

| Report of   | Meeting           | Date             |
|---|-------------------|------------------|
| Director of Customer and Advice Services<br>(Introduced by the Executive Member for Customer and Advice Services) | Executive Cabinet | 20 November 2014 |

## DIGITAL CHANGES TO BUSINESS PROCESS

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To inform members in respect of a number of service changes to improve access to services for customers whilst promoting digital access and to help effectively manage the demand for services.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

- That the changes outlined in this report be noted.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

- The Councils Digital Strategy was approved by Executive Cabinet on 16 January 2014 to help residents/customers with digital access to services and information.
- Significant progress continues with the digital agenda and work is underway to promote digital inclusion for customers to access services online.
- Changes to services will be made aimed at speeding up digital access and digital inclusion which otherwise will require an increase in resources.
- 17 changes are listed at Appendix A which have been approved in principle by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and by both the Executive Member (Customer and Advice Services) and Executive Member (Public Protection).
- The changes are in line with the aims and objectives of the council in adopting a 'digital first' approach helping to improve services, achieve further efficiencies and improvements in both business and management information.
- The Councils customer service centre will continue to support in person access to services and through its digital access points.
- Costs associated with implementing the changes will be contained within the Customer & ICT services budget.

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| <b>Confidential report</b><br>Please bold as appropriate | Yes | <b>No</b> |
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|  |     |           |
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| <b>Key Decision?</b><br>Please bold as appropriate | Yes | <b>No</b> |
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### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

#### (If the recommendations are accepted)

- Changes to how customers access services are necessary:
  - The changes improve access to services for customers whilst promoting digital access.

- b. There has been an increase in customer contact over the last 18 months due to a number of initiatives and external changes:
  - o There has been a high demand for waste collection services such as the free waste electrical and electronic equipment and recycling waste container service
  - o There have also been external factors such as the welfare reform changes, including the Council Tax Support Scheme and the expansion of Buckshaw Village that have led to an increase in the demand for services and information from the council
- c. Balancing resources without compromising services is at the forefront of these change proposals.

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

11. No viable alternative options have been identified at this stage.

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

12. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

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|--|--|---|---|
| Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all |  | A strong local economy  |   |
| Clean, safe and healthy communities  |  | An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area | X |

**BACKGROUND**

- 13. The importance of increasing digital access to services is reinforced by the government who continue to emphasise the preference for the use of digital channels to access services and benefits, through the digital by default strategy.
- 14. The overall vision of the council’s approved digital strategy is to ensure that customers are able to and *prefer to* access efficient services and information easily online, also to ensure the commitment and engagement of staff and members to enable the changes to take place.
- 15. The overall aim of the Digital Strategy is two-fold:
  - a. to ensure that customers are able to, and prefer to, access services easily online whilst also maintaining traditional channels and support for customers unable to benefit from self-service;
  - b. to ensure that changes continue to be made in the way the Council manages information and conducts its business in order to deliver services
- 16. Changes in the organisation’s approach to the way it delivers services will lead to corresponding changes in customer behaviour.
- 17. Much technological progress and changes to infrastructure has already been made and the principles in the digital strategy will enable the full benefits of this progress to be realised.
- 18. The implementation of additional customer terminals in the customer service centre will support changes to digital systems, customers will be able to access online services while getting any support or help they might need. This will help build customer confidence with migration to online services.
- 19. The ICT and GIS strategies emphasise the importance of digital access and make access to services as easy as possible for customers, with support and alternatives available for those who cannot use it including in person support at the Councils customer service centre in Union Street.
- 20. A desire to increase digital inclusion and support for residents is currently being developed and will be included in the councils Corporate Strategy.
- 21. However, in order to make significant strategic changes in the levels of direct customer contact we need to place this at the heart of every aspect of service delivery and consider making greater changes in the way we manage access to services. Self-service is the most

efficient access channel for the council and provides an improved service for the customer in many instances. Straightforward transactional requests such as those for waste receptacles and pest control appointments can be logged on the Councils website and appear as jobs in real-time for contractors.

## **PROPOSED CHANGES**

22. We have already made some strides towards achieving digital access. Almost 100% of housing benefit applications are made using digital systems (excluding those circulated by partner/other public sector organisations). Other successes include online applications for railcards and parking permits where the majority of applications are made online.
23. We are mapping the digital access footprint across the borough and the customer service centre provides assisted and non-assisted digital access for customers.
24. Small changes to the Interactive Voice Recording messages on the council call centre telephone system have been made to provide customers with information or signpost them to an alternative channel, e.g. Election reform information and the automated payments line.
25. A total of 17 changes are listed at Appendix A, 2 of which are subject to approval by the Chief Executive.
26. A number of benefits will be derived from making these changes and these are detailed in the attached Appendix e.g.:
  - a. Migrating simple requests from the customer service centre online e.g. free waste electrical and electronic equipment collections and payment only requests is likely to free up phone lines for dealing with other more time consuming/complex service requests
  - b. The action of encouraging the submission of all application forms online will lead to significant savings in paper, scanning and indexing costs and staff time
  - c. The changes will help with managing the demand for services
  - d. The changes support and encourage the transition to digital systems building confidence and helping to achieve digital inclusion amongst customers
  - e. The changes will continue to further improve management and business information
27. Advance publicity regarding access to the service will be required and although customers may still telephone and visit they can quickly be advised of alternative options, lessening the impact on contact centre resources. Customers may also be directed to digital access points which will also be available in the Customer Service Centre.

