



CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY

Making it easier to access local services

RYEDALE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Access to Services Programme

Document Control

Version History

Version	Author	Date	Comments
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Related Documents

Document Name and Description	Version
Access to Services Programme Plan	
Working with you to make a difference	
Imagine Ryedale...	

Index

Background & Introduction	page 3
1. Our Drivers	4
2. Our Vision	4
3. Our Aims and Objectives	5
4. How will we deliver our services?	5
5. Access Channels	6
6. When will we provide our services?	9
7. How will we link our services?	9
8. Supporting our stakeholders	10
9. What is Ryedale District Council doing?	10
10. What will be the benefits?	10
11. Monitoring Performance	11
12. Workflow	12
13. Local Land and Property Gazetteer	12
14. Staff Recruitment, Training and Development	13
15. Best value services	14
16. Project management and managing risk	14
17. Marketing and communication	14
18. Our Performance Targets	15

Background & Introduction

Ryedale District Council is committed to improving access to services for residents and other customers. This will be achieved by improving processes and facilities for dealing with the customer's initial and ongoing contact whilst dealing with the Council. This Customer Access Strategy defines the Council's aims and objectives for customer contact. It is concerned with defining a consistent and professional approach to making contact with the Council as appropriate and convenient as possible for the customer.

The strategy represents the customer facing strand of a wider programme of work: the Access to Services Programme which also includes the development of systems and technologies which will enable all of our services to be e-enabled as part of the government's targets for UK Online.

The primary purpose of the Customer Access Strategy is to assist the Council in achieving its vision for the future for customer service:

“Making it easier to access local services”

and in so doing, achieving one of the Council's Corporate Aims:

“To have efficient and effective high quality services, accessible to everyone in a way that suits them”¹.

This document sets out Ryedale District Council's strategy for customer access to council services, advice and information. It identifies how Ryedale will work with customers and partners to provide customers the choice in the way council services are delivered to them. It demonstrates how we will provide a customer centric approach to service delivery ensuring residents can access the council at a time and in the way that suits them best.

The strategy identifies why, when and how customers can access services now and in the future. Technological developments are increasing the ways in which we can do this but we are mindful that face to face or personal contact is still very important to many people. By increasing the number of ways people can access services we aim to make it easier for them. However, such improvements must be effective and to ensure this we must ask the users themselves. A customer survey across the district has been conducted to capture information about how the public currently access our services and the channels by which they would be happy to use². We also asked how they currently perceived the accessibility of our services and how they felt about developing new ways by which they can access the services.

From this survey we have found that 40% of the public find our services very accessible, although the majority of these people were attending the area offices. 55% of people find the services only “quite” accessible, and 5% find them difficult to access. Our aim would be to get the figure up to 90% of the public finding the services very accessible, whether they are visiting the area offices, the main office or accessing by other means.

¹ Corporate Plan: Working with you to make a Difference

² Appendix A

1. Drivers

Strong drivers have highlighted the need to develop and deliver this strategy.

- Our Customers
- UK-Online – National objectives for e-government
- Local Implementing E-Government targets (IEG)
- National Priority Outcomes for Access to Services
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment requirements
- Gershon Efficiency Targets
- The Community Plan
- Our Corporate Plan
- Access to Services Programme

The Ryedale Strategic Partnership – of which Ryedale District Council is a key partner - has agreed its vision and priorities from now to 2013 in the Community Plan – Imagine Ryedale... This is the product of much consultation about what sort of place Ryedale could be in the future, and the part that the council should play in leading the changes ahead. The Council expresses this contribution in its Corporate Plan – Working with you to make a difference. One of the Council's 6 Corporate Aims is specifically concerned with ensuring access to Council services is improved for all our customers.

2. Our Vision

“Making it easier to access local services”

Local people want council services to be available in the right way, the right place and at a time to suit them. Our customers want to sort out their business with the council simply and quickly - with one visit to the council's offices, or one phone call, rather than several. They don't want to be passed from pillar to post. We need to redesign how we provide services and to do this we will put the customer first.

Our Vision has been drawn from the following programmes:

Imagine Ryedale... - The Community Plan

The vision for Ryedale for 2013 is that it is easy to access any part of Ryedale, and all other places, for work and play. Communication is dealt with in flexible and innovative ways.

