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Rochford District Council

Rochford District Council Access to Services Strategy

Rochford District Council

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5 December 2007

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Document control sheet

Client	Rochford District Council
Document Title	Rochford District Council Access to Services Strategy
Version	1.0
Status	For approval
Reference	
Author	Robyn Nuthall
Date	5 December 2007
Further copies from	**email: documents@tribalgroup.co.uk quoting reference and author**

Quality assurance by:	

Document history			
Version	Date	Author	Comments
1.0	5 December 2007	Robyn Nuthall	Review after Council feedback
04	15 November 2007	John McGuire	Internal Review

Contact details			
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Executive summary

1. This Access to Services Strategy lays out a strategy and high level plan to maintain and increase the quality of customer access to Rochford District Council services.

2. It includes information from new and existing customer research and insight which is used to drive key elements of the strategy.

Our Goal and Objectives for Customer Access

3. On the basis of the research presented as part of this report, and in order to support the Council's priorities, values and current good performance, the Council has developed the following goal and objectives for customer access:

    Rochford District Council aims to provide an excellent cost effective frontline service for its all customers.

Objectives:

4. The Council will:
    1. resolve 80% of our customers' queries at the first time they contact us and work to ensure our customers get to the right person first time
    2. provide information on the progress of customer inquiries for customers
    3. ensure that none of our residents are unfairly excluded from our services through age, ethnicity, disability or circumstance
    4. provide a joined up service to customers that makes it easier for them to access services and makes our services more efficient
    5. provide a choice of cost-effective access channels for customers to use
    6. ensure the processes used to fulfil customer requests are efficient and effective for the customer
    7. treat compliments, comments and complaints with systematic and timely responses, including careful investigation and updates for the customer

5. In delivering frontline customer service, the Council will work to the its primary values to:
    1. Act with integrity
    2. Be open and transparent about what we do
    3. Respect others and treat people courteously and equally
    4. Be responsive to customer needs and requests
    5. Always try and improve on what we do
    6. Work with others to improve what we do, both directly and through partnership working

Strategy Implementation, Service Model and Phasing

6. In essence, the most cost effective way to deliver these objectives is to:

    ¦   Introduce a customer relationship management approach and system to provide customer services

¦   To consolidate frontline services in two receptions, and one frontline customer service team

¦   Increase the level of training and information available to frontline staff

¦   Re-engineer customer-facing processes

¦   Introduce outreach services to smaller centres (Great Wakering, Hockley and Hullbridge) through partnership working.

Next Steps

7.   An action plan is being produced to manage the implementation of the strategy. The Council will develop a business case for the larger changes recommended in this strategy, and we will implement the cost-neutral elements in a planned and measured way.

Continuous Improvement and Change

8.   The Council's Members and officers are currently working together to refine the Council's priorities and values. At the same time the Community Plan is also being revised and refined both as new evidence is gathered and as the Local Strategic Partnership develops its vision and the outcomes it seeks.

9.   As a result of this, and the normal patterns of changing local issues, some elements of this strategy are likely to be reviewed over the period of its implementation.

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1 Introduction

1.1.1 Rochford District Council enjoys a high level of customer satisfaction over other similar authorities when customers are asked about it across the board, with about 62%[1] of surveyed customers indicating that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the way the Council runs things, higher than comparable councils in Essex County. The Council is one of the two top performers in its population size group (see graph below).
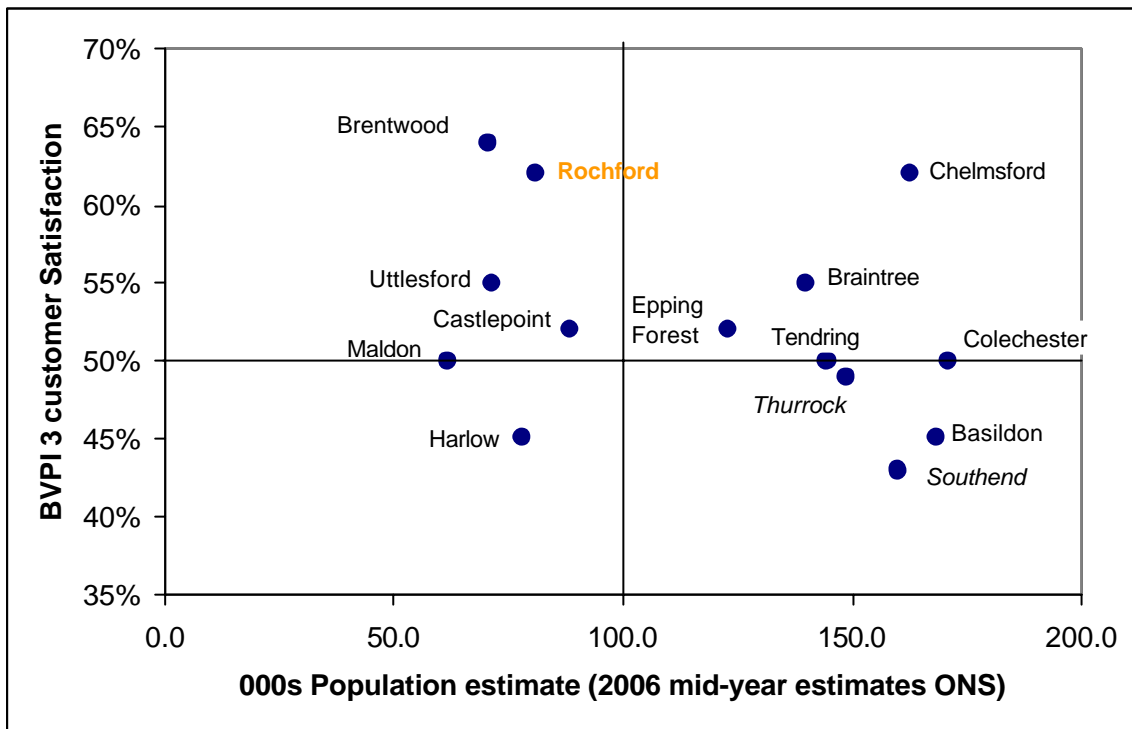
Figure 1: Overall satisfaction with the Council mapped against the population of the district. Two unitary councils are included in italics – sources ONS and the Rochford District's general survey from 2006.

1.1.2 Indeed, we have recently surveyed customer satisfaction[2] with the first point of contact and 85% of those surveyed (and who had had contact with the Council) agreed that they were satisfied with the standard of service they received (either agreed or strongly agreed).

1.1.3 While this is true, Rochford District does not want to rest on these laurels and, through this strategy, it aims to strive to match the national top performers with a 90% satisfaction with 'first contact' services.

1.1.4 The Audit Commission has challenged the Council to further improve its performance. In particular, it believes that the Council is lacking a strong knowledge base about its customers. Our investigations supported the view that the Council has information about

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[1] BVP3 2006/07 Best Value General User Survey for BVP3; this figure may be higher when only those who have used Council services are included. It is within the upper quartile of district councils in the Country.

[2] DJS Research Customer Preference Survey carried out for this strategy in October 2007.

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customers, but that this information is not held in a centrally accessible repository and that it is not widely understood. In addition the Audit Commission recommends that the Council use customer insight in developing an Access to Services Strategy which addresses the needs of each key customer group drawing on such a customer knowledge base.

1.1.5   This Access to Services Strategy is designed to address these challenges, while ensuring that the propositions in it are affordable. It lays out the background, issues and evidence, and the Council's strategic approach to continuing to support the high level customer satisfaction it enjoys, and to improve satisfaction with frontline services.

1.1.6   The approach we have taken is based on guidance from central government, Cabinet Office's National Standard for Customer Service and the Charter Mark approach. The stages of development recommended from these sources and used here are shown below:
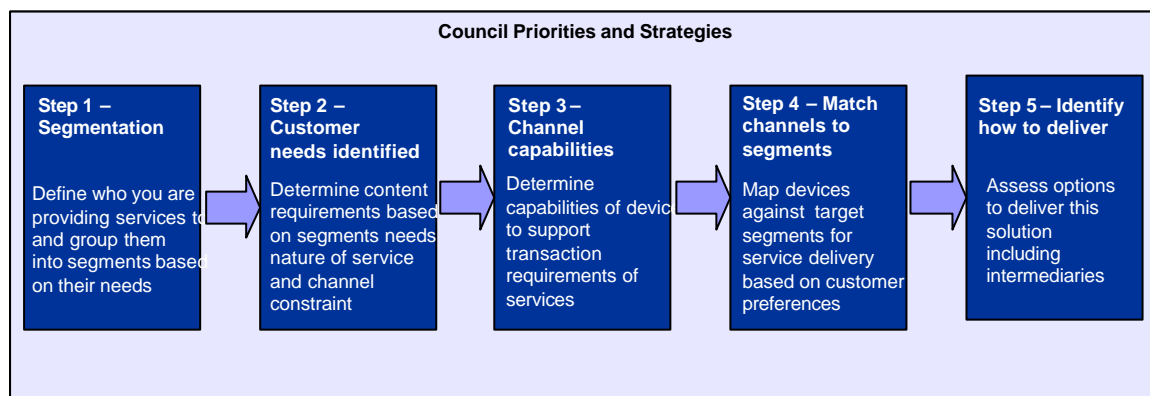
Figure 2: The development process for this document – *Source: Office of the e-Envoy Channels Framework, 2002.*

1.1.7   This approach is reinforced by the recent Varney Report ("Service Transformation – a better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer"), which encapsulates both best value approaches to which customer access channels to offer and the outcomes and benefits available from an excellent customer access strategy. We refer to this report within this Access to Services Strategy.

The principles for developing a strong customer access strategy are described by Varney as:

Know the citizens or businesses your organisation is trying to reach: how they think and behave, what matters to them and what channels might work best to achieve the desired outcomes for them;

Establish what type of contact your organisation and your customers need to have with each other (not necessarily just a continuation of the current system) based upon the nature of the services your organisation and partners provide;

Analyse the current channel of service access used by citizens and businesses, along with the channels' performance and reliability; and

Gather cost-to-serve data on current channels to know what channels actually cost you and calculate savings/investments for the future – see if you can identify patterns of transactions across channels, not just the cost of separate contacts and try to estimate the hidden cost of channel error and demand caused by failure.

1.1.8   In this document the Council investigates the Council's customers and their characteristics, identifies possible channels for access to services, matches the channels

with the customers, and considers the potential commercial options. This process is reflected in the document structure.

1.2 Document Structure

1.2.1 As an Access to Services Strategy, the document covers a wide ranging set of issues and the whole of the Council's customer base, and progressively becomes more specific until it finishes with a set of service recommendations which can be costed by the Council. This Access to Services Strategy has the following sections:

- Strategic context

- Customer segmentation

- Social inclusion

- Customer service channel analysis

- Channel access propositions

- Customer access service model

- Conclusions.

1.3 Consulting the Citizen on Access to Services

1.3.1 The Council has used citizen consultation and research as a basis for this strategy.

1.3.2 As this strategy is implemented, the Council will continue to consult our citizens on it. We will adopt a consultation approach which includes a citizens' panel reference group to act as critical friends through the next stages of the development. This may be linked to or include input from the Essex Youth Assembly Rochford representatives.

1.4 First Contact and Case Management

1.4.1 This Access to Services Strategy is focused on improving the experience and efficiency of the customers' first contact with the Council on a particular issue. Once a customer has engaged with the system and has a case manager, ongoing contact is very much the purview of the individual service.

1.4.2 The Access to Services Strategy is aimed at resolving as many customer issues as possible at the first contact, but when the issue needs to be managed as a case then the study is aimed at ensuring the best handover possible into the case management approach.

1.5 Definitions of Customer, Citizen, User, Constituent, and Client

1.5.1 There is often considerable debate about whether local authorities have customers or whether they interact with clients or users. This debate reflects the fact that the Council interacts with different people in different ways. We have used these terms in the following ways:

- **Access Channel** -- is a method of the customer contacting the Council or the Council contacting the customer. They include 'face to face' channels such as

reception areas, electronic channels such as the web and telephonic channel such as contact via land-land and mobile telephones.

¦ **First Contact** – the first time a citizen or customer contacts the Council about an issue.

¦ **Case Management** -- Once a customer has engaged with the system and has a case manager to manage the issue first raised and others which arise as a result.

¦ **Customers** – a catch all term for all those people who interact with the Council. This includes customers who live within the District and outside the Council's area

¦ **Citizens** -- residents of the Council who have a right to services from the Council

¦ **Constituents** – resident adults who actively engage in the democratic process

¦ **Users** – those people who have a right to access key services and do access services or those who benefit from the service through intermediaries.

1.6 Sources and Research

1.6.1 In this Access to Services Strategy we have used a range of research and information sources including:

¦ The Council's Geographic Information System unit and material from the Office of National Statistics (ONS)

¦ Research carried out for the Rochford Local Strategic Partnership by Local Futures

¦ 2006/07 Best Value General User Survey for BVPI3

¦ DJS Customer Preference Survey carried out through Tribal for this report in October 2007

¦ Access to Council Services Public Consultation focus group report October 2007

2 Strategic Context

2.1.1 Rochford District Council works with its public and private sector partners to ensure Rochford is a clean safe district with a high quality of life.

2.1.2 The Council has developed a Community Plan with local strategic partners including, among other partners, the Essex County Council, the Police and the local Primary Care Trust.

2.1.3 The key themes within the current Community Strategy revolve around:

- Feeling safe

- Looking after our environment

- A good education, good skills and good jobs

- Healthy living

- Getting around

- An inclusive community

2.1.4 The current Community Strategy also recognises the district's location within the Thames Gateway, a national priority area for regeneration identified by Central Government. For Rochford, the Council's long-term ambition is to be the green part of the Gateway, developing the area for leisure, recreation, culture and tourism.

2.1.5 In April 2006 the Council signed up to the Essex Local Area Agreement (LAA) which sets a shared agenda for local service providers. Over fifty public organisations came together as partners to focus on fourteen shared priorities grouped together under the following four blocks:

- Children and Young People

- Safer and Stronger Communities

- Healthier Communities and Older People

- Economic Development

2.1.6 By combining funds and agreeing a way forward, the LAA endeavours to increase efficiency and effectiveness. The LAA offers local government, the NHS, education providers and others the chance to leave behind organisational based working patterns and adopt common objectives. By focusing on these objectives the Council will improve the experience of its citizens and improve the way they work together. By adopting this approach, the Council aims to target services towards those in greatest need and achieve better value for money across Essex's public services as a whole.

2.1.7 Within this context, the Council's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership has already been recognised by the Government Office as one of the best performing Community Safety Partnerships in the region, exceeding the targets laid down in this area.

2.2 The Council's Priorities

2.2.1 The Council's vision is to make the district "the place of choice in the County to live, work and visit". The Council aims to achieve its vision through focussing on its six corporate aims to:

- Provide quality, cost effective services

- Work towards a safer and more caring community

- Provide a green and sustainable environment

- Encourage a thriving local economy

- Improve the quality of life for people in our district

- Maintain and enhance our local heritage

2.2.2 In achieving this vision it will carry out our work in accordance with the Council's values which are to:

- Act with integrity

- Be open and transparent about what we do

- Respect others and treat people courteously and equally

- Be responsive to customer needs and requests

- Always try and improve on what we do

- Work with others to improve what we do, both directly and through partnership working

2.2.3 This Access to Services Strategy is designed to support both the Council's corporate priorities and values and as these are refined the strategy will be adapted to continue to support them.

2.3 Key Strategic Issues for the Council and its Customers

2.3.1 While the Council is working to strive to exceed its already high levels of customer satisfaction, it is facing a set of key issues in the community which may affect the quality of life in the district, for better or worse. Our assessment of these key issues is that they are:

- **Rochford's residents are passionate about development** -- While one group passionately wants to protect the green belt, others want to develop their own properties for personal benefit. Development control is the most prominent area of citizen involvement with Council decision-making and can be the most controversial. These passions extend to the nature and size of building developments in the district.

- **Rubbing points between young and old** – when surveyed residents indicate that the most important issue for them is ensuring young people have things to do and that parents ensure their children have things to do. There are particular but low level tensions which relate to this in selected areas of the district.

