflict with customer expressed preference.

Some services may best be delivered by a particular access channel, when this is the case we should identify it and do it.



Service Design – Access Channels

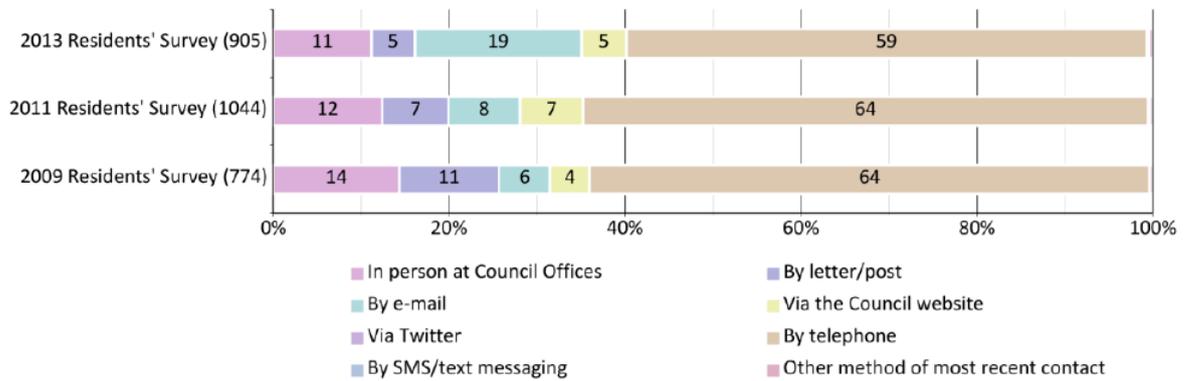
Based on East Herts' social grade profile:

1. 19208 (32.22%) of East Herts households prefer to use email as their preferred tool of communication
2. 15712 (25.75%) households prefer internet
3. 9799 (16.63%) mobile
4. 7482 (17.70%) home phone
5. 6711 (11.39%) households prefer post as preference

Total phone = 34.33%

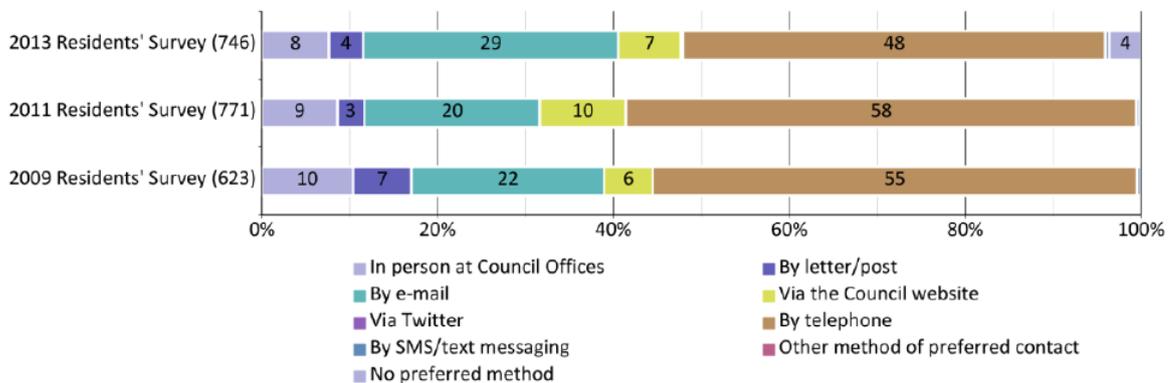
(Mosaic, 2013)

How did you get in contact with East Herts Council on the most recent occasion?



Base: All Residents who have contacted East Herts Council (number in brackets)

How would you prefer to contact East Herts Council?