## **RISK ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHANGES**

28. There are risks associated with the requests for change which have been recognised. In any change to service there is a risk of an increase in customer dissatisfaction, however a decrease in the abandoned call rate, alongside anticipated efficiency savings and other service enhancements should compensate for any temporary increase in dissatisfaction.
29. Potential complaints regarding publication of personal data or potentially offensive comments on the website may surface which will need to be actively managed. There will be the option to remove personal data or comments from the web site.
30. Customers may not have access to the web to obtain digital services and some customers may not have broadband access or an email address to receive notifications. Digital access will be provided in the council offices to assist customers without easy online access. The corporate strategy project to increase digital awareness and inclusion will support the delivery of the changes.

## **SAVINGS AND COST OF IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGES**

31. Costs and savings associated with the change requests have been estimated on the best available information and are difficult to estimate without detailed analysis. Costs relating to changes are largely contained within existing budgets and will not place an additional

financial burden on the council. Any software related costs may be absorbed in further commercial discussions with suppliers. Savings based on staffing resources are not cashable but intended to be used to enhance both single front office and planning services to the customer throughout the changes.

## IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

32. This report has implications in the following areas:

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| Finance         |   | Customer Services                      |  |
| Human Resources | X | Equality and Diversity                 |  |
| Legal           |   | Integrated Impact Assessment required? |  |
| Chief Executive | X | Policy and Communications              |  |

## COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

33. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report as the report focusses on process changes. The wider message is about the introduction of changes such as these should lead to future efficiencies which will be required over the medium term to balance the Council's budget.

## COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

34. The obligation on the Council is to provide these services in an open and transparent manner. The proposals, whilst attempting to steer the public to on-line engagement with the processes, continue to allow for the use of none-digital channels if required. This satisfies the council's obligations

LESLEY-ANN FENTON  
DIRECTOR CUSTOMER AND ADVICE SERVICES

| <b>Background Papers</b> |             |             |                            |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Document</b>          | <b>Date</b> | <b>File</b> | <b>Place of Inspection</b> |
| Digital Strategy         | 16 Jan 2014 | ***         | Union St                   |
| ICT Strategy             | 24 Oct 2013 |             |                            |
| GIS Strategy             | 16 Jan 2014 |             |                            |
| <b>Report Author</b>     | <b>Ext</b>  | <b>Date</b> | <b>Doc ID</b>              |
| Asim Khan                | 5448        | 06/11/14    | ***                        |

## APPENDIX A - DIGITAL CHANGES TO BUSINESS PROCESS

| Change No. | Service/Process   | Current Process  | Proposed Change  | Benefits of change   | Costs | Estimated Savings            |
|------------|---|--|--|--|-------|------------------------------|
|            |   |  |  |  | £     | £                            |
| 1          | Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment recycling service (WEEE collections). | Applications accepted online, by telephone and in person in the Customer Services Centre at Union Street.  | Although applications will still be accepted in person, telephone customers will be referred to the online application. Vulnerable customers will always be assisted as will customers without ICT access. | Increase customer confidence in digital channels.<br>Savings in staff time will support more demanding service requests. | None  | Staff resources<br>0.21 FTE. |
| 2          | Recycling waste container requests.   | Applications accepted online, by telephone and in person in the Customer Services Centre at Union Street.  | Although applications will still be accepted in person, telephone customers will be referred to the online application. Vulnerable customers will always be assisted as will customers without ICT access. | Increase customer confidence in digital channels.<br>Savings in staff time will support more demanding service requests. | None  | Included in above.           |
| 3          | Payment only customer contact.  | Payment only requests are taken through all channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Telephone</li> <li>○ In person at the council offices</li> <li>○ Automated</li> </ul> | Payment only contact will be phased through to the automated telephone payment line.<br>Other payment methods such as direct debit will continue to be promoted.   | Increase customer confidence in digital channels.<br>Savings in staff time will support more demanding service requests. | None  | Staff resources<br>0.27 FTE. |