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- **The aging population** – As with most of England, Rochford District has an aging population, with a lower proportion of children and young adults than the rest of the East of England. The district is forecast to see a rise of 33% in those aged 65 to 84 and a rise of 53% in those aged 85 and over between 2007 and 2029.

- The impact of the **Olympics,** the development of **Wallasea Island** and the new **London Gateway Port at Shellhaven** – the District is proud of its heritage and its woodlands, but it is not an identified tourist destination. These three key developments planned to commence in the next few years may increase the short break tourism seen in the area and thus provide a boost to the economy.

- **Rochford town centre** – there is some evidence of empty shops and lower levels of business in Rochford town centre. The Council has addressed this with new retail provision and a quality housing development in the town centre. A further town centre study is underway to provide a long term planning framework to under pin the work.

Age group	Rochford 2001 (Census data)	Rochford 2007 (ONS estimate)	Rochford 2029 (ONS estimate)	% change 2007 to 2029 (calculated)
0 to 14	14,572	14,400	14,000	-2.9%
15 to 24	8,028	8,800	8,700	-1.1%
25 to 64	42,185	42,700	43,300	1.4%
65 to 84	12,182	13,500	20,000	32.5%
85 +	1,522	1,800	3,800	52.6%
Total	78,489	79,400	86,000	7.7%

Figure 3: Population measures and estimates for the District for each age group. – *source Office of National Statistics*.

2.4 The Vision – One Rochford – the Seamless Front and Back Office

2.4.1 The Council's Senior Management Team has agreed an overall vision for the way that customers experience and perceive service at the Council.

2.4.2 The Council's Corporate Director, Internal Services, John Honey, describes this vision in the following ways:

2.5 The Resident

"What I like about Rochford District Council is that although I can do almost everything I need to online whenever I want, I can always speak to someone if need be. The person who answers the phone can usually deal with my queries themselves even when I want to talk about several different matters. I can speak to the case officer if the subject is a bit personal or complicated.

"I telephoned the other day about refuse collection. Once that was sorted out, the Information Officer who answered the phone was also able to talk to me about my email to their Transportation Team and let me know that my vouchers were in the post.

"Of course, there are times when I prefer to speak to someone face to face.

"When I visit the Council, I am always greeted with a smile. The receptionists have time to listen to me and I don't feel as if I am intruding. The reception area is spacious, light and airy. There is a lot of information there and sometimes I find I don't need to speak to anyone at all. Browsing through the library area or using the self service computers, I can find most things for myself.

"I can get help to look at planning applications, see what the Council proposes for future development and get advice on all kinds of things from recycling to planning and building matters. And if I need to see a case manager, I can make an appointment at a time that suits me."

2.6   The Front Desk

"I look after people. I am the first person visitors see when they arrive and I know their impression of me is their impression of the whole Council. I work on the reception desk in shifts so I am not "front of house" all day every day. Sometimes I work at Rayleigh or in our satellite receptions in Wakering, Hockley and Hullbridge.

"I need to know what is going on and to have an understanding of most Council services so I do a lot of training and get regular updates. It can be challenging but I feel valued and the pay reflects that I am more than just a receptionist."

2.7   The Information Officer

"Some people think I work in a call centre but it is more than that yet nothing like as big. I am the first contact for anyone telephoning the Council. I decide whether I can help them then and there or if they really do need to speak to one of our professional officers.

"Mostly I can assist because I have a range of information at my fingertips and can pull contact details up on screen. I don't usually use a script except for some routine and repetitive inquiries. I receive extensive training but the Council recognises and rewards my "special" skills."

2.8   The Data Processor

"I am part of a large team, the hub of the authority. Everything comes through here. We scan and index correspondence, plans and documents.

"Some of us are specialists in particular service areas and do the administrative work that supports officers on the front line, processing applications. We maintain the Council's records and keep its registers up-to-date handling everything from tree preservation orders to the electoral roll.

"I like dealing with people and get the chance to go on switchboard and reception from time to time although not everyone in the team wants to do that."

2.9 The Professional Officer

I am a qualified professional. The set up here allows me to get on with my job without getting bogged down in admin. Most things are managed electronically. I receive mail, daily work plans, etc at my desk or wherever I happen to be and I get on with it. I rarely get involved with routine enquiries. My contact with the public is usually focussed on the job in hand and I like having time to concentrate on that.

2.10 Our Goal and Objectives for Customer Access

2.10.1 On the basis of the research presented as part of this report, and in order to support the Council's priorities, values and current good performance, the Council has developed the following goal and objectives for customer access:

Rochford District Council aims to provide an excellent cost effective frontline service for its all customers.

2.11 Objectives:

2.11.1 The Council will:

1. resolve 80% of our customers' queries at the first time they contact us and work to ensure our customers get to the right person first time

2. provide information on the progress of customer inquiries for customers

3. ensure that none of our residents are unfairly excluded from our services through age, ethnicity, disability or circumstance

4. provide a joined up service to customers that makes it easier for them to access services and makes our services more efficient

5. provide a choice of cost-effective access channels for customers to use

6. ensure the processes used to fulfil customer requests are efficient and effective for the customer

7. treat compliments, comments and complaints with systematic and timely responses, including careful investigation and updates for the customer.

2.11.2 In delivering our frontline customer service, the Council will work to the its primary values to:

1. Act with integrity

2. Be open and transparent about what we do

3. Respect others and treat people courteously and equally

4. Be responsive to customer needs and requests

5. Always try and improve on what we do

6. Work with others to improve what we do, both directly and through partnership working

3 Customer Segmentation

3.1.1 In order to develop this strategy we have assessed existing research into the Council's customers and we also carried out a survey of a representative sample of 300 residents.

3.2 The Age Profile of Our Residents

3.2.1 Overall Rochford has a similar age profile to the wider region, the East of England, but with some key exceptions:

¦ Fewer young adults aged 19 to 31 than in the East of England

¦ Fewer young children than the East of England (0 to 4)

¦ Overall more aged 52 to 69 than in the East of England

¦ Marginally more older adults aged 80 and over.
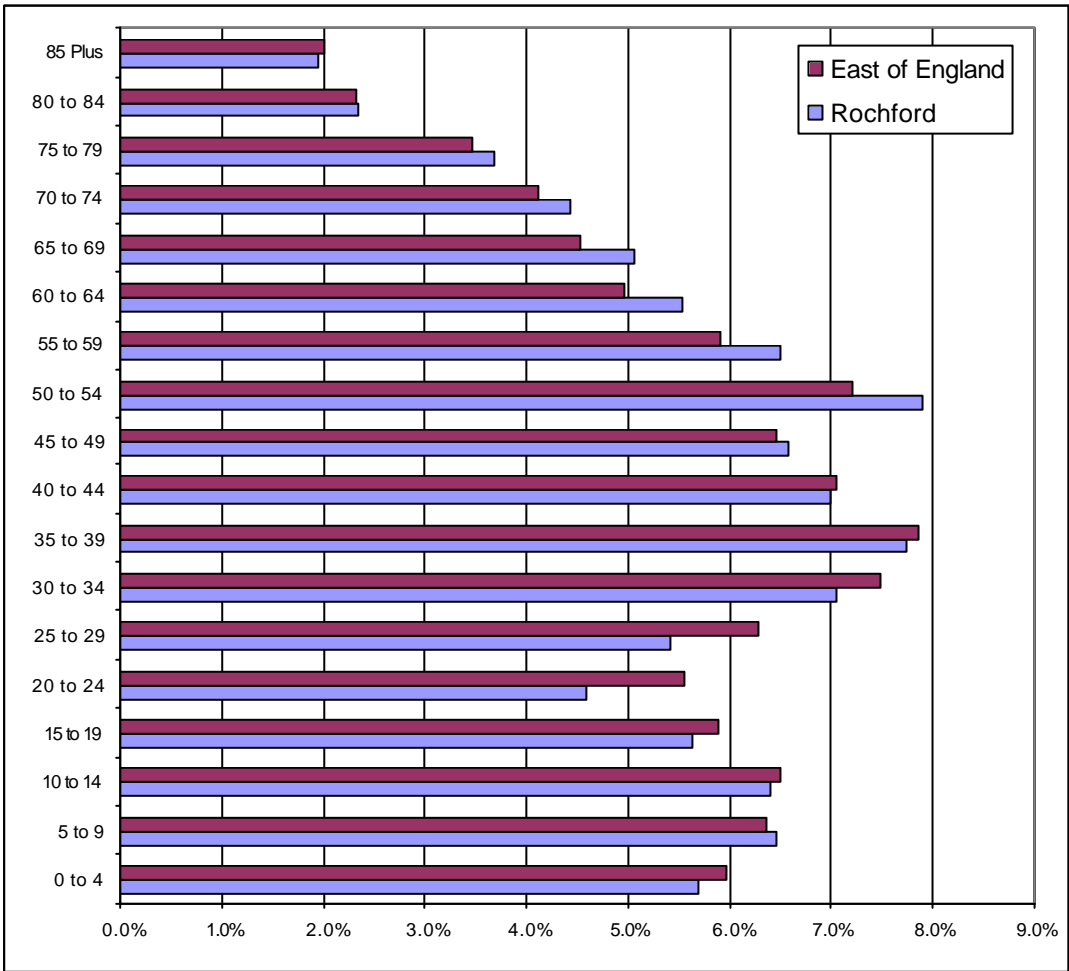
Figure 4: The age profile of residents in Rochford District – source Census 2001, Office of National Statistics.

3.3 Ethnicity

3.3.1 Rochford district has a very low non-white population with only 1.7% of the population stating that they are non-white in the 2001 Census.

3.3.2 Residents also think that their communities are tolerant of diversity -- 52% agree that 'this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together' (24% don't know)[3].

Ethnic Group	Rochford	East of England	England
White	98.31%	95.12%	90.92%
Mixed	0.59%	1.08%	1.31%
Asian or Asian British	0.50%	2.26%	4.58%
Black or Black British	0.22%	0.90%	2.30%
Chinese or Other	0.37%	0.65%	0.89%

Figure 5: The ethnic make-up of the Rochford population measured in the 2001 Census – source ONS.

3.3.3 Not only are there fewer non-white residents in the District, but there are fewer residents (as a proportion of the total population) who are not born in the United Kingdom.

Figure 6: Rochford has a significantly lower proportion of residents who are not born in the UK.
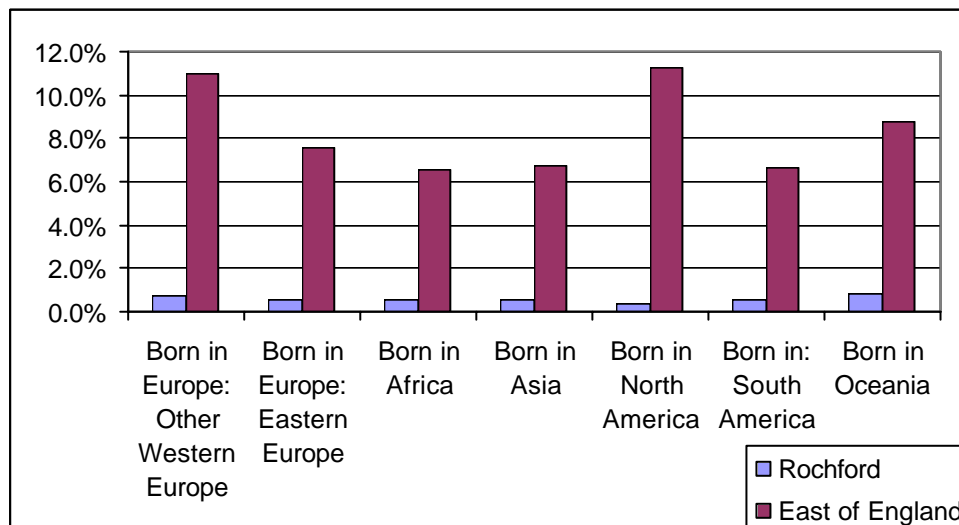
3.4 The Lifestyle Profile of Our Residents

3.4.1 Rochford district has a very low level of unemployment with only 1% of the working age population identified as unemployed.

3.4.2 There is a slightly lower proportion of the working population who are knowledge workers than in the rest of the East of England, but Rochford District has about the same proportion as the rest of Great Britain[4].

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[3] BVP3 2006/07 Best Value General User Survey for BVP3.

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3.4.3   The 2001 Census indicates that Rochford has an unusually high proportion of workers who work from or very near to home (24% of workers). Only 16% for East of England and 14% for England are grouped in this category. Eighty-six percent of workers, work less than 10 km from home. This may be related to the higher proportion of self employed trades workers in the district.
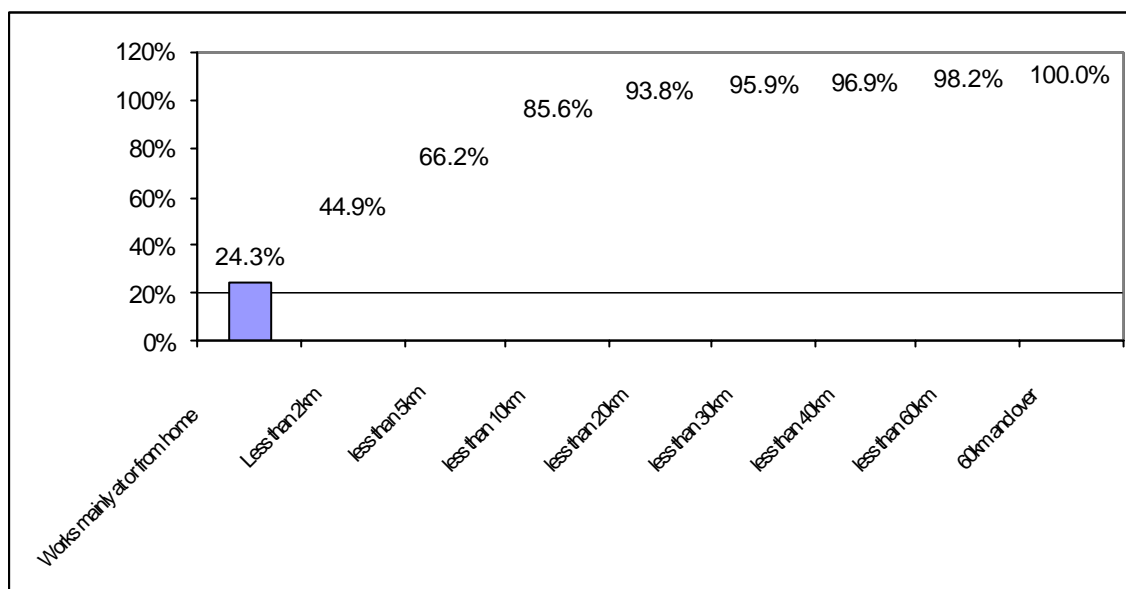
Figure 7: A Pareto diagram which shows the cumulative proportions of the working population which travels each distance. – source 2001 Census, ONS.

3.4.4   There are about 44,300 vehicles in the district in the approximately 32,000 households[5].

3.4.5   Rochford district currently has proportionately fewer single person households than other surrounding districts and the second highest average household size (2.5 persons per households) in Essex districts.

3.5   Customer Segmentation

3.5.1   Considering the Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement, and the Council's Priorities, along with an over all profile of the Council's customers, we have segmented the Districts' customers so that we can then consider how services will be delivered to each group.

3.5.2   We have grouped customers into groups using the following dimensions:

⋮   Democratic and geographic divisions

⋮   Resident or visitors either as individuals or grouped into households

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[4] Research carried out for the Council by Local Futures Group in October 2007.

[5] Both statistics from the 2001 ONS Census.

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⋮ Age groups, including working age and status

⋮ Businesses and organisations

⋮ Potentially socially excluded residents and visitors including mobility status and over-laying all groups.