Base: All residents who have contacted East Herts Council (number in brackets)

ORS, District Wide Survey 2013

On-line

E-mail is an ever growing and important access channel as is the preference of many customers to access our services. The reasons may vary from service to service but it is rapidly replacing letter as the customers preferred communication

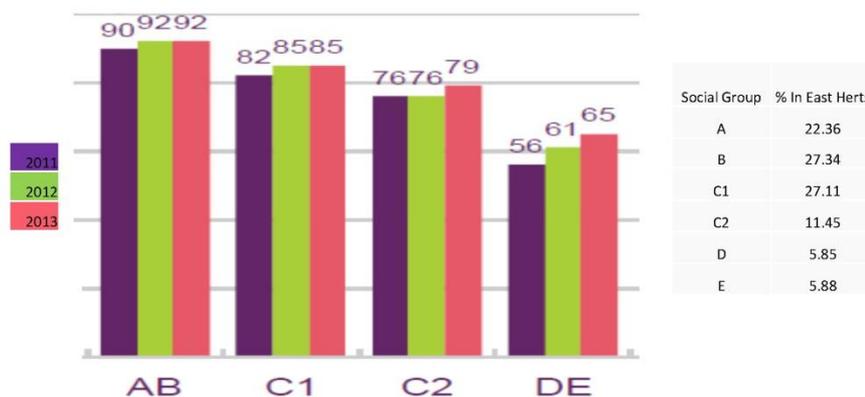
channel. Email is a permanent record, time stamped with an audit trail. The way in which we manage, reply to and utilise email is critical to the Council and is an area we could develop more.

East Herts is on-line; the majority of households, over 80% have someone within them who can access the internet. Use is relatively high given the predominance of high social classes. Adoption of new devices such as tablets and laptops is increasing the rate of adoption amongst older and younger users. However East Herts customers have a low desire to use the web as their access channel of choice, much lower than we could expect given the profile of the population. There is evidence we could reasonable expect use to increase to shift to 26% of contact subject to services being fully available on-line, current preference is below 10%.

The website is full of information that is written by service specialists in their language. There is a huge opportunity to change this by centralising content authoring, supporting services in preparing what information they want to provide and what services they wish to present better.

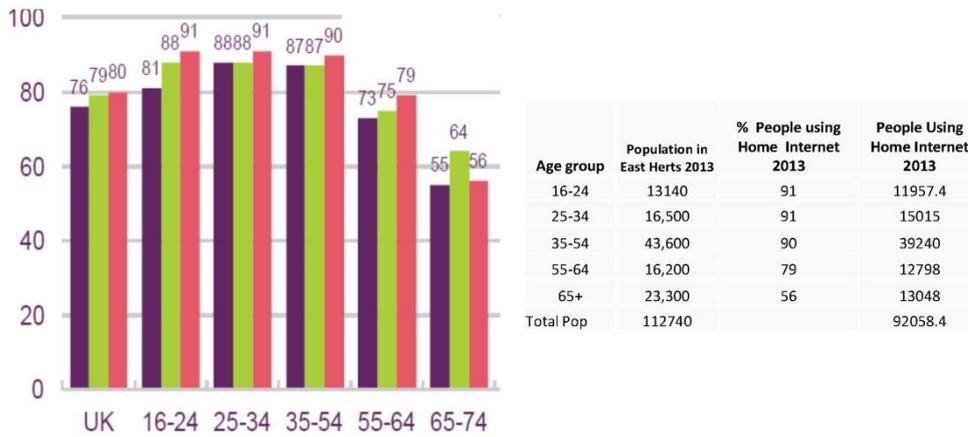
Website use and increased demands for on-line end-to-end service provision is inevitable, our preparation for this could be improved.

