



INFORMATION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
CUSTOMER SERVICES	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	28 MARCH 2022	8
CUSTOMER ACCESS CHANNEL REPORT (CORPORATE PLAN FOLLOW UP)			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

This report outlines the current arrangements for customer access to council services across all channels with particular focus on the most vulnerable.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Includes statistics from Mitel channel reporting system and Microsoft Teams recording system for face-to-face contact.

LINK TO INFORMATION

No link required

WHY IS THIS INFORMATION BEING GIVEN TO THE COMMITTEE?

This information is provided to inform the committee of policies and procedures in place to provide customer access to council services with particular focus on the most vulnerable in accordance with the Corporate Plan.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact: William Fisher - william.fisher@fylde.gov.uk

When Fylde Council's Customer Service team was established in 2004, two channels of communication were included the telephone and a face-to-face service out of The Public Offices in St Annes and Moor Street offices in Kirkham. In 2010 the team permanently vacated the Kirkham Offices and the call centre moved to a larger facility in The Public Offices.

In 2015 the service was enhanced with the introduction of a dedicated customer email address <mailto:listening@fylde.gov.uk> listening@fylde.gov.uk and an online 'Chat' service. Subsequent years have seen the launch of a fully integrated Fylde Council Website offering 24/7 online access to services; an appointment system launched for in person customers and interactive online chat service. Enhanced digital services with the Shared Service partners have been established providing a fully digital Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit application form, a digitised instalment payment plan for customers with difficulty paying council tax and a further suite of online council tax services. The Social Media offer has been enhanced with tens of thousands of customers

visiting Facebook and Twitter annually.

In 2017 we conducted a survey to identify the home locations of visitors who dropped into the Town Hall which indicated that well over half our visitors came from St Annes with diminishing numbers from other areas corresponding to distance of travel. It was noted that approximately 45% of all customers attending the Town Hall in person would visit on a Monday resulting in long waiting times with fewer visitors for the remainder of the week.

In November 2017 a system was introduced for customers to request an in-person appointment. In 2016/17 there were 12,040 customers at the counter with 5,029 enquiries dealt with at the initial 'Meet and Greet' desk. In the year before the pandemic (2019/20) there were only 2,893 customers requiring in person counter service and 9,220 who 'dropped in' dealt with at the Meet & Greet desk as first point of contact. To enhance the service available at the Meet and Greet desk we applied additional resource from the Customer Service Specialist team to deal with the volume of enquiries which are, by their nature, short and simple (such as scanning of documents, payments, Nowcard forms, general advice, and support on public access computers etc) with the skillset to deal with more complex enquiries as they arose. The appointment system for face-to-face enquiries has meant better customer management with zero waiting times and the facility for staff to spend longer time with more complex customer enquiries especially those presented by vulnerable customers. This has also led to an improvement in confidentiality as groups of customers no longer 'wait' near the counter and a more comfortable experience without a sense of having to rush the enquiry when there are large numbers of other customers waiting to be seen.

During the pandemic, The Town Hall was closed for two periods from April 2020 until July 2020 and November 2020 until April 2021 in accordance with government guidelines. Visitor numbers reduced substantially during these periods and we offered a front door advice service for customers who called at the Town Hall. Following the easing of Covid restrictions the Town Hall reopened with an 'appointment only' counter service to avoid attracting large numbers of people to the Town Hall which might have put staff and other visitors at risk of transmitting the Covid virus. Since January 2022 the Town Hall has been fully open to the public.

During the closure and restricted access to the Town Hall the website received 210,796 unique hits in the 7 months up to 31/10/21 and 9,607 online transactions in the 6 months up to 30/9/21. Throughout 2020/21 the Customer Service team received 24,422 emails and handled 51,211 telephone calls to 01253 658658 – there was a significant shift to digital online engagement that has remained high since re-opening in-person channels.

The chart below provides details of contacts by the Customer Service Team for the previous 6 years reflecting the migration of customer contact from traditional resource intensive and more expensive face to face and telephone methods to online digital platforms and channels i.e. email, chat, social media, contact forms.

Year	<u>Calls Answered</u>	<u>Calls Abandoned</u>	<u>Total Calls</u>	<u>% Answered</u>	<u>Emails</u>	<u>Chats</u>	<u>Meet & Greet</u>	<u>Counter Enquires</u>	<u>Total Contacts</u>
2015/16	75,591	6,536	82,127	92.2	13,635	2,775	4,516	11,391	114,444
2016/17	67,907	9,357	77,264	87.8	15,968	4,233	5,029	12,040	114,534
2017/18	75,574	20,519	96,093	79.7	18,268	5,987	7,946	12,526	140,820
2018/19	63,341	8,933	72,274	88.2	14,507	7,072	9,248	4,764	107,865
2019/20	56,261	8,508	64,769	87.3	14,260	1,106	9,220	2,893	92,248
2020/21	51,211	3,938	55,149	93.8	24,422	0 **	859	240	80,670
2021/22*	45,910	2,837	48,747	94.2	14,745	0	4,183	348	68,023
* 11 months									
** Chat services replace by interactive service.									

Customer preference for online transactions is reflected in subscriptions for the green waste service. The following table shows a shift from supported subscription through contact with the Customer Services Team in 2018 to self-service subscriptions in 2021.

	2018	2021
Online subscriptions	12002	14203
% Online	70%	79%
Customer Services	5094	3896
% Customer Services	30%	21%

As Fylde Council's services have evolved since 2004 customer preference for accessing council services online has transformed the service. In 2004 contact was by telephone and in person only. In 2022 these channels coexist alongside email, interactive chat, a full suite of web-based self-service and social media. Online services are available round the clock, seven days a week, phone lines and counter service are available 41.5 hours per week.

For the purposes of confirming the Corporate Action, all channels of customer access are available post COVID.