Working with you to Make A Difference - Ryedale Corporate Plan

To have efficient and effective high quality services, accessible to everyone in a way that suits them.

Access to Services Programme Plan

To develop and implement a customer access strategy which improves the quality and availability of our services, increase take up by electronic channels and results in efficiency savings.

Member & Customer Support Service Delivery Plan

To receive all personal and telephone callers to Ryedale House and the authority's customer centres, on behalf of the authority, NYCC Social Services and the Registrar, providing a high level of customer care, whilst working towards equal access to services, in ways that suit the customer and that can be sustained by the authority.

3. Our Aims and Objectives

Through an analysis of the drivers and the feedback from our customers the strategy will deliver the following **strategic aims**:

- Making it easier to access local services
- Listening and responding to what people want
- Providing services for **everyone** in a way that suits them best
- Increasing choice for customers
- Delivering efficient and effective best value services
- Encouraging partnership working

We will achieve these strategic aims through the successful delivery of the following **key objectives**:

- To resolve 80% of customer queries at first point of contact by 2009
- To increase by 10% every year the level of transactions completed electronically
- To offer a wide range of access choices, opening times and access locations around the requirements of our customers
- To identify and deploy those technology enablers that deliver the maximum benefits to the customer in accessing services
- To provide a consistent and quality service responsive to customer needs
- To integrate all back office systems with the front office
- To achieve 2.5% annual efficiency savings
- Deliver continuous improvement.

4. How will we deliver our services?

The strategy focuses upon the means to deliver a more responsive and seamless service to the customers of Ryedale. This approach will mean that many customer queries will be handled at the first point of contact. Appropriate technical solutions will be developed to assist the delivery of these objectives.

Customers nationally and locally prefer to contact the council using either face to face or via the telephone. There are some other ways by which services can be delivered which include web services, local access points, mobile services, advice surgeries, home visits, interactive TV, postal services and email. We will seek to offer a wide range of access choices to our customers.

Front Line Enablers (Front and Middle Offices)

“Enabler technology refers to the computer systems, or middleware used to support access channel policy and provide the link to core business and information systems.”

Socitm.

We will support our access channels by providing and consulting on the potential benefits of utilising a variety of enabling technologies. These will include Contact Centres, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), a corporate intranet, electronic forms, electronic payments, telephone, face to face, web, and geographic information systems (GIS). We will seek to identify and deploy those technology enablers that deliver the maximum benefits to the customer in accessing services.

Support Enablers (Back Office)

To ensure that we deliver services, how, when and where the public require, we will need to provide a variety of information and knowledge solutions that will support the way we deliver our services. These will include scripting of frequently asked questions (FAQ's), service information, customer service standards, content management, knowledge management, e-learning, management information, policies, procedures and protocols. These will enable us to provide a consistent and quality service responsive to customer needs.

Seamless access to services

Our focus will be upon the means to deliver a more responsive and seamless service to the customers of Ryedale. This approach will mean that many customer queries will be handled at the first point of contact. Appropriate technical solutions will be developed to assist the delivery of these objectives.

Social Inclusion

It is important to us that in delivering this strategy we ensure that we have an understanding of Ryedale's diversity and our approach will be inclusive and equitable. In setting targets and when developing and implementing projects, we will ensure we engage and consult with a wide range of customers including local faith groups, disabled customers, black and ethnic minority communities, young people and other "hard to reach groups". We will also ensure that the Council will provide translation and interpretation facilities to enable more effective communication with individuals, including the use of language line. Our team will also include staff trained to at least British Sign language level one.

5. Access channels

"Access channels are the various routes through which people might contact, or be contacted by local service providers. Such channels need to offer greater choice and convenience for customers, whilst also supporting appropriate authentication of users and security for public service systems.

Facilitated access to systems at public sites is particularly important as a means to introduce customers to technology through personal assistance and hand-holding, thereby helping reduce social inclusion."

ODPM National Strategy for local e-government 2002

Face to face

Face to face contact is still one of the preferred ways of contacting the council. In a recent survey of Ryedale customers, 83% of people said they preferred this method of contact.