Service Design – Internet Use



Based on the social grades found in East Herts, 50338 (85.45%) households have someone that will access the internet at home, 83.67% in East England (OFCOM, 2013)

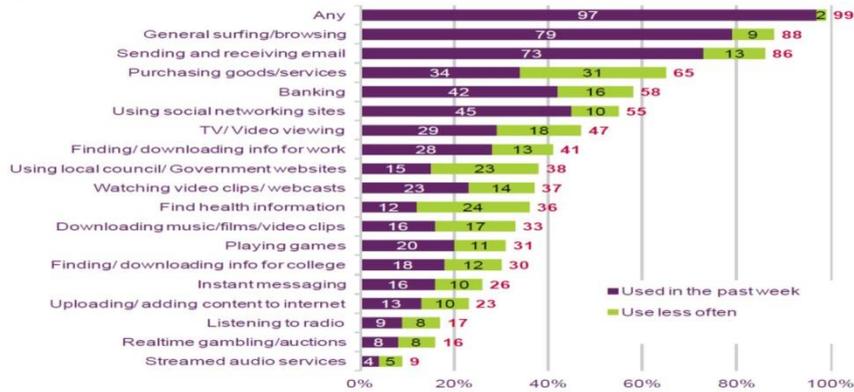
Service Design - Internet



Based on the age profile in East Herts, 92058 (81.66%) population 16+ have someone that will access the internet at home, 74.47% in East England (OFCOM, 2013)

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Service Design – Use of the Internet



- 86% of East Herts Internet users 16+ send/receive emails regularly accounting for 79170 people
- 58% use online banking (53594 people)
- 38% (34982 people) claim to use the Internet to access Government/Council websites

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Telephone Access

The Council has seen the preference for telephone access fall from 70% five years ago to around 50% now. However there are pressures in terms of very high demand for services (Revenues and Benefits) which may reverse this trend. An aging and potentially more isolated population may also increase the desire for telephone contact. Telephone remains the most important access channel reflecting in part the nature of the services we provide, where problems are registered for fixing or complex matters that need discussion are required and it is not easy to travel to do this face to face either due to work/life commitments and the challenges of travel. Getting telephony right and employing telephone technologies will be of on-going benefit to the largest number of customers.

Service Design – Telephone Use

Figure 5.75 Household penetration of fixed and mobile telephony, by socio-economic group and age



- 589 (1%) of East Herts households have no form of personal telephone communication
- 2945 (5%) of East Herts households don't have any mobile phone
- 8835 (15%) have only a mobile phone

Face to Face

Face to face services in Council Offices have declined in preference to 8%, but the demand for housing and benefits advice is growing. Planning services also have aspects of service delivery that may only be delivered currently through face to face discussion/meeting.

However an aging population and more vulnerable minorities will have need of advice and support services which may only be provided face to face. Transport challenges may mean the Council has to consider how face-to-face service may be enabled with customers, not just those who are able to visit one of our Customer Service Centres.

Written Documentation

Like the website, other written information produced by the Council can be technical in nature and complex. It is a firm desire to continuously work to simplify things and provide a way of supporting services to do this be it a 'plain English' approach, use of 'fog indexes' on writing.

Social Media

Social media use remains small as a method of access to services and currently remains closely monitored by the communication team as it covers opinion and reputation. Any requests for service are switched to a more suitable channel to enable service delivery. This needs to be monitored as such social platforms will inevitably become more important in the future.

Knowledge

More knowledge than ever is available about the structure of our communities and where different groups of people live whether that is the more affluent majorities or those in minorities. This information is the basis for our overarching strategy for the access channels we will use and how we prioritise and shape them to suit our communities. This work can be done for all services to ensure services are offered to match customer preference and that decisions are made on how services are individually offered as one size does not fit all. Service planning can take account of this and the Council can plan to adapt and maximise its accessibility to suit its communities.

Setting the Scene – Outcomes of Staff Workshops 14th – 17th July

Key Points from Group Sessions

The group's sessions all pointed to the ageing population across England and within East Herts. There was acceptance that there would be more elderly people in future and this will bring about more interactions across the communication channels available. There was a common perception that this ageing population may mean more and more people of vulnerable ages won't be able to drive and this brought much debate in how we adapt channel choices.