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|   |   | <p>telephone payment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bank</li> <li>○ Post Office</li> <li>○ Direct Debit</li> </ul>   | Where a request for advice precedes a payment this will continue to be accommodated by telephone.  |   |   |   |
| 4 | Landlord notification letters.                      | Registered landlords currently receive paper notifications of awards, terminations and adjustments to their tenant's Housing Benefit entitlement each time a decision is made. | Digitise notifications to registered social landlords using e landlord software Agree charging SLA with landlords.   | Reduction in printing and postage costs of at least 15,000 landlord notification letters per annum.   | Software and annual support costs.  | Reduced printing and postage costs. Increased revenue to the council. |
| 5 | Revenues and Benefits paper application forms.      | Paper forms remain for some council tax and benefit applications.  | Remove all Revenues and Benefits paper forms. Applications will still be accepted in person, by telephone and online. Vulnerable customers will always be assisted as will customers without ICT access. | Increase customer confidence in digital channels. Savings in staff time in processing paper application forms will support more demanding service requests. | Software changes will be managed through existing contracts where possible. | Staff resource.   |
| 6 | Benefit e-claims process. (Subject to CEO approval) | Signed benefit e-claim declarations are required by post or in person which hinders digital take up.   | To accept claims without a signed declaration. Changes in DWP policy support this change if approved by the CEO.   | Improves digital access and streamlines the process for customers and the council.  | None.   | Staff resource.   |
| 7 | Compliance with Verification Framework (VF).        | VF requires sight of original documentation in support of benefit claims.  | Replace the requirement to see original documentation with acceptance of digital   | Improves digital access and streamlines the process for customers and the council.  | None.   | Staff resource.   |

|          |  |  |   |   |   |                 |
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|          | (Subject to CEO approval)  |  | and/or photo copies.<br>This change has already been implemented by some other Lancashire LA's.<br>Changes in DWP policy support this change if approved by the CEO.  |   |   |                 |
| <b>8</b> | Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications.                                  | DHP application process is a paper based form.                       | Remove DHP paper form. In the main these are completed with assisted support from council staff and partner organisations. Applications will still be accepted in person, by telephone and online. Vulnerable customers will always be assisted as will customers without ICT access. | Increase customer confidence in digital channels. Savings in staff time in processing paper application forms will support more demanding service requests. | Software changes will be managed through existing contracts where possible. | Staff resource. |
| <b>9</b> | Notifications of Housing Benefit decisions and other correspondence for claimants. | Notifications and other correspondence are printed and sent by post. | Encourage claimants to opt to receive information digitally e.g. email.   | Improves digital access and streamlines the process for the customer and the council. Savings achieved through reduced printing and postage costs.          | Software changes will be managed through existing contracts where possible. | Staff resource. |

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| <b>10</b> | Planning and Building Regulation applications and supporting documentation. | Applications received on paper, online and on compact disc.   | Applications received online and paper application forms will be removed.<br>In person support will remain in the Customer Services Centre at Union Street for completing and submitting applications. | Significantly reduces the need to scan paper documents leading to a more streamlined process.                         | Software changes:<br>£3,200                        | 0.25 FTE.        |
| <b>11</b> | Planning & Building Control outbound correspondence.                        | Correspondence produced, printed and enveloped in house, or sent via email.                                   | All outbound mail processed through UK Mail in line with established procedures in the Single Front Office e.g. Council Tax and Housing Benefit correspondence.  | Reduction in mail, printing cost and staff time.  | None - absorbed into UK Mail contract.             | £600.00          |
| <b>12</b> | Incoming Planning and Building Regulations correspondence.                  | Correspondence received at Chorley Council, scanned and indexed on site into document management system.      | All incoming postal correspondence to be diverted to off-site scanning bureau in line with established procedures in the Single Front Office e.g. Council Tax and Housing Benefit correspondence.      | Reduction in staff resource to scan and index.<br>Savings in staff time will support more demanding service requests. | Minimal but will be absorbed into bureau contract. | Staff resources. |
| <b>13</b> | Publication of all Planning application documents online.                   | Currently consultee responses and contributor letters and emails are the only documents not published online. | All planning application documents including contributor and consultee letters will be published online.   | Improves transparency with planning application process.<br>Will help reduce direct customer contact.                 | Software changes:<br>£400                          | Staff resources. |



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| <b>14</b> | Removal of Planning and Building Regulation application forms from council website. | Links to downloadable paper forms available via the council website.      | Remove links.   | Increase customer confidence in digital channels and reduction in paper forms.   | None                  | Staff resources. |
| <b>15</b> | Publication of Building Control application details online.                         | No Building Regulation application details currently published online.    | Publish application details (but not documents) online. Create Building Control portal for officers enabling remote access to documents.                            | Improves transparency with building control application process. Will reduce direct customer contact and support digital channels. | Software cost: £1,400 | Staff resource.  |
| <b>16</b> | Stop notification of decision to contributors.                                      | We currently notify contributors of planning decision by letter or email. | Information available online. Initial neighbour notification letter will be amended to advise that further application information will be available online.        | Reduction in mail cost, print cost and staff resources in enveloping mail.   | None.                 | Staff resource.  |
| <b>17</b> | Cheque payments for selected services.  | Council currently accepts cheque payment for most services.               | Stop taking payments by cheque for planning, building control, street naming and numbering and 'get up and go' activities. Other payment channels including online, | Will help streamline service. Savings in staff time will support more demanding service requests.                                  | None.                 | Staff resource.  |

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|  |  |  | telephone and in person<br>are available for all these<br>services. |  |  |  |
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