3.5.3 Each of these dimensions produces a set of sub-groups, for example, resident or visitor status, provides two groups – those who are resident in the area and those whose are tourist or visitors. The result of this grouping is shown in the following diagram.
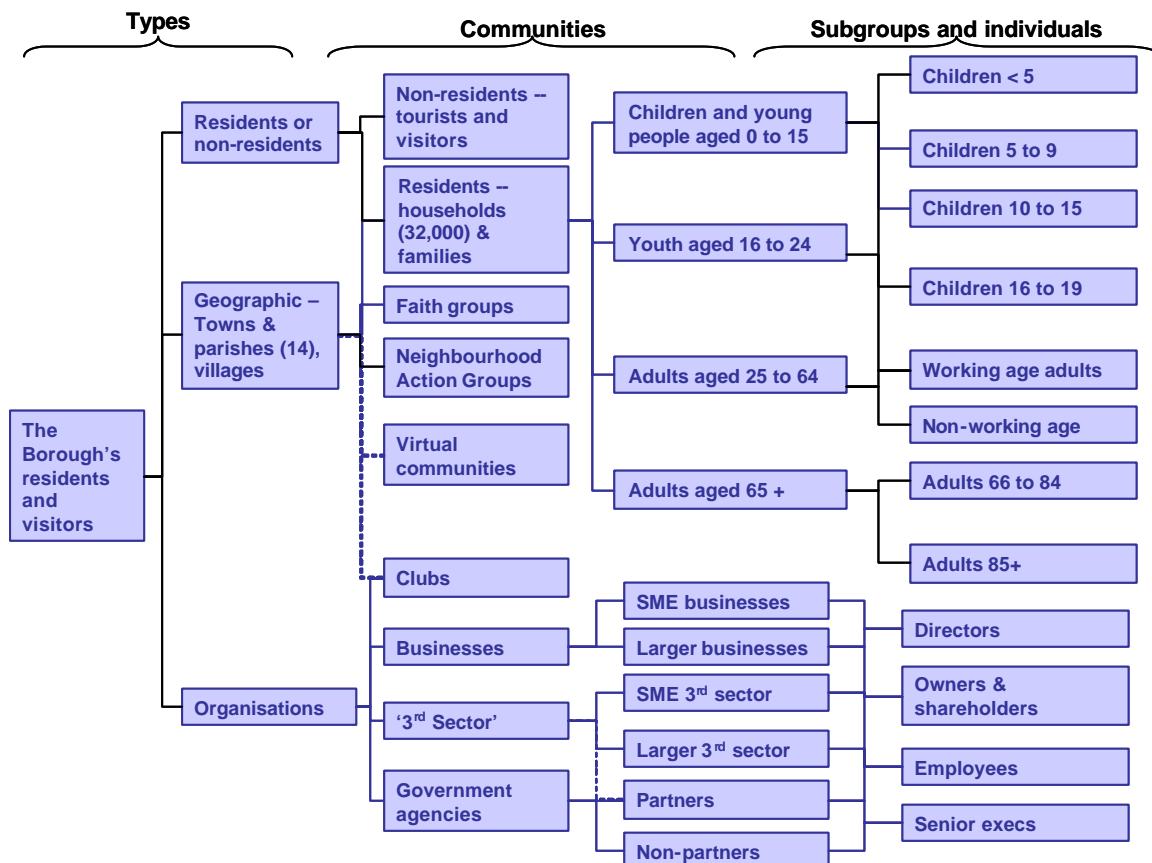
Figure 8: The customer segmentation tree for Rochford District's customers.

3.5.4 We have also included in this customer segmentation tree a small group of social and community groups such as faith groups, Police Neighbourhood Action Groups, clubs and virtual communities. These are groups which operate in the community and can be used as communication channels for harder to reach groups or special interest groups.

3.6 Geographic Segmentation

3.6.1 The District has four geographic groupings:

- Super Output Areas set by the ONS

- 14 Towns and Parishes

- 19 Wards

- 3 Areas, as defined by area committees.

3.6.2 Super Output Areas are the smallest areas of analysis set out for the district, are set by the ONS and are of about equal size in population. Super Output Areas (SOAs) are small areas specifically introduced to improve the reporting and comparison of local statistics.

3.6.3 Within England and Wales there is a Lower Layer (minimum population 1000) and a Middle Layer (minimum population 5000). Unlike electoral wards, these SOA layers are of consistent size across the country and are not subjected to regular boundary change.

3.6.4 The Towns and Parishes are all associated with local councils and some have permanent staff and publicly accessible buildings.

3.6.5 Wards are represented by Councillors on the District Council.

3.6.6 The Areas are represented by Area Committees of Councillors.. The towns and parishes included in each of the areas are:

- **West** – Rayleigh and Rawreth

- **Central** – Hullbridge, Hockley and Hawkwell

- **East** – Rochford, Ashingdon, Canewdon, Foulness, Stambridge, Paglesham, Barling, Sutton and Great Wakering

3.7 Potential Social Exclusion Indicators

3.7.1 We explore the dimensions of social exclusion in the next section.

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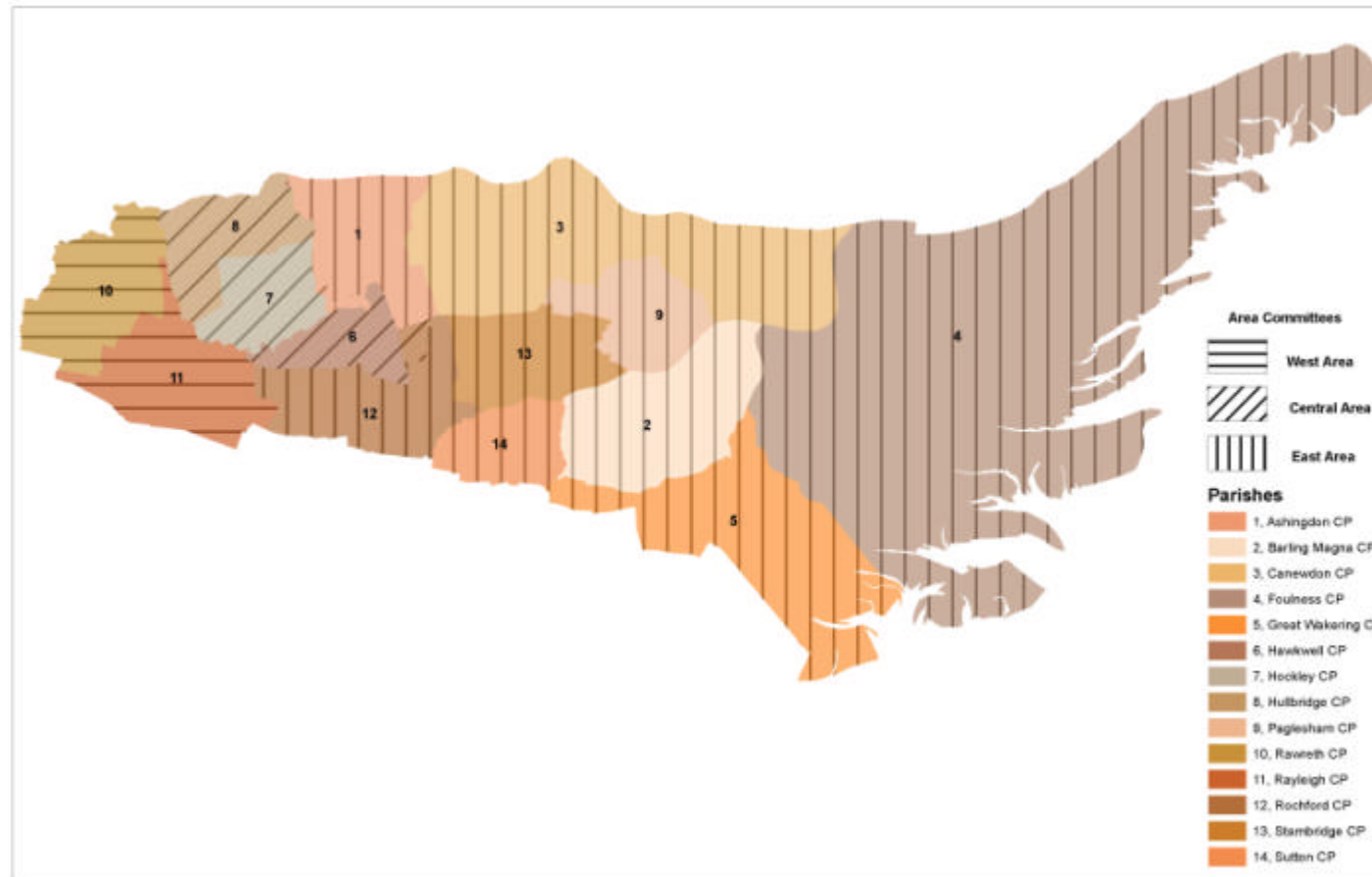
Figure 9: Area Committees and towns and parishes; the areas include two or more towns or parishes. The East Area Committee covers most with nine parishes in the area.

4 Social Inclusion

4.1.1 The Council has a Social Inclusion Policy to "make sure that no-one is left out", and this policy identifies those groups which might be excluded from accessing services and the ways the Council is addressing this. The Council also has an Equalities Strategy which lays out its approach to equalities.

4.1.2 In this section we estimate the scale of possible social exclusion and how the Council is addressing this. We also include elements of Social Inclusion and Equalities Strategy policies and build on them for customer access.

4.1.3 Social exclusion can affect people in many different ways, to differing degrees and at different times in people's lives. It can be caused by three main types of living condition:

¦ the characteristics of the **environment** that people live in, for example the potential isolation of people living in rural areas with no transport

¦ The **social and economic circumstances** that they are in at that stage of their lives, such as those who have been the victims of crime and are less likely to brave social interaction

¦ **Characteristics of the person**, such as those who have visual impairment or those for whom English is a second and weak language.
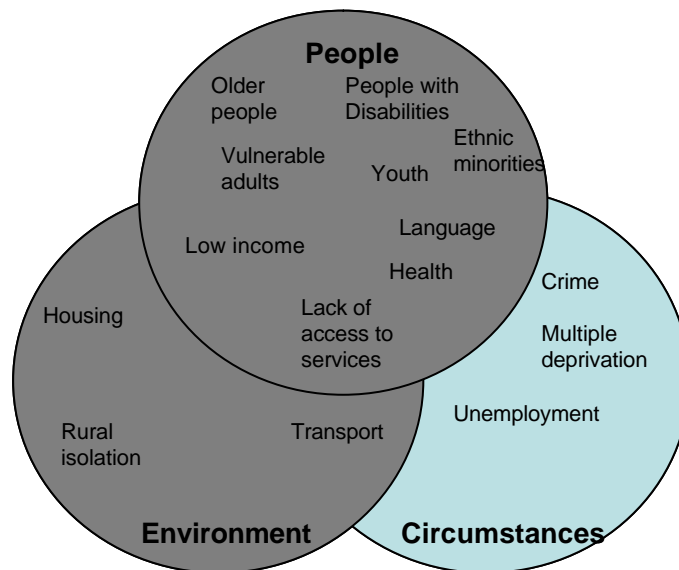
Figure10: There are three intersecting types of condition under which some residents live, which can conspire to create social exclusion – environmental, socio-economic and personal.

4.2 People-Oriented Social Exclusion Indicators and Scale

4.2.1 It is difficult to get exact figures for the scale of personal conditions which can indicate or cause social exclusion, but in this section we have tried to estimate the possible scale of a key set of indicators. These include:

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- 15.8% of all residents indicate that they have a long term limiting illness (the same as the East of England but slightly lower than the national average)

- 3.1% of those in the potentially economically active age group (16 to 74) are permanently sick or disabled (2001 Census) and thus are not economically active

- Our customer survey indicated that 7.7% were registered disabled (1.3% weren't sure or declined to answer)

- Across the whole country, 52% of those surveyed by the DWP who could be defined as disabled, did not consider themselves disabled.

4.2.2 From this, we might surmise that up to 16% of Rochford residents (over 6000 residents) might be at risk of unequal access (through disability) to services unless the Council takes active steps to ensure that frontline services are accessible to those with disabilities.

4.2.3 The total number of blind and partially sighted citizens in England has not been accurately measured (estimates range from 300,000 to 1M), and there is evidence that only 55% of those who could be registered are registered[6]. This research also showed that ethnic minority eye patients were three times as likely to be unregistered. Other research also shows that those who are blind or partially sighted are also more likely to be older with 83% and 82% of a group of registered blind and partially sighted patients being 65 or over[7].

4.2.4 There are significantly more people in the population who are deaf or have hearing loss than with sight loss, with an estimated 9M across the United Kingdom. Of these 71% are aged 60 or over. If the ratios are broadly proportionate with the national average, there are possibly as many as 11,700 people within Rochford with hearing loss of whom 71% are 60 or over.

4.2.5 It is estimated that British Sign Language is the first or preferred language of between 50,000 and 70,000 people in the UK[8]. Using the mid-point, this may mean that there are only about 80 people of all aged in Rochford District who used British Sign Language.

4.2.6 There were about 2600 non-white residents in the district, of whom a smaller group will have English as a second language. If being born out of the UK or English-speaking regions[9] is an indicator of English as a second language there at most there are about 1600 residents who fall into this category.

4.2.7 In summary, Rochford district has small numbers of people who have characteristics which make them vulnerable to social exclusion. The biggest group are likely to be those with hearing impairment.

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[6] Barry, R. J., and Murray, P. I., Unregistered visual impairment: is registration a failing system?, *British Journal of Ophthalmology* 2005;**89**:995-998; doi:10.1136/bjo.2004.059915.

[7] Bunce, C. and Wormald, R., Leading causes of certification for blindness and partial sight in England & Wales, BMC Public Health 2006, 6:58 doi:10.1186/1471-2458-6-58.

[8] RNID

[9] 2001 Census, born in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, South America.

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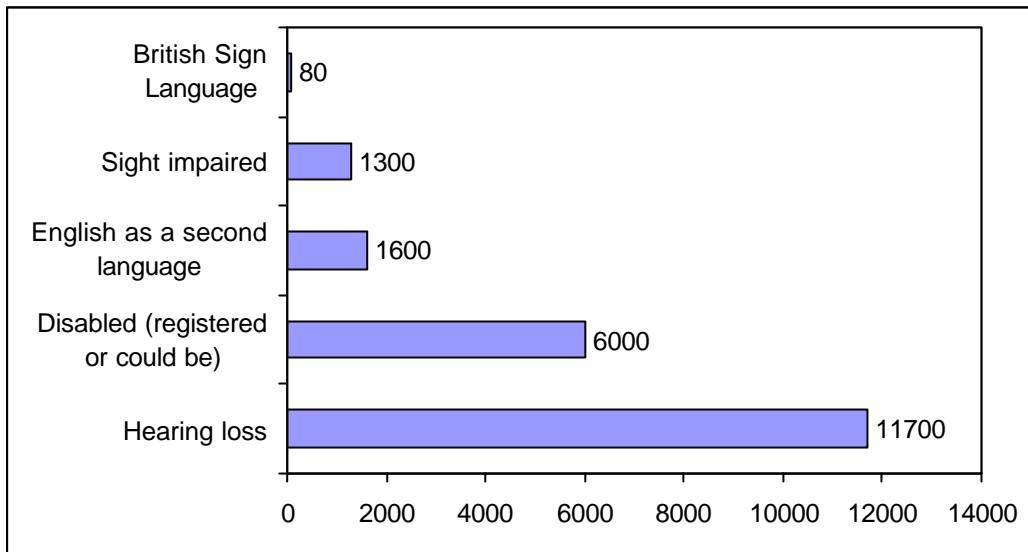
Figure 11: Rough estimates of the size of each group of potentially personally socially excluded groups in Rochford district.

4.3 Person-centred Legislation which governs the Council's Obligations

4.3.1 There is a set of laws which obligate the Council to address the needs of all those within these groups, and a set of national performance indicators which measure progress. The laws which address key elements of social inclusion include:

⦙ Disability Discrimination Act 2005

⦙ Race Relations Act 1976 and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

⦙ Human Rights Act 1998

⦙ Employment Act 1989

4.4 Environmental Social Exclusion Indicators and Scale

4.4.1 Rochford district includes some rural areas with limited access to services in general. For example, some areas have no access to public transport.