In line with this ageing population, is the idea that residents will have more time on their hand whether it be to address issues, praise the Council, use the Council services etc. and this provides an opportunity to engage and advertise the leisure services that the Council provide.

The group sessions raised the need to consider the level of foreign people coming to live in East Herts. Even though EH has a relatively low population of European born residents and that from other ethnicities, it is well recognised that there are pockets in towns, most notably in Bishop's Stortford.

There was a common theme of concern with the ageing population and comments suggested that there was likely to be an increasing proportion of the population that suffer life debilitating diseases such as dementia. The groups pointed to the increase in care homes and that the Council needs to have better liaison with them.

With proposed housing developments set out in the District Plan, the groups recognised the need to increase resources in preparation for this increased demand for services. With this increased population, the groups recognised the need to monitor the need for services such as doctors, schools, transport reviews etc.

There was a divide or argument over services designed for the younger generation. With a high number of young children, playgrounds are likely to see good usage but in contrast, social patterns amongst the teenage population has moved more towards social media interaction and less actual interaction out of school hours and those associated problems such as underage drinking and anti-social behaviour.

There was an argument in a group session that social groupings may not change dramatically. The groups also commented that inflation rises in relation to earnings has made our population more reasoned in spending

Impact/ Issues of Population Profile for East Herts

- Ageing population mean we need to perhaps spend more time considering the content and ease of use of services
- The importance of developing relationship with County to understand better what each Council provides as services- better training so employees know quickly what services are and are not provided, perhaps have better knowledge of who be best to speak to
- Careful liaison and better education of future transport changes i.e. loss of public transport services
- More pensions – more interactions!?
- Ageing population, less driving, more local services?!
- Increased requirement for other language text/ Immigration changes
- More care services, care homes etc. so better relationships need to be forged with these services
- Ageing population- more time to focus on 'Council issues' Letters/contact of complaints/praise possibly. More demand for our services
- Older people becoming more 'techy' increased use of social media- quick and powerful methods of circulation of council issues- quick to forge an opinion on Council
- There may be less calls/ letters in the long term, especially letters with technology
- Increased requirement for later/weekend contact/availability with longer working hours though job flexibility is greater than ever so patterns are complicated
- Social grouping may not drastically change
- More of a presence in Bishops Stortford may be needed with new homes that are proposed
- Outreach in Buntingford
- Consideration that there may need to be better accessibility of Council services to our customers rather than them coming to us
- Need to carefully consider why customers would want to call us rather than other methods
- More demand for school places, aid with families with young children
- Possibly more use of public spaces, play areas. Consideration that in social media age, these may not appeal to teenage groups like they used to
- Growing infrastructure/doctors/ transport issues, traffic, increased populations
- Need to really keep up to date with social media, identify issues quickly before they go viral e.g. particular issue of litter etc.- need to be seen to action/respond

- A need to help customers understand the number of services the Council provide and perhaps aid people more as what services are not provided by District but by County
- A need to consider inflation and how this is increasing in relation to pay scales which are in no way keeping up – tighter and more reasoned spending
- Support community bus services that are still in operation across East Herts I.e. SAWBO bus
- Perhaps a mobile presence to be introduced into rural areas
- More drop services
- For the Council to try to be more robust in pushing services that clearly operate much better online for example to be conducted online to be able to free up resources for other more hands on services

Impact/Issues of Contact Method and Preferences

All the groups touched on in slightly different forms the impacts of vulnerable groups of people that we need to consider when looking at channel choices. All groups pointed to the idea that, particularly in the elderly population, there is a real desire that people want to talk to someone ‘human’ for:-

- Ease of use, especially in more complex services
- Perhaps trust issues and just the desire to interact with someone
- A more powerful tool of persuasion
- A quicker resolve of a problem
- Especially important in elderly populations in rural areas where there are pockets of poor internet connection

The group sessions suggested that we need to find a way of getting our customers to trust the online services more, perhaps a financial incentive in some services would aid this dramatically like in car tax for example.