We are currently investigating the possibility of a Customer Contact Centre based in Malton town centre, which would be a larger scale operation than the current Area Offices based in Pickering, Kirbymoorside and Helmsley. These area offices are extremely successful and in our survey, the public said that without these offices, it would be extremely difficult to access the council's services. By opening this centre in Malton, Ryedale's largest (with neighbouring Norton) and most central market town, it will enable customers to have easy access to our services wherever they live. Until it is decided whether or not we will open this centre, we will base our Customer Centre at Ryedale House with a front office and middle office providing customer service.

We aim to:

- Provide well trained, professional and knowledgeable front line staff to support the delivery of front line services.
- Provide facilities and amenities that are responsive to the requirements of the customer and meet our Disability Discrimination Act responsibilities.
- Ensure front line employees are provided with enabling technologies so that customer interactions are dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- Ensure we meet our obligations under the Freedom of Information Act.
- Ensure that all front line services have access to the same information wherever they are located in the district.

Telephone

Information suggests that people like to use the phone as a way to contact the council. In a recent survey of the Ryedale District, 50% of people said they have used the telephone to either make contact or make transactions with the council.

Information nationally supports these statistics and suggests that the preference for the telephone will not change. Statistics show that 76% of the calls coming into Ryedale House last for 2 minutes or less (quick calls)³, these are the queries we will be initially targeting to be resolved by our Customer Centre. Our customers expect our telephone front line staff to be professional and knowledgeable and able to resolve their issues and complete their transactions quickly and efficiently. We will be doing this by developing a middle office that will deal with enquiries from one point of contact. This will be based initially at Ryedale House but may move to the Customer Centre if developed in Malton town centre.

We aim to

- Target the “quick” calls initially to resolve at first point of contact.
- Streamline service contact telephone numbers to ensure that all enquiries made via the telephone are responsive and professional.
- Ensure that contact numbers are arranged around specific services not a person or Unit title.
- Develop a knowledgeable and professionally trained contact centre team able to deal with all enquiries.
- Enable technologies to support the delivery of modern and effective contact centre services.
- Provide a lo call telephone number to our customers

Web

The Internet is fast becoming one of the ways our customers interact with the Council. Over 22% of those customers questioned during our recent survey identified the web as a way they would contact the Council for either information, to request services or to make payments. We are ensuring our strategy is not developed solely around the web but uses this technology to deliver many of our services. Our front line and contact centre staff will have access to the same web information as our customers accessing the council from their homes, offices or schools. This will improve our responsiveness to customer enquiries and ensure that customers have self-service access to the same information wherever possible.

³ Appendix B

We aim to

- Ensure that the website is available 24/7 to access information about all services across the council. This will include the facility to make payments and complete application forms online at times of the day to suit them.
- Provide customers with email links to services and respond within 24 hours.
- Customers will be provided with reference numbers to ensure that they can monitor progress of their enquiries.
- Ensure that the website is accessible to those who have specialist requirements by meeting recognised national website standards on accessibility.

Email

More people are using email to communicate with businesses and local services. In the customer survey 28% of local customers said they would like to use email as a method to contact the council. Email users often expect a faster response rate from services than traditional postal methods. The council has recognised this fact and is developing service standards around these raised customer expectations.

We aim to

- Develop service standards for services that include our response rates to customers via email.
- Respond to email enquiries within 24 hours providing customers with a unique reference number that they can use to contact the council.
- Develop our systems that support email to be safe, secure and robust.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer relationship management allows an organisation to manage every aspect of their relationship with their customers. In the context of local government, information about customers is acquired from various sources and brought together in a joined up, secure and integrated way via a CRM solution. An example of how this works in practice is that a customer should only have to tell the council they have moved on one occasion and the council should then be able to update all records relating to that person to include the new address. Good customer relationship management should not simply involve procuring software but identify ways we can understand our customers, record and learn from their interactions.