4.4.2 These areas with the characteristics of rural isolation are in the east of the district (and in the East Area Committee Area), where there is also very low population density.

4.4.3 The parishes which are most affected include eight of the nine in the East Area and Hullbridge:

⦙ Foulness

⦙ Great Wakering

⦙ Barling Magna

⦙ Canewdon

⦙ Paglesham

⦙ Stambridge

⦙ Sutton

⦙ Ashingdon

TRIBAL
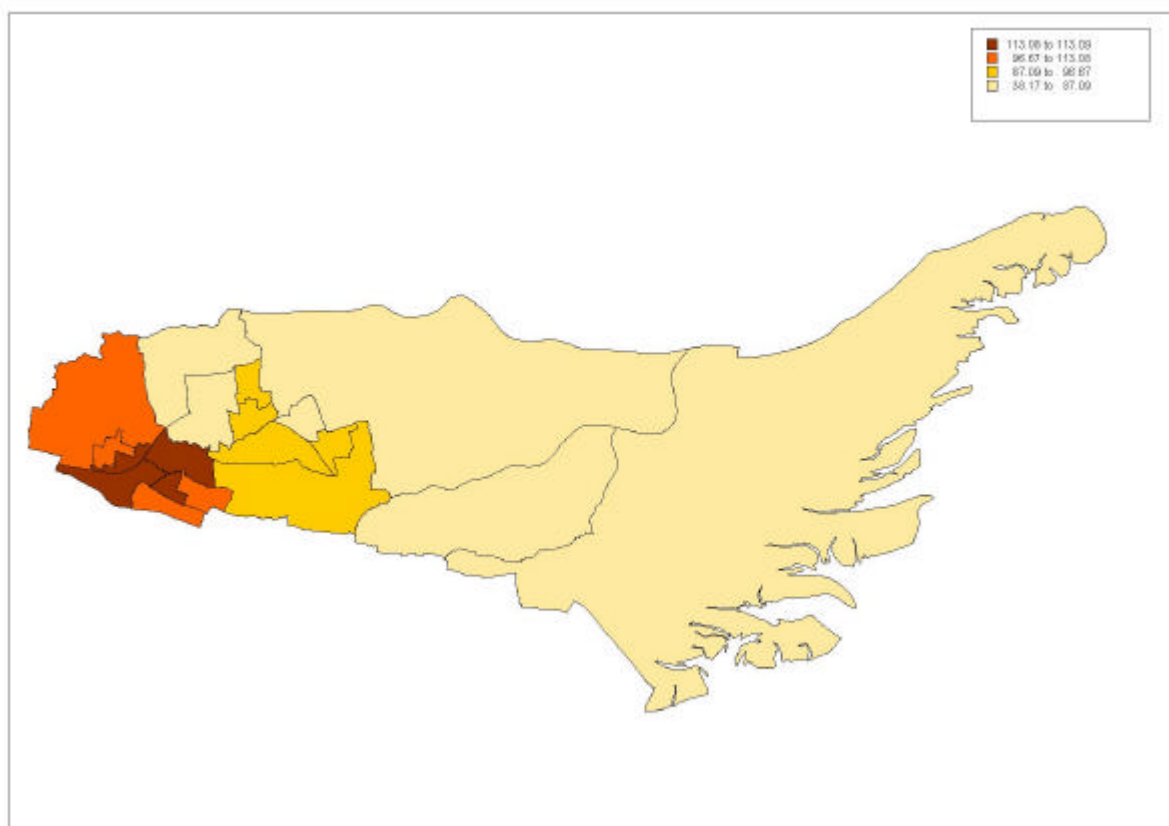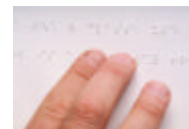
Figure 12: A map showing the SOA areas which have the most access to services (darker areas) and the least access to services (lighter areas) – source Local Futures and ONS.

4.4.4   Of these parishes with lower access to services, the only ones of significant population are Great Wakering and Hullbridge.

4.4.5   The district has only 1800 former Council-owned social housing dwellings.

4.5   Circumstance based Social Exclusion Indicators and Scale

4.5.1   The national Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004) is a blended measure which largely reflects circumstance-based indicators which can be linked to social exclusion.

4.5.2   Rochford District does not have high levels of deprivation in comparison with the rest of England.

4.5.3   We have mapped the areas with are most deprived relative to the rest of the District and this indicates that two areas are in the most deprived for the area, although not very deprived relative to the rest of the country.

4.5.4   The more deprived areas are in Rayleigh and Rochford.

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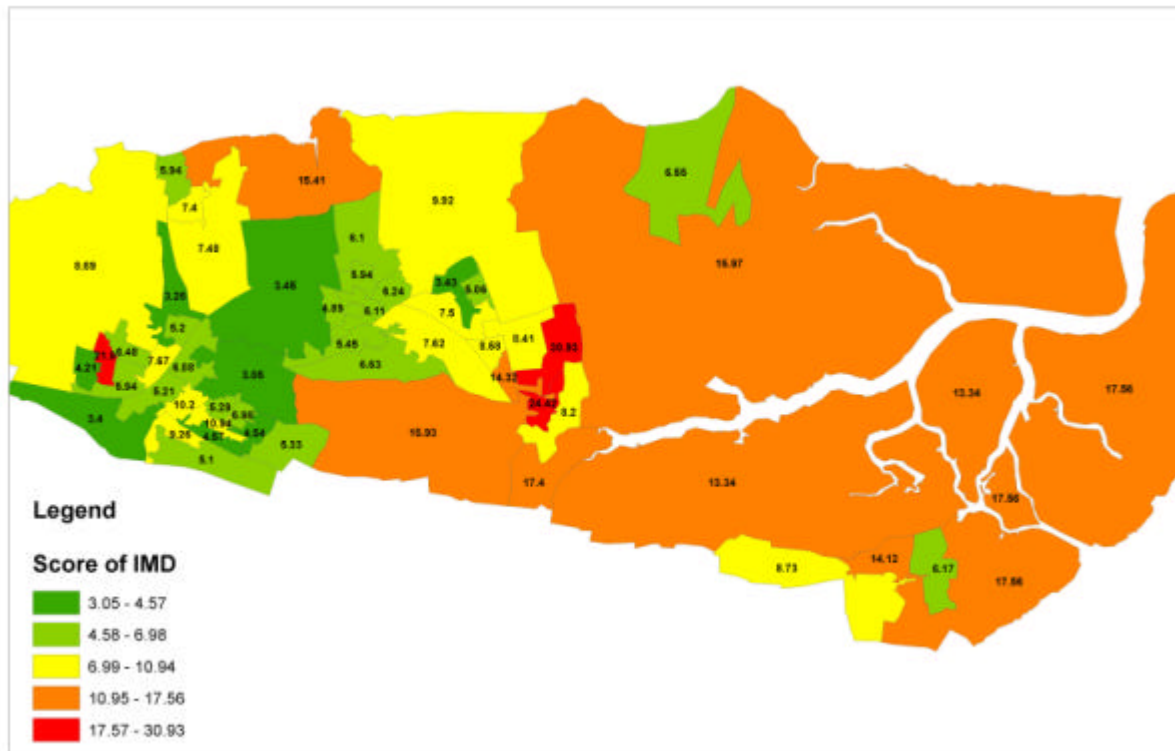
Figure 13: Rochford District showing areas (SOA) which are more deprived than the rest of the district. Those areas which are relatively more deprived are in red – national Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 and ONS.

4.6 Combinations of Social Exclusion Indicators

4.6.1 There are a small number of combined indicators which can show higher levels of risk. These are combinations of:

 ¦ Living in social or low value housing, or homeless

 ¦ Living alone

 ¦ Living with long term debilitating illness

 ¦ Key age groups

4.6.2 For example, there is some evidence that youths who live in social or low value housing are more at risk of committing anti-social behaviour than those who do not or elderly persons living alone and with few social connections are more likely to suffer ill-health.

4.6.3 We explore the specific needs of key age groups later in the report.

4.7 Council Policies and Approach

4.7.1 The Council's Social Inclusion Policy includes the following objectives:

- To ensure that equality and diversity are seen as a priority in all policy development and service planning

- To make a positive action to ensure that all sections of our community have equal access to information and services

- To consult, involve, and encourage the participation of all sections of the community

- To ensure equal access to employment, setting an example to other organisations through employment procedures and practices that eliminate discrimination.

4.7.2 The Council completed schemes in place for Race Equality and Disability in December 2006[10] and has implemented a process for impact assessment of each key policy or strategy. These schemes include three key elements:

- Goals, objectives, standards, and plans

- Consultation and communication frameworks

- Monitoring in the form of equality impact assessment (EQIA) across all services.

4.7.3 The Council intends to achieve the Equality Standard at some stage in the future to support its approaches to addressing social exclusion. The standard has five levels of achievement and the Council is at level 2 at present and is working towards level 3:

- **Level 1** – Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy

- **Level 2** – Assessment and consultation

- **Level 3** – Setting equality objectives and targets

- **Level 4** – using information systems and monitoring against equality targets

- **Level 5** – achieving and reviewing outcomes.

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[10] Reported in Corporate Equalities Action Plan December 2006.

TRIBAL

Cantonese	Gujarati	Spanish
如果您需要放大字體、點字或另一種語言的此資訊，請電 01702 546 366	આ માહિતી મોટા અક્ષરોમાં, બ્રેઈલમાં કે બીજી ભાષામાં જોઈતી હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને ફોન કરો 01702 546 366·	Si desea esta información impresa en letra grande, Braille o en otro idioma, por favor llame al teléfono 01702 546 366
Urdu	**Portuguese**	**Bengali**
اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات بڑے حروف، بریل یا کسی اور زبان میں چاہیں تو براہ مہربانی فون 01702 546 366 کریں	Caso necessite desta informação em impressão maior, em Braille ou noutra língua, por favor contacte 01702 546 366	আপনি যদি এই তথ্য বড় হরফে, ব্রেইল অথবা অন্য কোনো ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে 01702 546 366 নম্বরে ফোন করুন।
Shona Kana uchida ruzivo, kana tsananguro iyi yakanyorwa nemavara makuru, kana kuthi yakanyorwa nerndimi rwemapofu, kana nerumwe rutimi, kana umwe mutauro sununguka kuti taurira panutare ronoti 01702 546 366·	If you would like this information in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546 366	

Figure 14: The Council's current standard multi-language panel which offers the document in other languages.

4.7.4   The Council regularly reviews which languages are most appropriate to quote in its translation and interpreting text panel. The most recent translations which have been required have been Chinese (Modern Standard) and Turkish and a further review is planned.

4.8   Using Services and Technology to Support Equality of Access

4.8.1   The Council currently uses a range of techniques to assist with frontline access to services for all. However, there does appear to be a patchy approach across the Council, as much decision-making is done at the service and directorate level.

Key tools used by the Council include:

- **Browsaloud** -- The website includes **browsealoud** which enables the website content to be read out.

- **Large text** – is available on the website.

- **Interpreting and translation** – The Council offers a range of language supports for those who need them.

- **Hearing loops** – the Council offers hearing loops at both its main customer service sites (Rayleigh and at both reception areas in Rochford)

- **Sign language** – British Sign Language is provided on request.

- **Minicom text phone** – the Council offers a Minicom service.

⁞ **SMS Text** – can be used to support communication with deaf or hearing impaired customers. The Council is to pilot SMS text services this year.

4.8.2   The Council has recently developed a flow chart to assist staff in offering interpreting services (which includes assistance for sight and hearing impaired customers) to ensure that staff across the whole organisation is able to support those for whom English is a second language.

4.8.3   A price and service review of the Council's translation and interpreting services was carried out in October 2007 to ensure value for money. This has ensured that the Council is using good quality services at a reasonable price.

4.8.4   In general, the Council organises appointments for those who need face to face interpreting services. As the demand for support for hearing impaired customers grows, it is possible that the Council might need to call on more immediate support, such as the SignVideo service.

Figure 15: An illustration of the services provided by the SignVideo service, which offers real-time sign language interpreting through a video conference link – source www.signvideo.me.uk.

T R I B A L

Services for non English speaking customers, and those with vision and/or hearing impairments

Customer...

| ...has hearing impairments | ...does not speak English | | ...has vision impairments |

Telephone or face to face interpreting
Translation of written documents
British Sign Language

Formatting of documents
into Large Print

Transcription of documents onto
Audio tape or CD
Formatting of documents into Braille

Language Direct
Tel: 020 8539 5142
languagedirect@onetel.com

Please contact
the Print Room
Ext: 3809

In Real Time Translation
0845 838 1051
mail@inrealtimetranslation.com

Telephone Interpreting
First 10 mins £10.00
£7.00 per 10 mins thereafter
Emergency + 50%

Face to face Interpreting
1st hour £25.50, £20 per hour thereafter
Eve, weekend, BH £38.50
Emergency + 50%Travel £13.00 p/h

Transcription onto Tape or CD
From £30 per item

Written Translation
First 200 words: £45.00
Per 100 words thereafter: £15.00
Urgent + 50%

British Sign Language
£66.00 per hour
Travelling cost £13.00 p/h
Minimum 3 hours

Braille
From £10 per page

Figure 16: The Council's translation and interpreting flow chart, which includes costs.

4.9 Social Inclusion Conclusions and Recommendations

4.9.1 The Council has a commitment to delivering accessible services which are fair to customers, and has implemented a good range of systems and services to address the possible disadvantage faced by some customers.

4.9.2 The Council is working hard to ensure it meets its obligations to provide equality of access and has achieved all that is has set out to deliver. Indeed the very low numbers of those who are in the group who are potentially unfairly excluded from the Council's services means that the relative costs of some provision is high for the number of people involved. The small numbers of customers involved, though, can also be an advantage.

4.9.3 The introduction of a customer relationship management system would enable the Council to pro-actively offer communications or service assistance to those who may wish to use these services.

4.9.4 It is recommended that the Council:

¦ *Introduce a customer relationship management system which is able to record the special needs of customers*

¦ *Work with the deaf community to consider a pilot SMS text service for those who have hearing impairment*

¦ *Investigate the cost-effectiveness of a call-off contract for British Sign Language interpreting using a video link*

¦ *Further review translation services.*

5 Customer Service Channels

5.1.1 This section of the strategy report investigates the current customer access channels and how well they are performing for the Council and its customers.

5.2 Current Customer Access Channels

5.2.1 The Council currently offers:

- Telephone services through a main switchboard and about 200 direct dial lines

- Face to face services at the Rochford site and the Rayleigh site

- A newly redeveloped website for PC or mobile phone

- Fax communications

- Email services through generic emails and direct personal email addresses

- Letter or postal access to services

- The Council is about to embark on piloting SMS text for customers this year.

5.2.2 The Council is well into the process of implementing electronic document management using the Comino system to assist with the efficiency of end to end customer service processes.

5.2.3 We have used two methods to estimate the number of customer contacts through each channel – surveys and actual measures of contact. This has provided a range of estimates of the number of contacts through each channel which are customer-initiated.

5.2.4 There is no doubt that the telephone is the most common way of contacting the Council, with a visit the second most likely to be used, and web, email or letter the third most likely (depending on how the contacts are measured).

Source:	2006 Survey	2007 DJS survey	2007 Citizen Panel	Various
Measure:	Recalled last	Recalled last	Most likely to use	Measured Contacts
Telephone	59.0%	69.2%	57.0%	48.3%
Person	19.7%	19.2%	5.0%	4.6%
Letter	12.9%	3.8%	10.0%	13.6%
Email[11]	5.0%	2.9%	22.0%	14.6%
Website[12]	3.1%	5.0%	6.0%	18.9%
Other	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Figure 17: Estimates and measures of the current channel mix.

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[11] We have made the assumption that 25% of recorded email contacts are first contact with the public emails.

[12] The method of recording unique visitors measures the IP address of the inquirer, thus a person who accesses the site from both at home and at work is recorded twice. We adjusted the higher total visitors by the surveyed figure of the proportion of responses in our survey that name home among the places selected (39.7% of total places selected by all respondents).