Email communication was quite a prominent form of discussion with the groups agreeing that customers do like the paper trail that emails bring about accountability. There was a perceived difference in how customers and our employees regard email in their importance with customers emailing in the hope on a more immediate response but this not necessarily being viable .

There was a common theme with the website that the layout of the website should be improved to make it more user friendly especially with the desire to increase customer use. One group suggested that the most used services such as planning should have much more prominent signage on the website. It was suggested that departments take more of a personal responsibility of the content of the website. There were also suggestions that use of social media could be improved in giving out information/responding to negativity and questioned if there are any real incentives for our population to want to join EHDC twitter and Facebook.

There were many comments of the current phone system and there were points to an improvement. There was a united agreement that the phone system and how people get into contact with the right person needs improving. All too often, customers seem to not be getting in contact with the right person first time which has time wasting implications. There was a real agreement that the front line team needed better understanding on what services each service provide and to have better knowledge of who exactly they need to speak to.

There were many comments on transport. With the population ageing, there were comments of possibly providing a mobile services and promoting the community transports that are currently in place such as the SAWBO bus. There was a real concern of social exclusion and this sense is heightened with the potential loss of public transport services proposed by the Herts County Council. Part of this concern is brought by living in a rural District where there are pockets of broadband unavailability or slow connections speeds that mean that it is too time consuming to do some services online. The groups suggested better liaison with the County Council on transport and just in services in general across all channels with better understanding to the public the services that the District, County and Town Councils provide which they believe would save time.

There was a theme that the Council needed to have a better understanding of what services work well on the internet, phone etc. and try to push our customers more into the channel choice that is easiest and most efficient, less 'hand holding'

Some of the more specific and less brought up points included:-

- Use of new/older technology- what happened to video phone, is skype a realistic tool, would an app work for a council service/ is the interactive service valuable resource
- Difference between customer opening times (08:30) and phone call time (9-5)
- Will the elderly population in 10 years' time be more 'tech savvy' than currently with less reliance of face to face/ phone
- Greater proportion of elderly, more time to contact us/complain/compliment
- Owning smartphones and using internet services on them can vastly differ
- Working is more flexible than ever, working from home has increased, is there a need to change times of services or are sufficient given this flexibility
- Service needs to be easy, if it's too difficult people will just give up and ring up instead
- Being on your own, increasingly likely in ageing population. People may want that extra assurance/ someone to talk to – fear of total social isolation.
- "Barclay's model" could be a considered method?!
- As the population gets older, the 'tech savvy' generation will increase, more accustomed to new forms of contact but may mean others feel even more isolated
- 'Support rather than serve'

- Prioritisation of different forms of contact
- To consider the price of equipment both to the Council and for our population, can they afford new forms of technology coming through
- There is often a difference between owning a smartphone and using available technology on the smartphone
- Security and Trust- Needs to be a consideration of how we can increase trust of using alternative services such as internet
- Need to carefully consider groups that are likely to increase in future with ageing population, so greater proportions of elderly. Dementia, for example will likely increase- impact on people remembering details etc.
- Social exclusion and vulnerability- bus service cuts being discussed, ageing population, car use as a % of travel to work has decreased- can people continue to use car as much?! Current pockets of isolation with regard to broadband availability
- On-going issues around email- email chains?! People are assured that they have written evidence of conversation- powerful tool if there are complications
- Differences between the phone contact times (9-5) and the time customers can come into the building (08:30)
- Will an ageing population drive a renaissance in phone usage, the idea of speaking to somebody human
- Some people feel that talking to someone is a more powerful tool in achieving their targets i.e. phone upgrades where people can often talk staff round to getting a better deal than that listed on internet. It may also be easier to explain a situation on the phone
- Question of what happened to Video phones, do they have a place?!
- An increasing population of people working from home, more phone usage?! Or possibly they have all facilities work based operation may have
- People's perceptions that emails will acquire quick/immediate response despite service standards compromised
- A need to review the ease of contact, are we effectively getting people in contact to the right person – a review of people on the phone to understand better who customers may need to talk to
- Time of contact Mon-Fri 9-5, absent on weekends
- Review website for accessibility, how user friendly it is, the form filling process and confirmation of receipt
- Hard to reach especially in rural areas
- In 10 years' time, will the new generation of elderly population have the skill set to use the internet, will there really be such demand for telephone/personal contact