We aim to

- Enable information about the customers to be recorded once and used by front line staff across the district to share and support customer enquiries.
- Develop solutions to deliver information about our customers to improve service delivery.
- Link any customer relationship management systems to workflow technologies and back office systems to ensure that enquiries are seamlessly and effectively dealt with relevant services specialists.
- Empower our back office staff to keep records updated within the CRM system to ensure information is kept up to date.
- Develop internal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and external Service Level Agreements (SLAs) so records are updated within agreed timescales

Electronic Payments

E Payment services will transform the way Ryedale District Council collects revenue from its customers and businesses. Enabling customers to make payments electronically has been identified as one of the most important priorities for delivering our services locally. Being able to pay for services via the telephone or via the

website will improve customer service and help improve processes. We know from experience and consultation carried out nationally and locally that being able to make payments any way customers choose, at a time convenient to them, is high on the public agenda.

We aim to

- Improve service delivery by enabling customers to make payments how they like, where they like and at times convenient to them.
- Enable payments to the council in ways that encourage public trust and confidence.
- Ensuring that all our stakeholders have the option to pay for services via face to face, the web or the telephone. They will also be able to use the web to check Council Tax and Business Rate balances online.
- Demonstrate efficiency savings and improved collection rates following implementation of electronic payment services.

6. When will we provide our services?

This access strategy will help to support customers by providing services at times and through locations that suit them. Many of us are used to contacting companies, such as banks, outside normal office hours but we need to really understand our local customers to ensure we are providing appropriate services.

As a result we aim to

- Investigate ways we can provide access to front line services outside of traditional office hours.
- Continuously consult with customers to provide access to services that offer best value service delivery

7. How will we link our services?

The technical infrastructure that will link our services will be configured in such a way as to appear seamless from the customer's perspective. It will form the backbone to excellent service delivery. Initially, however, it will only be possible to fully integrate a small number of systems with our CRM due to financial constraints. The longer term intention is to integrate all systems, although this will be dependent on securing the resources necessary to achieve this. The programme will determine what access channels and enablers we will use and our infrastructure will support these requirements. The technical standards and systems we are implementing will improve the way our back office employees are able to do business, enabling more effort to be placed into improving service delivery.

We will align our services with national standards and projects where appropriate including Government Connect and Local Direct Government.⁴

⁴ Appendix C and D

8. Supporting our stakeholders

We will be supporting this strategy by ensuring that we have professional and well trained staff, provide excellent accessible facilities, enable good partnering and joint approaches to service delivery, market our services effectively and provide best value. Our front line staff will be trained and will have core competencies within customer care.

Sharing service improvements regionally and with our public sector partners will ensure that we minimise duplication of effort while we maximise the potential from these joint working initiatives. We intend to ensure that any partnerships are aware of and support the aims of this strategy.

9. What is Ryedale District Council doing?

Traditionally the Reception in Ryedale House has been a signposting service, moving customers to other organisations around the district or to other services within the building. Telephone calls are handled via a main switchboard or a series of service specific telephone numbers. The result for the public has often been confusion or frustration with the need for repeat calls or visits and the requirement to provide the same information more than once. This has already begun to change. By the installation of a CRM system, this will now provide the customer with a more seamless process by which most of the queries will be handled at first point of contact.

The technical framework of channels being developed, to link our services, will be seamless and transparent to customers yet will form the backbone to excellent service delivery. A review is underway of our existing call handling, electronic and written correspondence, with a view to establishing a "fully fledged" customer contact centre.

We want customers to be able to contact us easily in the knowledge they will be speaking to customer advisors trained to handle their enquiry without the need for referral.

10. What will be the benefits?

Our access strategy will provide faster, improved and wider access to services within the district - from the Council, partners and other local organisations. There will be benefits for all our stakeholders in the delivery of this strategy.

Customers

We will:

- Enable customers to interact with the council where and when they want and offering choice in the locations they visit or contact the council.
- Improve processes to ensure that there is seamless service delivery between our front line staff and back office services.
- Continuously develop our services to meet the needs of our community.
- Provide a consistent approach to service delivery and implement the necessary technical infrastructure.

- Provide professionally trained staff within our Contact Centre who are able to handle a wide range of enquiries in an efficient and professional manner to improve the customer experience.
- Develop and monitor consistent service standards.
- Ensure our website conforms to recognised web accessibility standards.