5.2.5   Our review of these ways of estimating the proportion of contacts through each channel indicates that there appears to be a much higher proportion of email traffic than is recalled by users. This is explored later in this section on channel use, preference and value for money.

5.2.6   Both the 2006 Survey and the citizen panel survey are postal surveys, the DJS survey is a telephone survey. The postal surveys show a higher recalled use of post than the telephone survey, which shows a higher telephone channel use. Thus the channel used to conduct surveys seems to lend a bias towards that channel in customers recalling use.

5.2.7   There is a significant variation in the estimated proportion of contacts which are through face to face visits. The actual visitor figures exclude the visits to the planning reception area and so are likely to be underestimated.

5.2.8   Overall the actual measured contacts identified a total of 1.2M contacts; of which approximately 340,000 are by telephone.

5.3   Future Customer Access Channels

5.3.1   Customer access channels which are not currently catered for are:

- Instant messaging (such as MSN)

- Out-door kiosks

- Digital TV

- Gaming console

- Digital radio.

5.3.2   The list of possible devices and channels is likely to change over the next five years. Even ten years ago, some of the devices available today would barely have been imagined. This underlines the need for the Council to maintain a flexible approach to channel choice, and to regularly scan the horizon for new and useful technologies.

5.3.3   The emergence of new technologies also means that the Council will have to make increasingly difficult decisions about which technologies to reject. Constraints on budgets and resources will inevitably limit the Council's ability to "cover all the bases". In Tribal's experience, it is harder for any organisation to drop an old way of doing business, than it is to rise to the challenge of a new one. Worse still, new technologies and channels (e.g. SMS messaging, 3G telephony, interactive digital TV) seem to arrive at a faster rate than the older ones (e.g. fax) are disappearing.

5.4   Selecting the Right Channels for the Council's Customers

5.4.1   We have considered introducing additional communication channels for customers and whether the communication channels that we offer are fit for purpose. We have used two ways of assessing these channels:

- what they are capabable of and

- what our customers want.

5.4.2   The channels that are not currently offered have significant limitations in providing the quality of interaction that we need with our customers, with the exception of instant messaging:

⫶ The limitations of the use of digital TV, gaming console, and digital radio are that they are not able to support user-friendly interactive contact with customers

⫶ Outdoor kiosks have been shown elsewhere to be more limited in what customers are happy to use them for and have relatively low uptake by customers

⫶ Instant messaging (which is the web-based equivalent to SMS texts on mobile phone) is increasingly being used by the private sector for help-line style support. It is user-friendly and may have a future in local authority customer access. However, the costs of being a trail blazer in using this technology are likely to be too high at present.

Figure18: Current channel capabilities.
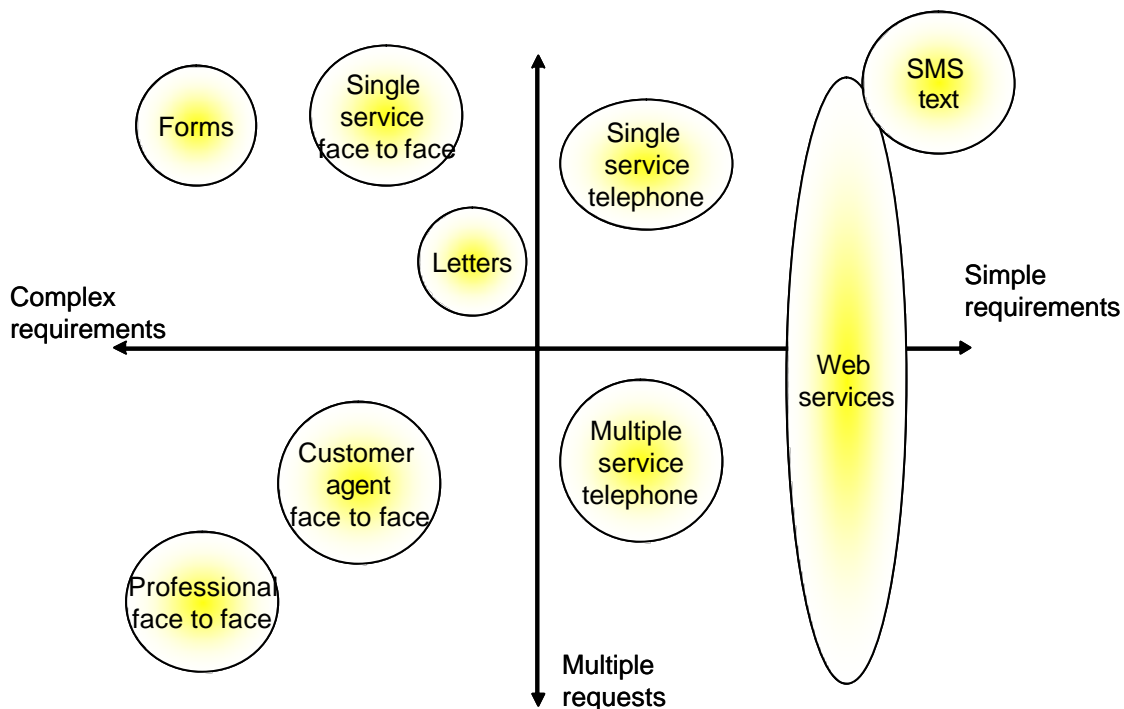
5.5 Customer Channel Preference

5.5.1 We surveyed customers on which channel they prefer to use for key types of transaction. The following diagram shows the results and reinforces the importance of the telephone for the Council's customers.

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	Phone	Personal visit	Website	Email	Letter
Simple information	57%	9%	26%	6%	1%
Simple transaction	55%	22%	17%	4%	1%
Complex inquiry	40%	55%	3%	1%	1%
Payment	29%	26%	18%	4%	23%
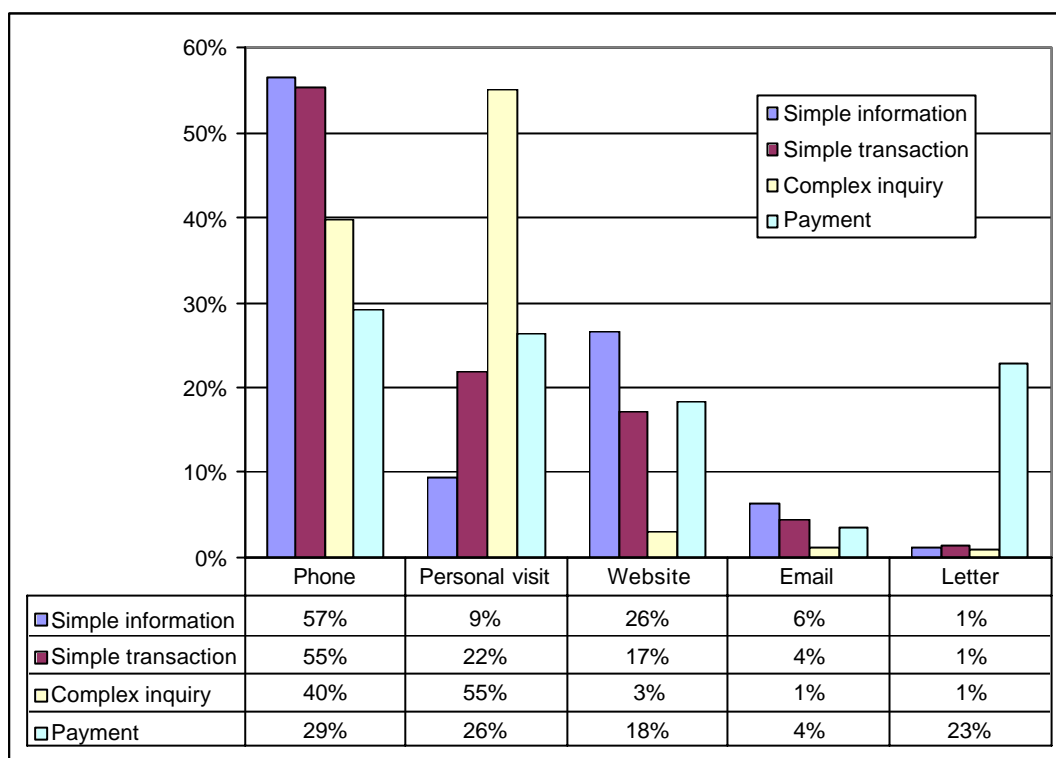
Figure 19: Surveyed customers' preferences for customer access channels – DJS Customer Preference Survey.

5.5.2   The Council's customers prefer the telephone as a channel overall, especially for simple information and transactions. However for complex inquiries they prefer a personal visit. Focus group research reinforces this view:

"By telephone you get an instant response – which is convenient"

"It's good if it's urgent"

"It's easy to talk to someone to explain in words"

5.5.3   A significant proportion of respondents prefer to make payments by post. Currently the Council has about 70% of its Council tax paid by direct debit from customer bank accounts. However it also has a range of different types of payment such as parking fines. A significant 18% would prefer to make payments over the internet.

5.5.4   We have compared the channel preferences expressed by Rochford District respondents with those from other local authorities that we have surveyed.

5.5.5   We compared similar surveys done in the London Borough of Harrow, Oxfordshire County Council, and the unitary Borough of North East Lincolnshire. Harrow is similarly affluent, although more culturally diverse. North East Lincolnshire is significantly more deprived but also predominantly white British. Oxfordshire has a similar socio-economic profile to Rochford District, with affluent and stable population; although the County is a little more ethnically diverse.

5.5.6   The details of the surveys and a brief profile of the local authority areas follow:

- London Borough of Harrow February 2005 – no corporate contact centre; small pockets of deprivation; multi-ethnic (60% in schools are BME); relatively high internet access.

- Oxfordshire County Council August 2007 – no corporate contact centre; very small pockets of deprivation (relatively); very high internet access; award winning website

- North East Lincolnshire June 2007 – a well performing but relatively small corporate contact centre; 52nd most deprived in the country; 96% white British; very high internet access and of those with internet, 90% have broadband access; critical SOCITIM report on website

5.5.7   There is evidence through these comparisons that Rochford District residents are more likely to prefer the web to interact with the Council than in other local authorities that we have surveyed, with the exception of Oxfordshire, where there has been a good website in place for longer.

Simple Information
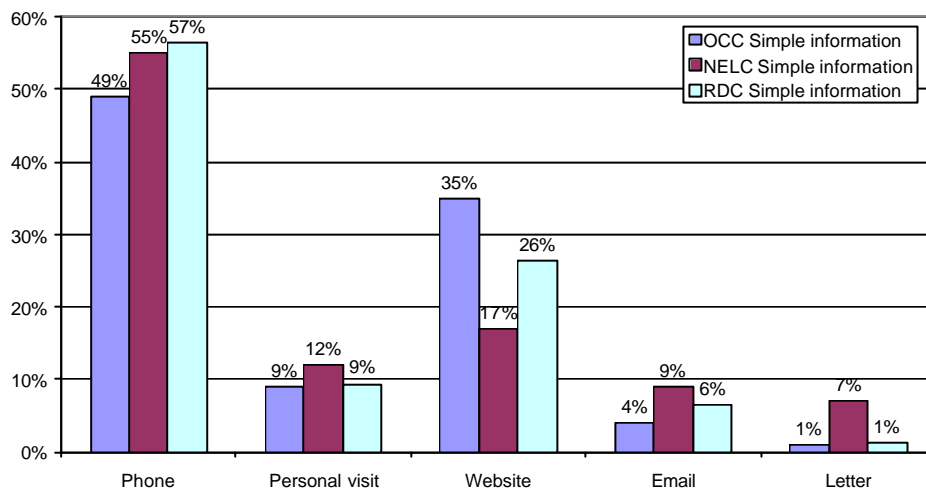
Simple transaction
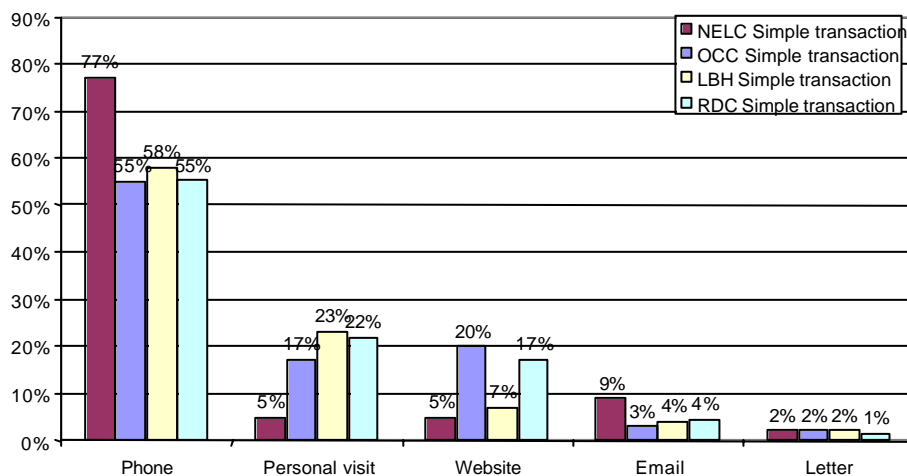
Figure 20: A comparison of channel preference for simple information and transactions – source DJS survey.

TRIBAL

5.5.8   The comparison shows a degree of trust in the Rochford Council website with the second highest proportion of Rochford District's residents preferring to pay online than in other local authority areas.
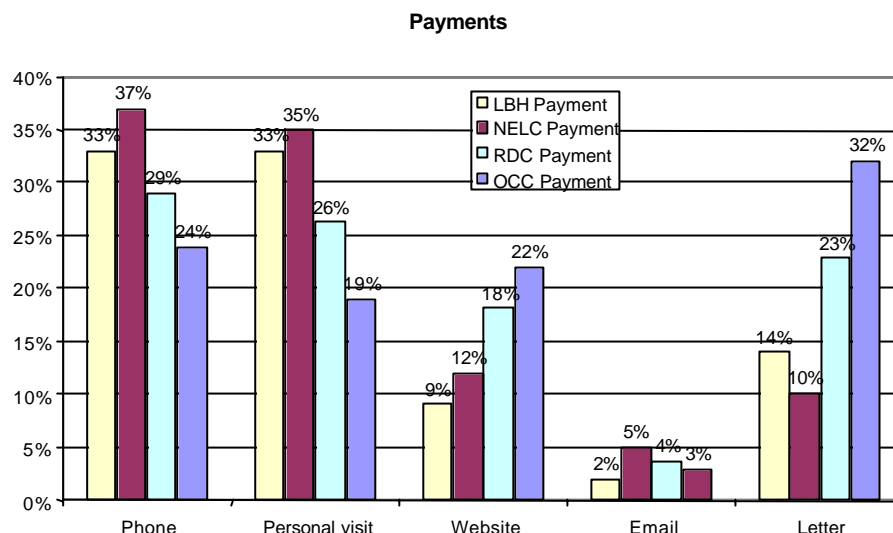
Payments

Figure 21: A comparison of channel preference for making a payment – DJS Customer Preference Survey.

5.5.9   Both of the more affluent and more rural areas surveyed include a significant proportion of respondents who prefer to use the post to make payments.

5.5.10   When customers are surveyed more would prefer to use face to face services than are currently using these channel-based services. If face to face services are made more accessible to customers, there could be a rise of as much as 500% in demand for face to face services.

Source:	Various	2007 DJS survey	Measured vs preferred		Non-contactors
Measure:	Measured Contacts	Preferred channel	Difference	Proportionate difference	
Telephone	48%	45%	-3%	-7%	42%
Person	5%	28%	23%	509%	27%
Letter	14%	7%	-7%	-51%	6%
Email	15%	4%	-11%	-73%	5%
Website	19%	16%	-3%	-14%	21%

Figure 22: Actual and preferred demand for customer service via different channels and the difference between the two. There is a significant difference between what people want to do and what they actually do. – Source DJS Customer Preference Survey.

5.5.11   With the unmet demand for face to face services, there is also a preference for less post and email contact.

5.5.12   Of those who have not contacted the Council in the last year, there is little difference for channel preference, with the exception that they are more likely to prefer web interactions.