- Young and elderly populations are amongst the highest groups in EH and are also the most likely to want to be in contact with us
- Growth in apps, can we tailor Council services to apps?! Would it work?!
- Are Interactive screens providing a valuable service?!
- Could Skype be a realistic method of contact?!
- Need to consider why all people are not using the internet, is it technology adaptabilities amongst customers, is it because of a poor experience
- Perhaps each department needs to take more responsibility of the information provided on the internet
- Are internet speeds across the District acceptable/ quick enough for people to perform the task they are trying to do
- Need to change people's mind-set on the use on internet services and phone calls
- People's priorities may change with ageing populations
- Website has improved but needs improving if it is going to be used more in the future
- Should the website have the most used services in a more prominent place – i.e. easier to find and navigate
- Phone calls can be so much more effective than any other channel choice in certain situations – complicated issues can be discussed quickly. Quick method of exchanging information from residents rather than back and forward services on email/internet
- Several phone calls can really interrupt working day- upset daily tasks. Emails and other channels help the Council balance the workload. Free up time
- The need to encourage our customers/redirect customers to other channels of contact. For example consider not sending out forms but encourage them to try online form – less hand holding
- Better management of social media!?
- Better education of the exact services each service provide so calls go to the right person first time. So big emphasis on customer service team- more awareness
- To ensure that we are not actively pushing people into a certain direction of contact, suggest where appropriate the best method of contact for each department

Setting the Scene – Member Workshops 4th and 9th September

Hertford

The group agreed with the overall make-up of the population of East Herts, being a place of affluence.

Members were concerned about grouping people together, stating that all groups could be minorities if you kept looking; specific needs should not be missed out as a result of pursuing a strategy to meet the needs of large majorities of the population.

Issues were raised about recent trends in primary school admissions, such that there were insufficient places and that this did not appear to be reflected in the longer term trends that had been presented. It was agreed that schooling was a draw for people in to East Herts.

The aging population and associated increase in health services was recognised, with increased demands for joined up services, linked together and offered. Agreement about the potential isolation of the elderly, including those who are asset rich in good housing yet have little income to support themselves. Transport was recognised as a key issue with aging impacting mobility and access to shops and services. This was felt to be increasing as the number of local shops in villages was in decline, there are no longer the small shops in villages/rural areas that previously offered stimulus and reason to go out for company and interaction with others. Social isolation was also felt to be increasing, in part, due to the busy lives of people now moving in to villages, with particular impact on the aging population.

The group felt strongly that East Herts was a district of lots on minorities, so small they were often overlooked and there was a strong feeling that more work to identify where such minorities in need/vulnerable would be and how services could then be better delivered to those minorities in different ways, joined up with other agencies. There was support for linking service plans to this knowledge with a feeling that we did not know enough.

There was agreement about the telephone access channel being very important for members and their constituents but that it was still complex to navigate to the right person. Support was expressed for extending the voice recognition used by members to the public.

Members agreed that access to technology was evolving and agreed that although mobile ownership was high they felt that the use discussed of around half that of telephone was correct.

Members strongly supported the evidence that email was growing and a high preference of contact for many, citing audit trail and record keeping by constituents. Members felt that service response to emails was variable in terms of timescales and quality and were not clear if the Council had set service standards for it. They expressed support for greater measures to manage, monitor and measure email traffic as an access channel.

It was felt that there was a resurgence of demand, particularly in Stortford, by those migrating to the district from other European countries, that an increase demand for schools and housing was resulting and support for those minorities to access services.

Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual and Transgender minorities were raised both in terms of fear of crime and crime in East Herts and that there were particular issues in ensuring services recognised this dynamic in East Herts.

Members noted that the website would continue to grow in importance and supported the idea of more work to streamline and simplify content to be legible for the general public. Members agreed that it would be a challenge as officers needed to write formal documents, policies and reports in their work and that writing for the public, such that it was not 'Council speak', was something officers should be supported to do.

All members found the way of looking at the breakdown of groups in the district informative and thought provoking, feeling that services could be more targeted, focussed and even cost effective by using such information. Members felt they would consider the minority groups within their wards, where they were and how best to support them.

Bishop's Stortford

Once again members were very engaged with the analysis and agreed with the information regarding the majorities and minorities in East Herts. Members were supportive of doing more work to get closer to understanding the types of residents and where they lived, allowing more focussed service delivery.

The support for an aging population was discussed especially in the context of access to services.

Transport was discussed and how important bus services were to residents and that this was of growing importance given the increased elderly in our rural communities, even those very close to towns were unable to use regular bus services and that other approaches should be considered.

Legibility of documents, and the ease with which they could be read was discussed. In forms, letters and website information. Strong support was given to using tools such as 'fog indexes' and 'plain English techniques' to improve access to written materials. It was recognised that there were real needs driven by low educational attainment and immigration to local areas to Stortford which was placing demand on Councillors to support residents with even straightforward letters. It was felt the good personal interface in receptions should not be lost.

Recognition was given to the challenges officers face in writing for the public given the Council's demands for formal report and documentation. These formats of documents and language being a world apart from 'common language use'. Centralising web authoring and supporting officers to simplify communication was discussed and seen to be a plausible way to enhance things in a focussed way.

The group agreed with the premise of good, streamlined and automated services to be on offer for the majority groups alongside attention and investigation of minorities and delivery methods to ensure such very small minorities were supported.

Support again was given to the growth and importance of email communication, albeit in some wards residents did still use postal communication. Variability in email responsiveness and approach was also raised. Members felt a focus on timeliness and quality would be of benefit given its growth in use amongst East Herts residents.

Telephone was agreed as key, strong support for voice recognition to connect services up better was given. The group agreed the Council should be looking to continue to increase use of the website for service delivery but felt the volume of text made it harder to use, that the search results were still not helpful enough.

Once again members welcomed the insight to the population make-up of the district and felt it would be important to use such knowledge to help plan services better.

Setting the Scene – National Picture

Reduced Funding

Councils are currently half way through a scheduled 40 per cent cut in funding from central government. Having delivered £10 billion of savings in the three years from 2011/12, local authorities have to find the same savings again in the next two years. As a result of these cuts councils in many areas will not have enough money to meet all their statutory responsibilities.

Our future funding outlook model predicts that the amount of money available to deliver some of the most popular local services will shrink by 66 per cent by the end of the decade. This is likely to result in less money to spend on things such as filling potholes, providing youth services and funding leisure facilities (pools, gyms and parks). It will also mean less money to spend on libraries and a significant reduction in the help that councils can provide to local businesses.

Councils across England are preparing strategies to help mitigate these pressures. Local circumstance dictates what options are available for quick cost savings or income generation and the nature of the decisions that need to be made to achieve a sustainable financial position. It is anticipated that spending cuts will continue beyond 2020, pressures on the costs to deliver services are inevitable and continuous improvement is required.

SOURCE: LGA Report Under Pressure April 2014.

Economic Downturn

The UK economy grew by 0.7% in the third quarter of 2014 compared to the previous quarter, and was up by around 3% on a year earlier. The recovery has now been sustained at an above trend rate for nearly two years since early 2013 after a couple of sluggish years in 2011 and 2012.