Staff

Will:

- Have inclusive, speedy access to current information about all services within the council.
- Receive training to enable them to deliver the best possible service to our customers. (E Learning).
- Be able to share their ideas, expertise and information more effectively through knowledge management.
- Contact centre staff will be able to deal with many of the frequently asked questions asked by customers and release back office staff to provide service delivery support.
- Be able to deal with up to 80% of customer enquiries at first point of contact before 2009.

Information

We will:

- Provide information about all our services in Ryedale. This will be available via all our access channels whether they are 'face to face', telephone or the web.

Apply and renew

We will:

- Enable the facility for customers to access all our current application and renewal forms electronically. Provide a facility whereby customers only need to change their details once for many services or be provided with an electronic form by front line staff.

Complain

We will:

- Allow Customers to complain about council services and ensure that these are dealt with efficiently as laid down by our complaints procedure.

11. Monitoring Performance

We will be setting up SLAs and KPIs in order to measure our performance. There will be agreed standards in place and a monthly reporting plan in order to track any areas where we may be failing to deliver. The PI's will be monitored through the Council's corporate Covalent performance monitoring system.

We will revisit the targets set on a quarterly basis in order to ensure that they are achievable and will revise where necessary. The targets will be monitored through the ESD Toolkit Access Channel Take-up Report tool.

Customer Satisfaction

In order to ensure we are meeting our customer's needs, we need to measure the satisfaction met from accessing our services.

We aim to

- Provide an online survey for customers accessing via the website
- Conduct a ring back survey for customers using the telephone as a means of accessing the council's services.
- Provide, in the main contact centre and area offices, paper based survey. Alternatively, to gain an understanding from across the whole district, a survey inserted in the Ryedale News could be sent out, ensuring everyone Ryedale District customer has the opportunity to make comments on our services.
- Make full use of the new call logging system in order to produce better information regarding calls from the customers.
- Measure performance on a monthly basis to ensure we are meeting the standards we have set.

12. Workflow

Workflow means the ability to pass work between staff electronically without the need to move paper physically from one in-tray to another. We are implementing workflow technology to allow documents and case notes to be circulated electronically between authorised staff. This will dramatically speed up processes and ensure the right person receives the right information quickly and efficiently.

We aim to

- Ensure that customer information, documentation and enquiries are securely and electronically transferred to speed up the completion of transactions. The transfer of information and work to the services.

13. Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG)

The Local Land and property Gazetteer (LLPG) is built to a British Standard (BS7666) and every record contains a definitive address (including postcodes) and a grid coordinate so that relevant maps and aerial photographs can be linked to them. Importantly each record is assigned a unique property reference number (UPRN) whether it is a property, a flat within a building or a piece of land. The UPRN provides the linking mechanism so that databases and council systems can integrate together, even where the descriptions of addresses or locations are different. This LLPG provides a unique framework to allow our access channels, enablers and back office systems to link to each other to modernise the way local services are provided.

We aim to

- Develop and maintain the LLPG for Ryedale to use as infrastructure component for all new systems developed at Ryedale specifically, CRM systems (to learn more about our stakeholders) and GIS (to link property based data to maps about our stakeholder services and access to local facilities).

Geographic information systems (GIS)

Geographical information systems deliver information using maps. This technology can enable sophisticated spatial analyses to be made based on matching data from different services. In real terms, this means that valuable data can be presented using geographical technology to provide a visual map of our services. This reduces the need to search through paper documents to find information and can present information quickly and effectively.

When combined with a corporate land, street and property database (LLPG), GIS can enhance intelligence led decision making within councils by enabling officers and members networked access to the same data, maps, aerial photography and graphical overlays.

14. Staff recruitment, training and development

Recruitment

Enhancing our current team with the right people will be essential to deliver professional, efficient staffing for the Customer Contact Centre. We recognise that specific qualities are required for these positions and will ensure that any additional staff are recruited to meet the responsibilities and duties required to deliver modern and effective services to our stakeholders.

We aim to

- Ensure that additional people recruited to our customer access teams have the right skills in order to deliver high levels of service that are responsive to the needs of our stakeholders.
- Provide the relevant training and working environment to ensure our valued employees are retained.
- Capture the knowledge of our staff so that this information can be shared with other front line employees.