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5.6 Channel Analysis – Telephone Use and Preference

5.6.1 The telephone is the most used and preferred channel for customer access. This section of the report focuses on customer perceptions of it and how it appears to be performing.

5.6.2 We have compared the total volume of calls measured in a range of other authorities and those measured at Rochford district. The districts receive between 6 and 4 calls per capita per year.

	Type	Population	Phone (all)	Switchboard/ CCC	All calls per capita	Centrally handled calls
Harrow	LB	210,000	1,000,000	400,000	4.8	1.9%
North East Lincs	Unitary	159,000	1,300,000	360,000	8.2	2.3%
Macclesfield	District	156,200	750,000	200,000	4.8	1.3%
Carlisle	Unitary	104,100	400,000	250,000	3.8	2.4%
South Northants	District	82,000	500,000	118,000	6.1	1.4%
Rochford	District	81,000	337,100	109,579	4.2	1.4%

Figure 23: A comparison with other local authorities' telephone volumes.

5.6.3 Our survey reveals that customers would prefer to use the telephone less and the website more for Rochford district inquiries. This provides some evidence that if the Council's website had high awareness and high usability, there would be a fall in telephone contacts, thus reducing costs for the Council.
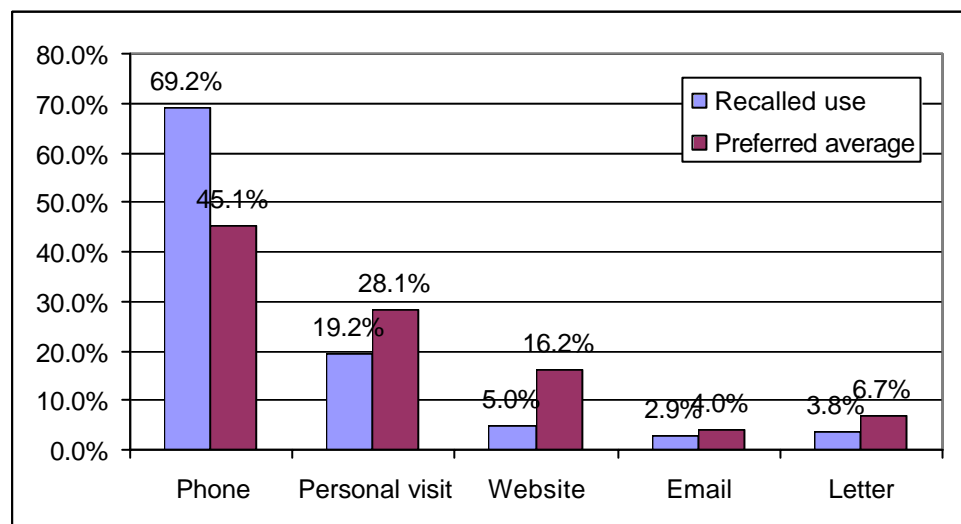
Figure 24: Recalled last contact channel compared with the preferred contact channel (averaged over each call type) – source DJS Customer Preference Survey.

5.6.4 The Council is currently working on promoting the website and this is covered in our later section on the web channel.

5.6.5 We investigated inbound telephone contacts by analysing all inbound calls into the Council and the final status of each call for the month of October 2007.
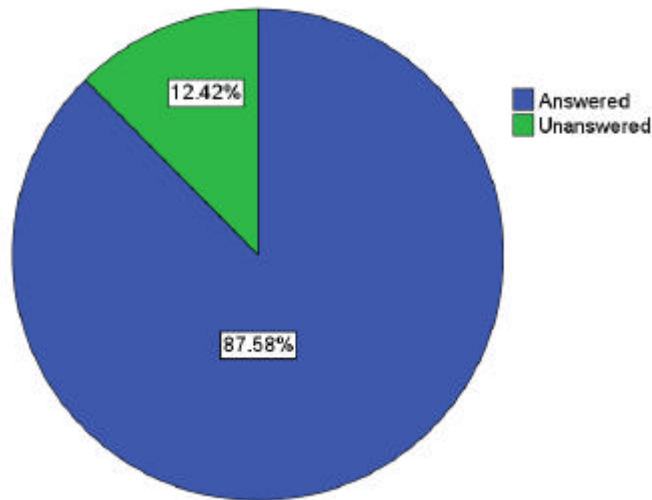
Figure 25: The proportion of calls logged in October 2007 which were answered and those which were unanswered.

5.6.6   There were about 19,500 inbound calls recorded, excluding those calls which are internal transfers.

5.6.7   There were a further 6800 that ring at an extension, are not answered and are transferred to another extension before being answered. Overall this represents 26% of calls that are transferred before being answered or going to an answer-phone.
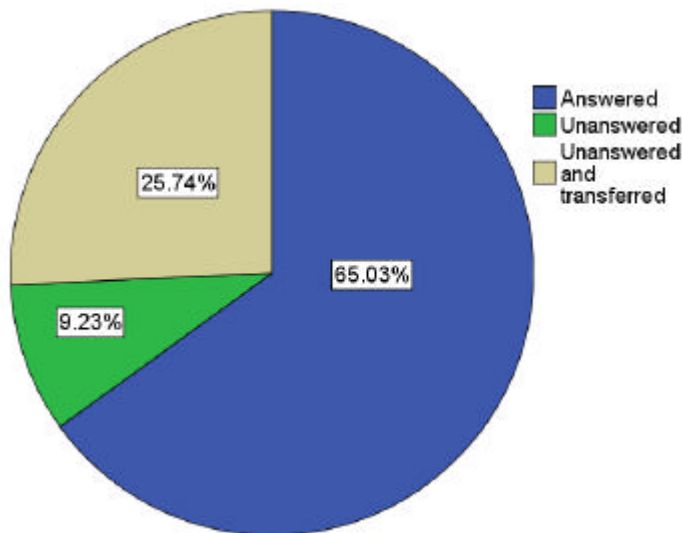
Figure 26: The proportion of calls logged in October 2007 which are answered, unanswered or unanswered and then transferred.

5.6.8   This mixed pattern of some customers being transferred until they get to the right person and some getting to the right person is reflected in some of the focus group feedback. Customers said:

It's easy – there's a list of telephone numbers which I've kept – that is easier than the switchboard."

"It's very easy – I was in Basildon before where it was harder"

"It's easy to get through – but hard to get to the right person – you get passed on from one to another"

"You get put through but it is not always correct and they are not always there – so you're always chasing them."

5.6.9   As with most other local authorities, telephone traffic is highest on Mondays and falls off during the week.
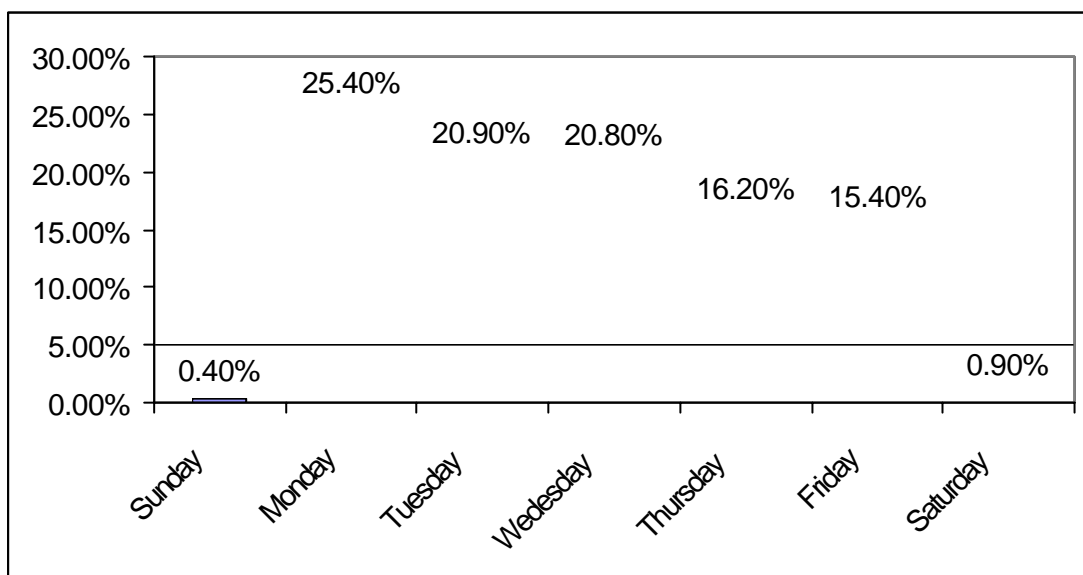
Figure 27: The proportion of calls logged in October 2007 which fall on each day of the week.

5.6.10   At present customers who call after the offices are closed or in the weekend hear a message and are told to telephone the out of hours service in Basildon. These calls are shown in the graph above.

5.6.11   When system transferred calls are excluded, the average call duration for inbound calls is 2.4 minutes. This is indicative of low levels of first time caller issue resolution as a high proportion of calls are either transfers or messages being left.

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Histogram of call duration for all answered calls across the Council
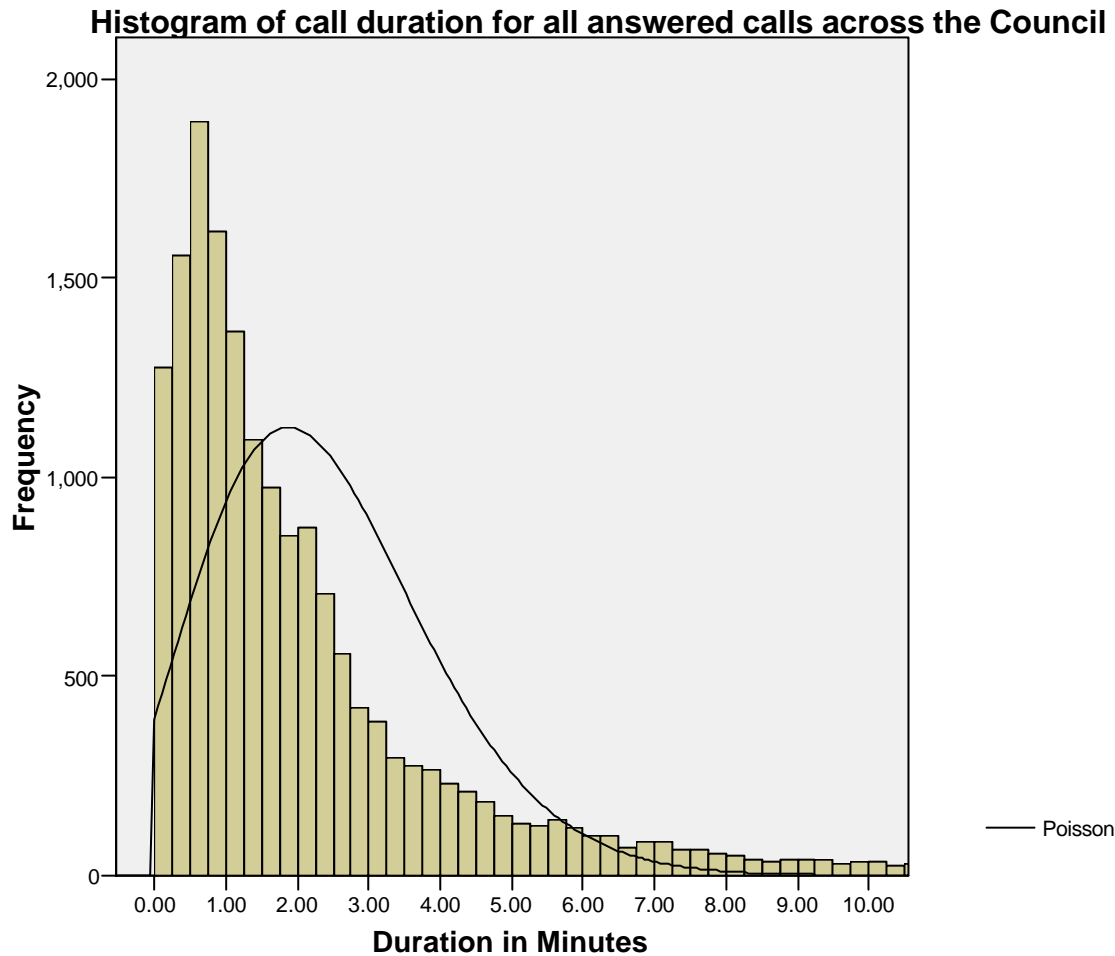
Figure 28: The distribution of call duration in minutes; the average call duration is 2.4 minutes and the median is 1.4 minutes.

5.6.12 When asked, customers would prefer to be able to call the Council outside the current traditional hours, with 41% preferring a Saturday morning and 39% preferring a late night.

5.6.13 There is little support for a 24 hour a day 7 day a week telephone service (8%).

5.6.14 Current telephone opening hours only received support from 21% of respondents.

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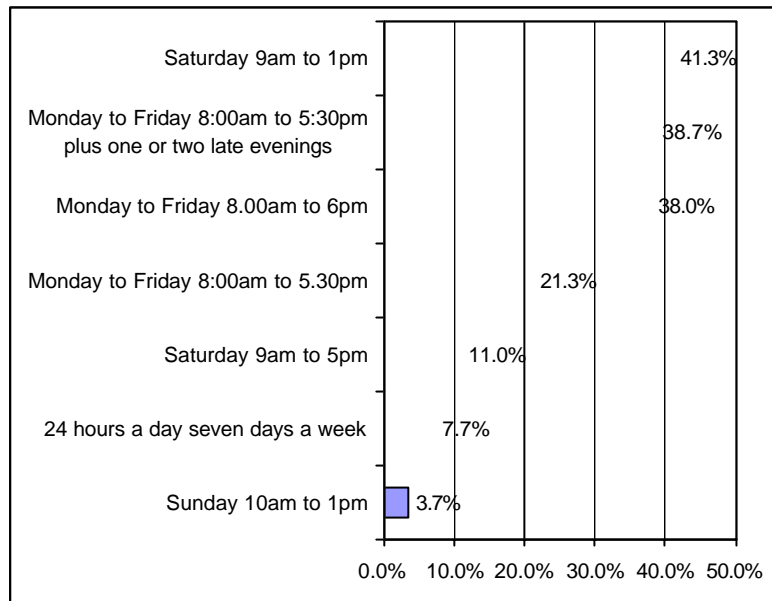
Figure 29: Customer preference for telephone opening hours.

5.6.15   The focus group research provides further insight into attitudes to telephone opening hours. It notes:

"People were unaware that they could contact the Council between 0800 and 0900 – and significantly, they were pessimistic that any worth while service could be offered as early as 0800 mainly because they believed most council staff would not be in work at that time" – focus group research report.

5.6.16   The Council's customers would use a touch tone phone to leave call and leave a message for a specialist (74% agreeing that they would).

5.6.17   There was similar levels of support for using a touchtone phone for a simple transaction (61%) and to request information (58%). Nearly 42% would make a payment using a touchtone phone.

5.6.18   However 17% would not use a touchtone phone for any of the functions listed.

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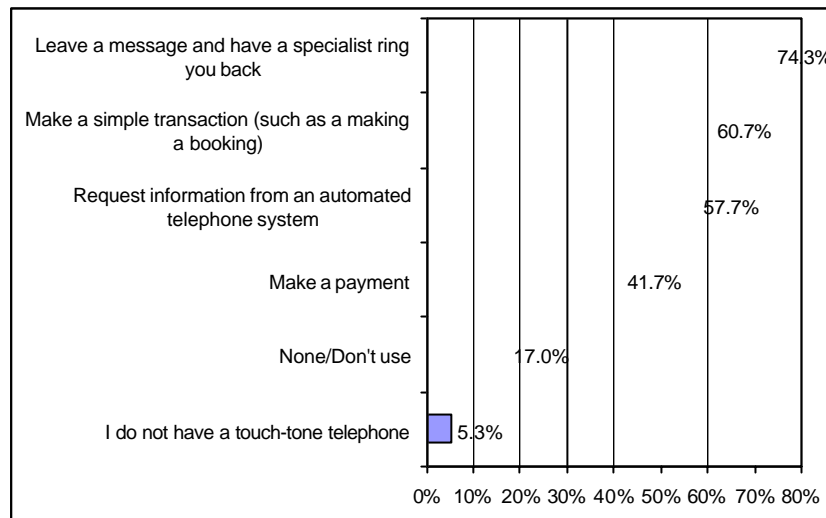
Figure 30: Respondents who agreed that they would use a touchtone phone to carry out each of the activities listed. Customers were able to select more than one choice.