Growth has been driven primarily by services over the past five years, but manufacturing and construction have also been on an upward trend since early 2013. This momentum seems to have waned recently in the case of manufacturing; however, as our key European export markets have lost momentum over the past six months.

Our main scenario is for UK GDP growth to average around 3% in 2014 and around 2.5% in 2015. This is similar to the latest consensus forecasts and slightly more optimistic than the OBR was in March.

Consumer spending growth is projected to be broadly similar to GDP growth next year, but with some moderation after 2015.

Inflation has fallen below the 2% target since January 2014 for the first time in more than four years, and we expect it to remain below target in 2015.

We do not expect any immediate rise in official UK interest rates, but a gradual upward trend seems likely to begin during the course of 2015 although market expectations of the timing of the first rate rise have been pushed back to the middle of next year. In the long term, however, we would still expect official rates to return to a more normal level of perhaps around 4% by 2020.

Higher interest rates will help savers and reduce pension fund deficits, but borrowers (including businesses and the government) might gain from locking in funding now for long term investments such as infrastructure and housing. Households need to bear in mind likely future interest rate rises in any decisions on mortgages or other longer term loans.

SOURCE: PWC Economic Outlook Nov 2014

Demographic Change

- The population is growing

Over the next 20 years (2012-2032) the population in England is predicted to grow by 8 million to just over 61 million, 4.5 million from natural growth (births – deaths), 3.5 million from net migration.

- The population is becoming more diverse

By 2031, ethnic populations will make up 15 per cent of the population in England and 37 per cent of the population in London.

- More people are living alone

By 2032 11.3 million people are expected to be living on their own, more than 40 per cent of all households. The number of people over 85 living on their own is expected to grow from 573, 000 to 1.4 million.

After recent growth, the number of births each year is expected to level off. Over time birth rates have fluctuated quite significantly. Current predictions are that the annual number of births will level off to around 680,000–730,000 births per year.

- Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are growing

In 1901 baby boys were expected to live for 45 years and girls for 49 years. In 2012, boys could expect to live for just over 79 years and girls to 83 years. By 2032, this is expected to increase to 83 years and 87 years respectively. Healthy life expectancy is growing at a similar rate, suggesting that the extra years of life will not necessarily be years of ill health.

- The population is ageing

The combination of extending life expectancy and the ageing of those born in the baby boom, just after the Second World War, means that the population aged over 65 is growing at a much faster rate than those under 65. Over the next 20 years the population aged 65-84 will rise by 39 per cent and those over 85 by 106 per cent.

After a recent decline, the number of deaths each year is expected to grow. The number of deaths each year is expected to grow by 13 per cent from 462,000 to 520,000 by 2032.

- Health inequalities persist

Men and women in the highest socio-economic class can, on average, expect to live just over seven years longer than those in the lowest socio-economic class, and more of those years will be disability free.

SOURCE: The King's Fund Summary 2014

DRAFT

Equality and Diversity Policy Statement

East Herts Council is firmly committed to providing and promoting equality for all its employees and the wider community. The Council has adopted this policy to ensure equality influences the way we provide services and the employment of staff. To achieve this we will endeavour to create an environment in which there is respect for every individual and recognition that no member of the public, employee, potential employee, service user or Councillor will be discriminated against irrespective of their gender, race, ethnicity, colour, marital status, disability, age, sexuality, family responsibilities, religion, trade union involvement or political beliefs. Neither shall they be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable for health and safety or legal reasons. This is not an exhaustive list and the Council recognises that there are other groups who may face unlawful discrimination.

In respect of race equality the Council has adopted the McPherson's definition of a racial incident '*a racial incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person*'.

The Council follows the Codes of Practice of the Commission for Racial Equality and Equal Opportunity Commission, and is committed to achieving the Equality Standard for local government.

We believe in the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity in all that we do. We recognise the rich diversity of East Hertfordshire's population as a strength and we aim to treat all people with dignity and respect whilst recognising the value of each individual and the positive contribution they make to the diverse community and workforce.