Training

Providing customer service staff with appropriate training is key to ensuring they can provide the quality of service we expect for our customers. A detailed training plan will be developed for all our customer service staff to provide them with the technical and people skills required to handle the wide range of enquiries, challenges and problems that arise in the delivery of council services including disability awareness (this will include external training in deaf awareness). Rapidly changing customer needs and expectations are placing heavy demands on organisations and individuals seeking to deliver high standards of customer service. To succeed organisations are required to transform their approach to customers and individual needs and to have high levels of personal effectiveness as recognised Customer Service Professionals.

We aim to

- Ensure that all our front line staff are trained to an agreed level of Customer Care.
- Provide appropriate training that supports the Disability Discrimination Act and other relevant equalities legislation.

15. Best value services

Ensuring that we are cost effective and deliver best value services is essential. We are actively evaluating our services and making significant process improvements to services. This means that we will not only deliver quality services, but will also strive to examine what we do and how we do it. We will re-engineer our services around customers requirements and modernise the way we deliver those services.

We aim to

- Deliver best value services by ensuring we are competitive, comparing ourselves against other local authorities and private sector partners, consulting with our stakeholders and challenging existing ways of working.

16. Project management and managing risk

Ensuring that we manage change in delivery of our services and access channels will be essential.

We aim to

- Ensure that we run professional project management (based on PRINCE2 methodology) during the delivery of this strategy and deliver quality solutions that support our vision to deliver modern and effective council services.
- Identify and re-engineer our service processes if required
- Ensure that effective risk management is included in the way we deliver projects.

17. Marketing and communication

Recognising the importance of effective communications to residents concerning council services and the decisions it makes, we have held focus groups with the public discussing the best way we can communicate changes and development in service delivery.

We aim to

- Ensure that we actively communicate and market our services to ensure that take up is successful, measured and the needs of all customers are included.
- Ensure that our communication and marketing techniques recognise all our stakeholders including children, businesses, those requiring community languages or alternative formats.
- Market all communication in line with the Council's corporate community involvement policies.
- Develop, promote and monitor our communication standards to our stakeholders.

18. Our Performance Targets

Transactions

Public interaction & main E-Access channel take-up	Actual ('000s)		Forecast ('000s)		
	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Transaction type					
Local Service Websites Web site address where this service is available					
• volume of transactions	592	840	0	0	0
• Percentage take-up – 10% increase pa	1%	2%	12%	22%	32%
Telephone (i.e. telephone interactions where officers can access electronic information and/or update records on-line there and then, including interactions in contact centres):					
• volume of transactions	1402	2046	0	0	0
• Percentage take-up - 10% increase pa	3%	4%	14%	24%	34%
Face To Face/ Non Electronic (ie payment by cash or cheque, either face to face payment or postal cheque)					
• volume of transactions	46190	46233	0	0	0
• Percentage take-up	96%	94%	74%	54%	34%

Please note – the figures for 2005/2006 have been estimated from Dec 05 – Mar 06

Customer Contact Centre

2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
20% of queries resolved at first level	50% of queries resolved at first level	80% of queries resolved at first level

Customer Satisfaction

2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
70% Customers satisfied in accessing the Councils services	80% Customers satisfied in accessing the Councils services	90% Customers satisfied in accessing the Councils services

Appendix A

This survey was carried out by both the Front Desk at Ryedale House and by the Area Offices during the month of November 2005. The objective of the survey was to ascertain the public's perception of current access to our services.

The results are as follows:

Survey Question	% of Customers
Accessibility Of Council Services	
Very accessible	40%
Quite accessible	55%
Difficult to access	5%
Very difficult to access	0%
Web Usage	
Would use web for information	11%
Would not use web for information	89%
Would make payments on web	22%
Would not make payments on web	78%
Phone Usage	
Have made transactions on phone	50%
Have not made transactions on phone	50%
Customer Centre	
Would prefer a Customer Centre to use	83%
Would not use a Customer Centre	17%