5.7 Conclusions and Recommendations for the Telephone Channel

5.7.1 The Council is achieving relatively low levels of resolution at the first point of contact and could improve this position with more information held at the frontline, consolidating frontline staff into a single team, and more training for frontline staff.

5.7.2 There are a significant number of calls that are lost (unanswered or busy) and this should be reduced to a more standard 4% across all lines.

5.7.3 There is an opportunity to offer an automated line for key messages and payments. This would be a second choice to a person-answered line, but could be used to assist with peak inbound call times.

5.7.4 Recommendations for telephone services for customers:

¦ *Reduce the number of advertised lines so that they can be managed more closely and can be staffed all of the time the service is open*

¦ *Review and divert lines which are not able to be answered all the time*

¦ *Use regular reporting to monitor performance of all advertised lines*

¦ *Consolidate call answering teams to ensure full time coverage of lines*

¦ *Review the current telephone opening hours*

¦ *Increase the training and information available for frontline staff*

¦ *Investigate the option of offering an automated information line for use during peak demand periods.*

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5.8 Channel Analysis – Website Use and Preference

Rochford District's customers have more access to the internet than other residents in Great Britain, with 71% of those surveyed indicating that they have access to the internet at home and 72% saying that they have used the internet at some time.
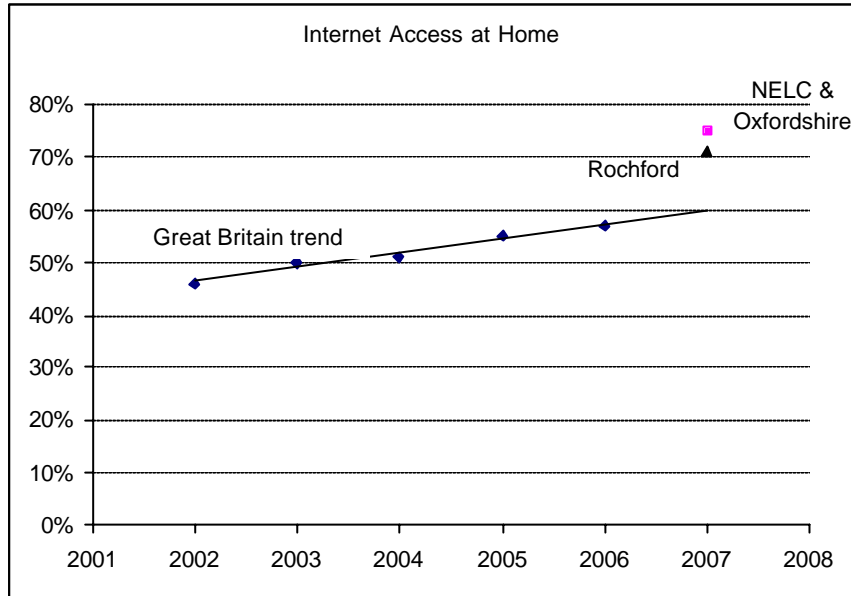
Figure 31: The national (Great Britain) trend to install internet access at home. Rochford residents have higher than average access at home (71%), although less than in Oxfordshire or North East Lincolnshire (both 75%) – source DJS Customer Preference Survey and ONS.

5.8.1 Rochford District's residents who use the internet are experienced and use it regularly:

- 85% of those who use the internet started more than 3 years ago

- 81% of those who have used the internet have used it in the last week.

5.8.2 When those who use the internet were asked where they most use the internet 86% indicated they used it at home.

5.8.3 The Council's website was redesigned and re-launched earlier this year and has a higher proportion of transactional interactions possible on it than many other local authority sites. Customers think the site is good:

"I used the website to look up planning applications and it was user-friendly"

"That would be the first place I'd look"

"The website is good for information and I've had good replies to the comments I've made there."

5.8.4 However, it still requires some additional investment to make it more usable for customers who at present have to navigate in and out of different sub-sites. Better integration with

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its sub-sites such as CMIS and the planning Public Access portal would mean that the users can find things on Council's main site or subsites more easily. This could be done through three possible techniques:

⁞ Migrating the currently sub-sites into the main site and retiring the existing separate technologies which support them

⁞ Introducing a search engine which can index and search the main sites and the sub-site and return the results in one list

⁞ 'deep linking' of the current main sites and the sub-site (this is currently partly in place).

5.8.5 Customers want to use the website but find which authority does what confusing. In the focus group customers said:

"They need to show on the website who does what: the County or the District."

I called Rochford Council today about schools, but I was redirected – and even put through to the right place in the County!"

5.8.6 External pressures and trends will mean increasing partnership working with other agencies especially local strategic partners.
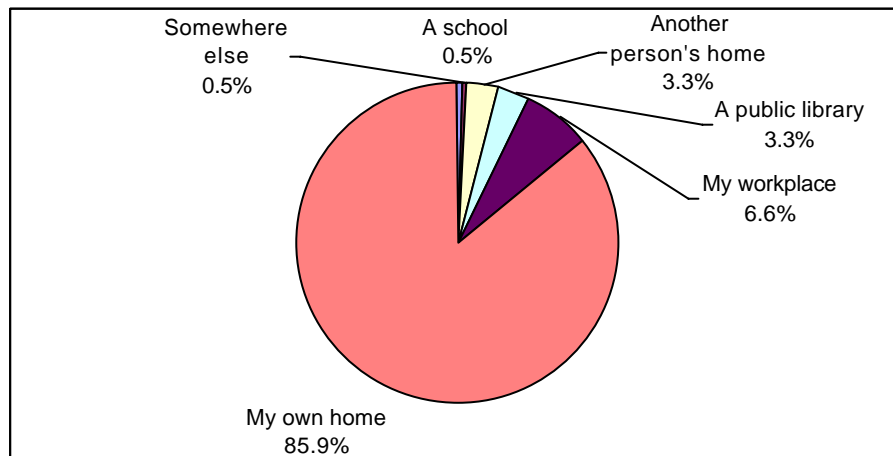
Figure 32: The place that respondents who use the internet most do it.

5.8.7 The Council is going to run two promotional campaigns (one internal and one external) to promote the use of the website. The following illustration (and that on the cover of this report) is drawn from the planned campaign.

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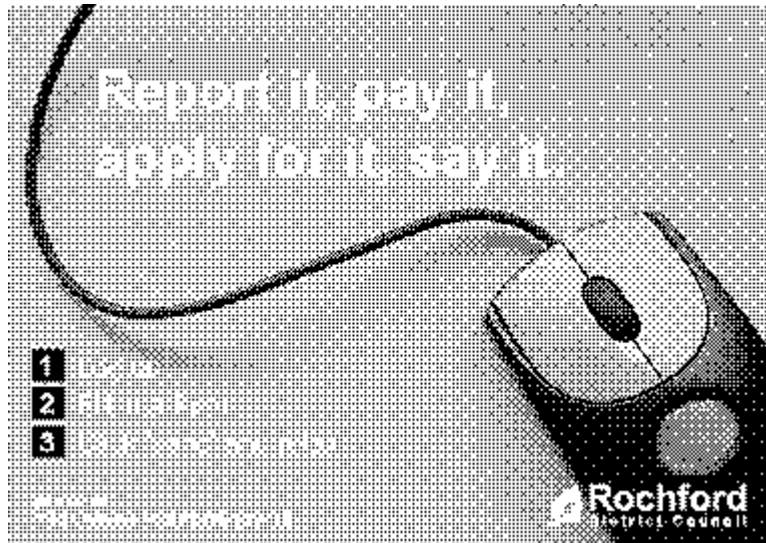
Figure 33: Web promotional campaign material.

5.9   Recommendations for Web Channel

5.9.1   When this information is combined with the comparative statistics on customer use and preference, there is a clear opportunity for the Council to encourage customers to use the website for interacting with the Council. We recommend that higher uptake of the web channel can be achieved through developing a business case for:

¦   *Increased promotion (even on top of the planned campaign)*

¦   *Further investment into the site with:*

   ▪   *Better integration with sub-sites, such as the CMIS, and the Public Access for Planning site, a better search engine, better reporting and Government-standard compliant meta data*

   ▪   *Better automated exchange of content from other local partners such as the County and PCT (syndicated content) with very good sign-posting about the origin of the material*

¦   *A review of Council policies and procedures which may be a barrier to transacting a process online, for example those which require a signature or those which might be created to encourage web-based transactions*

¦   *A significant increase in the content on the site in the form of a customer service oriented knowledge-base.*

5.10   Channel Analysis – Face to Face Services

5.10.1   The Council offers six main face to face ways for customers to access services (excluding voting and attending democratic meetings). They are:

¦   Visitor services at Rochford

¦   Visitor services at Rayleigh

¦   Appointments with professionals

> ┊ Home visits for revenues and benefits
>
> ┊ Contact with Councillors
>
> ┊ Plan viewing in Hullbridge Parish office

5.10.2 Face to face services are the most expensive of all to run but are more likely to be preferred by older and disabled residents.

Visitor services

5.10.3 Our comparative research shows the Rochford district residents significantly prefer to use the face to face channel for complex issues.

5.10.4 Most of the Council's customers say they find it easy to get to the Council's offices.
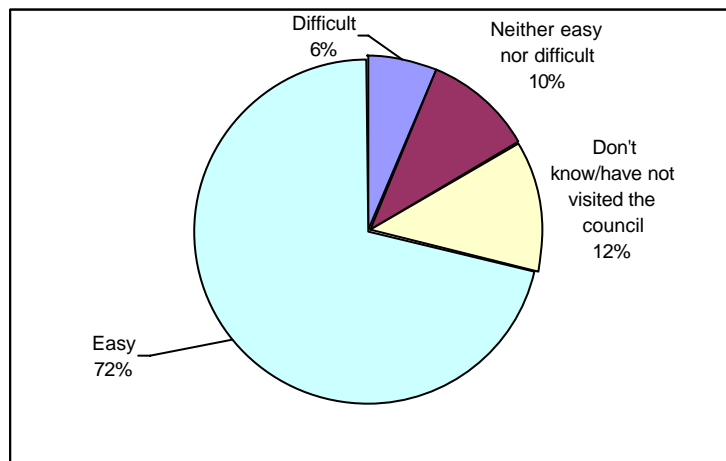
Figure 34: Overall 72% of respondents indicated that they found it easy to get to the Council's offices – source DJS Customer preference research.

5.10.5 However, there is evidence that some of those who have not contacted the Council have not done so as they find it more difficult. When we analysed the responses of those who have not contacted the Council 53% found it easy, and 29% weren't sure if it was easy. Seven per cent felt it was difficult.

5.10.6 The DJS customer research has shown that a significant proportion would prefer to go to Rayleigh for face to face services (34%).

5.10.7 Currently there is a limit to the range of services offered at the Rayleigh offices. Focus group research indicates customers are aware of the limits to service at Rayleigh:

"The Rayleigh offices cannot do very much – the real ones are at Rochford"

"You have to travel to Rochford"

Neither [Rayliegh nor Rochford offices] are convenient for those who work"

5.10.8 If this same analysis is carried out only for those who have not contacted the Council in the last year, slightly more would prefer a local office, Southend, or a home visit and fewer prefer Rochford.

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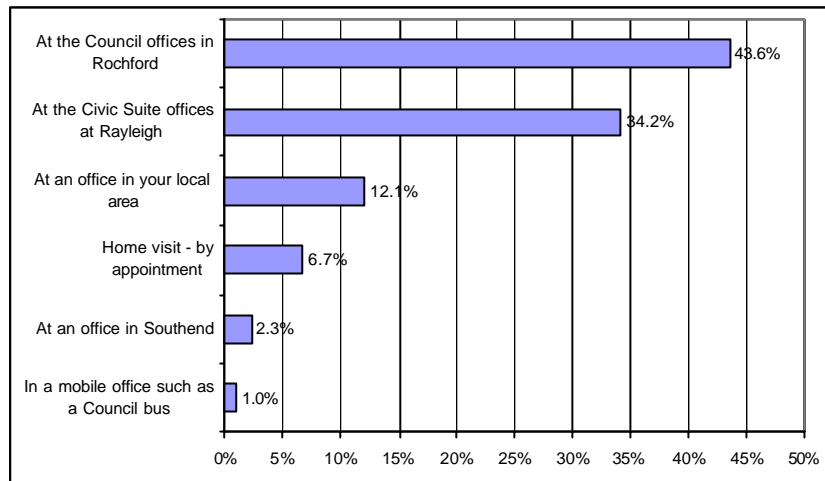
Figure 35: Customers' preference for the location of face to face service.

5.10.9 A smaller proportion (12%) would prefer to use a local office in their area (16% of those who have not contacted the Council). The nature of these respondents will need to be further investigated to see if there is an age bias if respondents who wanted this 'local access' come from a particular post code.

5.10.10 While there is a preference for services at both Rochford and Rayleigh there is also a preference for extended hours, with 43% preferring a late night and 35% preferring a marginal extension into the evening to 6pm.
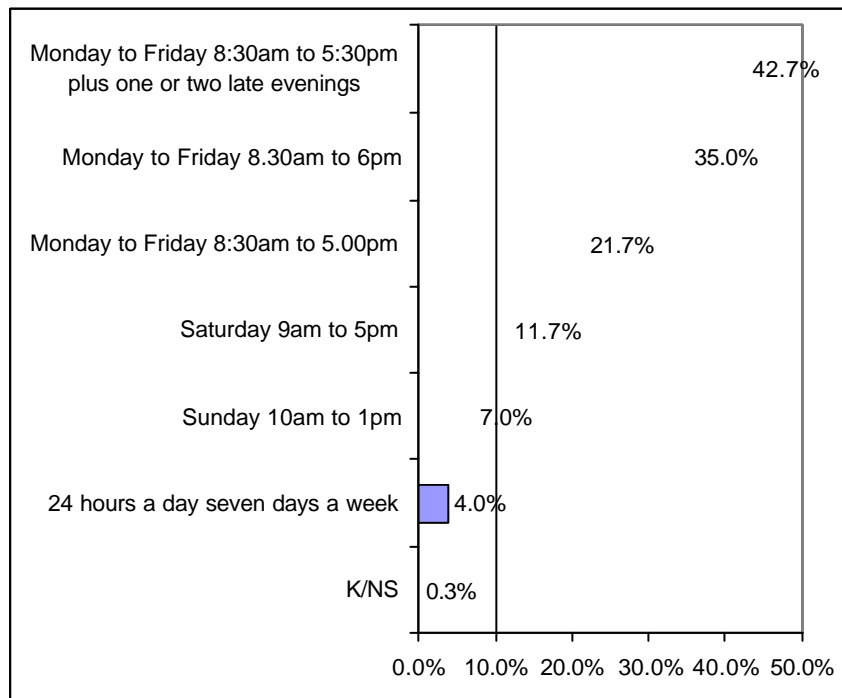
Figure 36: Customers' preference for opening hours for face to face services.

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5.10.11 Focus group reseach supports the view that the current opening hours are not optimal for them:

"No-one here has ever contacted the Council before 9am."

"I don't think 8am is necessary – 9 to 6 might be a better for many people"

"I'm surprised there's no Saturday morning."

"When the Council asks for information you have to take time off work to take documents in – so evening working would be helpful or Saturday morning."

"When I got married I had to take half a day off work to take in my certificate."

5.10.12 Currently frontline staff in the main public reception area for the Council also run the switchboard. There is evidence to show that both calls are lost and visitors can become distracted or frustrated by this.

5.10.13 There are currently two receptions at Rochford – the main reception and development and building control reception. This is less economic than a single reception area would be.

5.10.14 The main reception at Rochford has temporary planning permission and is located in temporary premises. This arrangement has been the result of limited space in the main buildings and the need to ensure the reception is fully accessible and is Disability Discrimination Act compliant. The Council will be developing a more permanent solution in the next few years as part of the implementation of this strategy.