Appendix B

Call Stats - October			
Department	Total Incoming Calls	Quick Calls	% of Quick Calls
Benefits	912	387	42.4%
Chief Officers	45	19	42.2%
Computers	448	301	67.2%
Community Safety	99	46	46.5%
Council Tax	1292	536	41.5%
Cultural Services	201	95	47.3%
Development Control	1508	846	56.1%
Commercial Services	718	387	53.9%
Economic Development	364	218	59.9%
Environmental Health	1187	732	61.7%
Elections	334	275	82.3%
Financial Services	292	164	56.2%
Housing Services	1025	600	58.5%
Interview Rooms	5	3	60.0%
Legal Services	140	80	57.1%
Forward Planning and Conservat	543	296	54.5%
Member and Customer Support	774	603	77.9%
HR	614	523	85.2%
Performance Management	84	44	52.4%
Policy	77	36	46.8%
Property Management	340	230	67.6%
Registrar	29	10	34.5%
Switchboard	8992	8897	98.9%
Total	20023	15328	76.6%

Appendix C – taken from the Government connect website

Government Connect is an initiative led by local authorities, the ODPM and the e-Government Unit of the Cabinet Office. It brings together a range of essential tools, from technical solutions to practical advice, which will enable the improvement of e-Government service delivery channels and improve service delivery to the front line.

Government Connect is about providing a secure and sustainable framework, which enables local government and its partners across the public sector to deliver personalised joined up services to their customers and enable service improvement.

The implications for the successful delivery of Government Connect are far reaching and link up a number of wider Government themes such as:

- Efficiency improvements
- More cost-effective e-Government service delivery channels
- Support within the new CPA Framework
- One common, customer-focused approach
- Secure transactions online
- More convenient and flexibility in government.

"Government Connect's purpose is to help create better public services through the joining up of government. This is ambitious but achievable and something that we need to all strive to achieve." Steve Gallagher, Chair of the Government Connect Programme.

Appendix D – Taken from the local direct government website

Online facilities to be available to allow one stop direct access and deep linking to joined up A-Z information on all local authority services via website or shared R3 telephone contact centre using the recognised taxonomy of the Local Government Category List (Authorities using alternative service taxonomies (e.g. seamlessUK) should plan for migration to the LGCL by December 2005)

Customer Benefits

- New options for access to information for a wide range of customer groups.
- Information available outside normal contact hours or from distance in the case of non-residents.
- Information about services from more than one Council available at the same place

Council Benefits

- Because information held in common, can be used to serve a variety of channels, ensuring consistency of response
- More efficient distribution of customer access also, because on the web, it may redirect demand that would otherwise have come in over the telephone or face to face (more expensive channels)
- Options to integrate information services from multiple councils.
- Option to link to Directgov

All Councils

This outcome covers the issues surrounding A-Z information on council websites, information sharing between councils and links to Directgov. To fulfill the requirements of the outcome councils have to make A-Z information available on their websites as well as to call handling staff, and to categorise that information according to the Local Government Category List (LGCL) or the Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary (IPSV).

A number of other issues should be considered:

The Local Directgov Project is working with the national portal for Government services Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk/), to establish the infrastructure by which Local Government can contribute content. At this stage, a local authority would be advised to ensure that the means by which they hold their A-Z type information is readily extractable into an XML format, although this is not mandatory at present.

The Local Authority Websites (LAWS) project, in conjunction with the esd-toolkit has produced a mapping from the LGCL to the IPSV. This provides some comfort that this information can be provided over a National Infrastructure as well as in a purely Local Government domain.

The A-Z list of services must be “joined-up”- meaning it should have all council services listed in one place in two-tier areas. As a minimum it should include as many of the services on the LGCL as possible, although many councils will want to include services provided by partner agencies, such as the Customer’s Advice Bureaux, as well as relevant services provided by neighbouring councils. Most councils will want

to maintain the list and keep it up to date by use of a database with a number of nominated list editors, each being responsible for a group of service entries, although other approaches are acceptable. Some content managements systems support this – although councils should be careful to ensure that use of multiple category lists is supported if this is a facility they require.

Links themselves should, as a minimum, be “deep” links to pages giving detailed information on services.

Once the lists have been compiled they should be displayed on the council website and as a resource to staff handling telephone or personal callers. In making the lists available, councils should consider search mechanisms and different approaches to cross-referencing and indexing of the lists to make them easy to use.

In addition to the above, A -Z lists compiled by counties should include all the services provided by their districts. Approaches to syndicated content should be considered in this regard.