5.10.15 Both main reception areas in Rochford and Rayleigh have large amounts of printed material which are used for customer information. These brochures are supplied by a range of different agencies and local authorities such as the County. In both cases they are contained in a range of different racks. In the case of the Rochford reception the area is also, to some degree, confusing to customers who wish to browse or use the self service area. In both cases, there can be some improvement to the way the areas are presented and designed with:

⁝ Consistent and good quality brochure stands which are flexible to allow changes to the number and size of brochures displayed and which include a built-in title holder at the top of each group of brochures

⁝ Re-consideration of the layout of reception in the main Rochford reception area if there is no near-term change to the provision of the area to increase the simplicity and clarity of sign-posting to areas for each function.

Home Visits, Mobile Working and Councillors

5.10.16 Home visits to housebound or isolated customers are designed to support those who are at risk of being unfairly excluded from key services; this way of working has successfully identified about £4M of additional financial (welfare) benefit for some residents that was not being claimed.

5.10.17 Councillors are also asked by customers to raise issues and service requests. They are, in effect, mobile and flexible workers on behalf of the Council's customers.

5.10.18 The Council has a Mobile and Flexible Working officer working party which is piloting technical solutions and human resource policies to support more mobile and remote working amongst its staff (the draft policy is appended). This has the advantage of

increased productivity and staff satisfaction while also potentially releasing office space to support better customer-facing facilities and service and to reduce Council overheads.

5.10.19   In the case of those staff who are out and about in the district working as mobile field workers, there is an opportunity to enable them to report customer issues and service requests to the Council while in the field. This can provide both an increase in the speed of response to customers and an increase in efficiency.

Meetings with professionals

5.10.20   The highest cost is through on-demand meetings with Council professionals. Managing contact with professionals rather than offering on-demand access can save money for the Council.. Customers in the focus groups concur:

"The Council should offer an effective appointments system for those having to visit the offices from places like Wakering."

5.11   Recommendations for Face to Face Channel

5.11.1   The Council should respond to the evidence that face to face services could be improved as follows. Some of these changes may well need to be subject to a business case, to support investment:

¦   *An increase in the range of services available at Rayleigh over time*

¦   *Review opening hours for face to face services aiming for extended opening hours*

¦   *Increases in the levels of resolution by frontline staff through an increase in the training and information available for frontline staff*

¦   *Consolidation of the two reception areas at Rochford*

¦   *Splitting the switchboard function from the reception function – i.e. separating telephone from face to face*

¦   *Consider investment in better designed brochure stands to hold all brochures at Rochford reception*

¦   *Phasing out of on-demand meetings with professionals in favour of agreed appointments for meetings with professional and technical staff (through the use of electronic diaries)*

¦   *Equipping Councillors and field workers with the ability to report customer requests and issues from the field which do not necessarily directly relate to the service they are in the field to deliver*

¦   *Work to increase the District Council information and services offered in key areas with more rural isolation – Hullbridge, Hockley and Great Wakering – through partnership working.*

5.12   Channel Analysis – Email and Post Services

5.12.1   The evidence on both demand for, and use of, email as a channel is not clear. However, overall, we consider that customers would not prefer to use email, if they can use the web instead.

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5.12.2   Email can be one of the more expensive channels to use, as the information contained in them is often incomplete and unstructured. The result is that there can be three or four return emails in order to clarify the details of the inquiry. However, web-forms for the same inquiry are much more efficient as they can validate the information, ensure that all information needed is provided and can be technically integrated into other systems. Thus web-forms are a much more cost effective channel for customer access.

5.12.3   As with direct dial lines, it is more practical to manage responses and measure performance when only generic email addresses are advertised for use by the public and a smaller number of email addresses are advertised.

5.12.4   Postal services are also more expensive to manage than, say web interactions, or telephone interactions. However, they cannot be avoided for some types of issue and some types of customer. Just as with email, it is more practical to manage responses and measure performance when only generic addresses are advertised for use by the public.

5.12.5   Therefore whilst both email and post are more expensive channels, the Council's move towards a paperless office with the introduction of the Comino document imaging and management system is nonetheless reducing the cost of serving the public by these channels.

5.12.6   There are both management and customer perception benefits in managing emails and post in the same way and using the same processes.

5.12.7   The reporting of email traffic into the Council and the Council's response times can be improved so that the emails attached to a single contact can be linked to a single contact record.

5.12.8   Customers in focus groups were interested in receiving information by email. They noted that leisure centres and the Council could offer emailed newsletters which customers could subscribe to.

5.12.9   Customers also thought that email was a convenient tool but could be used more efficiently:

"People should be able to opt to receive all correspondence by email rather than paper (to save paper and postage)"

"[The Council should] publicise the response time to emails from the website and registering to receive information."

"The acknowledgement of emails needs to be as informative as possible."

5.13   Recommendations for Email and Post Channel

5.13.1   Taking this information and the evidence into account, we recommend that the Council implement the following improvements for email and post:

- *Rationalise the Council's advertised addresses for email and post*

- *Continue to roll out Comino, with a view to harmonising the processes used to respond to customer emails and letters across the organisation with better reporting of response times and contact volumes.*

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5.14   SMS Text

5.14.1   There is evidence from both other local authorities and from our research generally that there is a niche for SMS text as a channel for customer access.

5.14.2   While a quarter of those surveyed would or might use SMS text to communicate with the Council, the evidence from elsewhere is that customers will not use SMS as a general communication channel. They will however, use it for specific tasks such as making payments for example in respect of Congestion Charging or parking fees/fines.
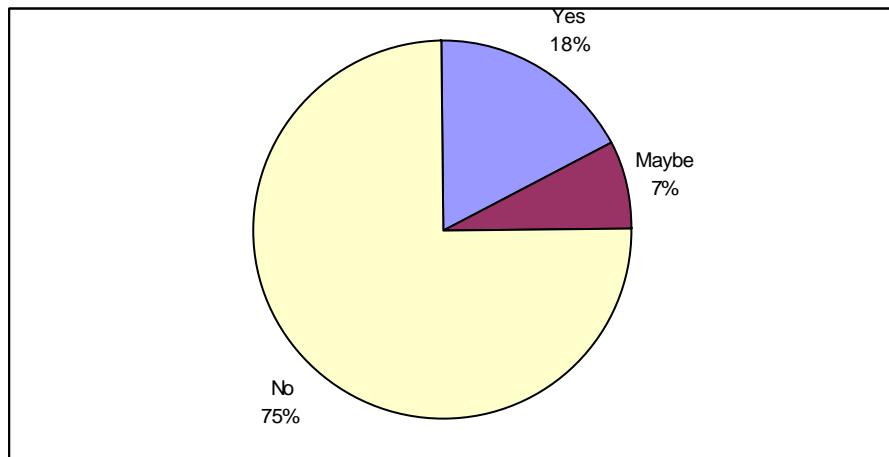
Figure 37: The proportion of respondents who answered yes, no or maybe to the question: 'would you be willing to use SMS text messaging to communicate with the council at all?' – source DJS Customer Preference Research.

5.14.3   The Council will pilot SMS text based reporting of street scene issues later in the year.

5.14.4   SMS text recommendations:

⋮   *Earlier in this report we recommended the use of SMS text as a channel for communicating with hearing impaired customers.*

⋮   *That the Council prepare a business case for the use of SMS text for parking payments.*

5.15   Cost and Value for Money

5.15.1   The costs of providing and maintaining various channels are an important factor in channel choice. The general rule of thumb is that the costs per interaction are higher for labour-intensive channels (especially where these involve visiting the customer's home), and lower for automated channels.

5.15.2   In practice, it can be difficult to make precise estimates of costs, since these can depend on a number of factors, including:

⋮   which systems, buildings and other assets a council already has

⋮   the volume of transactions (visits, telephone calls, e-mails)

⋮   accounting conventions such as depreciation, incremental vs fully-absorbed costing, internal cross-charging for use of facilities etc)

5.15.3 However, available data such as the following from Tameside Council shows that there is a substantial difference between the costs of the cheapest and most expensive channels:

Figure 38: Coordinating customer contact at Tameside to provide improved services for citizens at a lower cost

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council now uses the Web as the primary customer contact channel, providing round-the-clock access to all of Tameside Council's services. The channel also provides additional support to the Council's face-to-face and call centre services.

The figures below detail the usage rates and costs of different channels, showing that the transactional website offers an efficient means to deal with increasing use by citizens and changing costs across all channels. However, these benefits arise only when the shift has been combined with redesigning processes and integrating them with back office systems.

Number and cost of contacts for Tameside Council

	Number of unique Contacts	Cost Per Visit (£)	Total Cost (£)
Customer visits face to face			
2003–04	100,126 visitors	15.50	1,551,953
2004–05	104,986 visitors	14.65	1,538,039
Customer Call Centre			
2003–04	303,511 calls	1.59	482,582
2004–05	314,602 calls	1.39	437,296
Self Service: Website			
2003–04	452,378 visitors	0.38	171,903
2004–05	679,813 visitors	0.25	168,703

An additional benefit of e-enabling and promoting take-up of online services has been an increase in customer satisfaction. Tameside's standards of excellence in e-delivery were officially recognised when the Council won the Take-Up Award at the e-Government National Awards 2005.

Source: Tameside Council, 2006.

5.15.4 This is confirmed by data from the finance function at another UK council, which estimated the cost of taking a payment through each of the major payment channels currently offered to citizens by the council. Again, these show that electronic channels are significantly cheaper.

¦ Counter (face to face): 41p

¦ Direct debit (intermediary – bank): 17p

¦ Credit card (intermediary – card issuer): 1.3% of transaction

¦ Bank transactions etc (intermediary – bank): 5p

5.16 Managing Demand and Channel Use

5.16.1 The Council faces seasonal, weekly and daily fluctuations in customer demand for service. For example, as the new contracts for environmental services are rolled out in

2008, there is likely to be a rise in customer contacts as residents get used to the new arrangements.

5.16.2   At the same time, the cost of supporting customer service in each channel differs significantly from channel to channel.

5.16.3   If customer preference were to be allowed to drive channel use entirely, then the Council would be facing a significant increase in costs.

5.16.4   The following diagram is an illustration using the relative channel costs identified by Tameside and Rochford District's data for actual channel use (baseline) and preferred channel use (from the survey and reached in year 4).
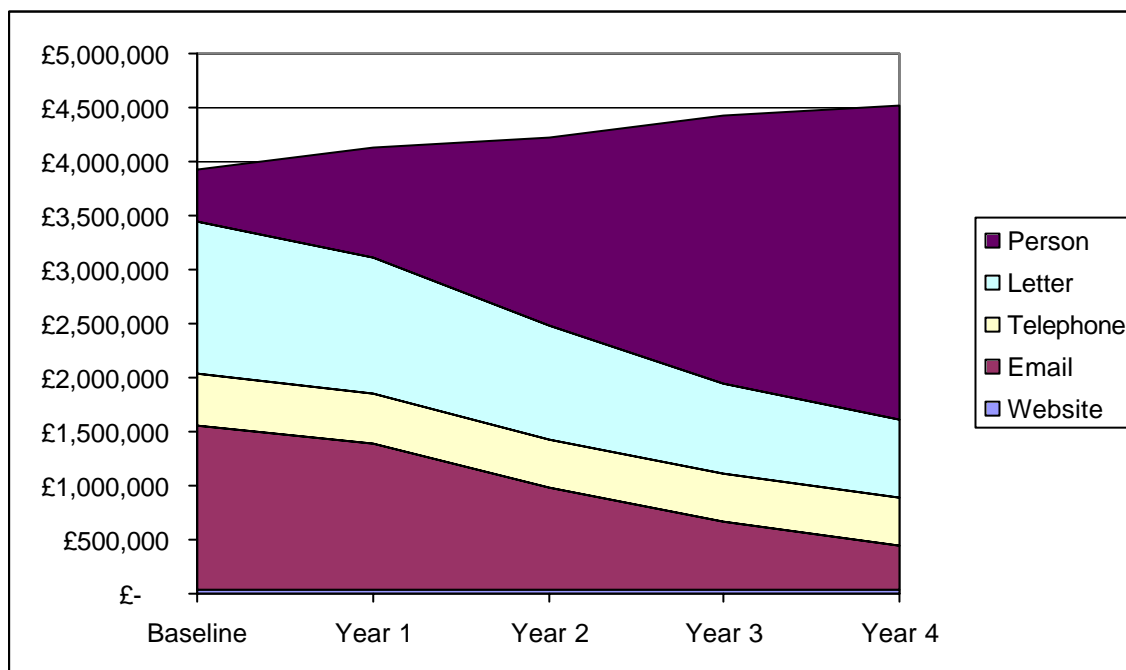
Figure 39: A model of costs of allowing customer demand to drive the resources applied to each channel to support customer inquiries.

5.16.5   If, on the other hand, the Council can successfully manage demand and costs it can reduce the cost of customer service delivery. This would be achieved by:

¦   Limit demand for face to face services or manage the cost of face to face services with limited increases

¦   Increase web use from 19% of contacts to 28% of contacts

¦   Reduce the use of email and letters

¦   Offering dedicated lines and addresses for services which are subject to seasonal and emergency fluctuations so that they can be staffed differently during peak demand (often known as hotlines or helplines)

5.16.6   We have modelled this using the same base costs and the shift in channel use below:
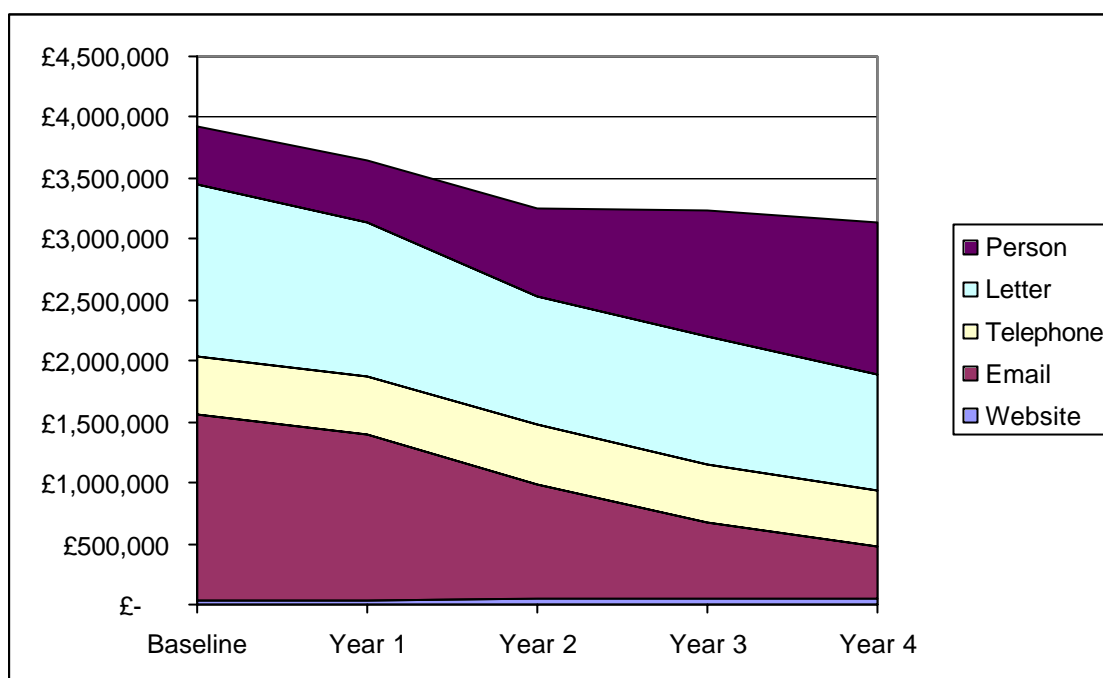
Figure 40: A model of frontline customer service costs assuming that the Council can shift customers to cheaper channels, particularly the web.

5.16.7   Costs used in both models are based on Tameside calculated costs and are:

Channel	Cost per contact
Face to face	£14.65
Telephone	£1.39
Web	£0.25
Post	£15.00
Email	£15.00

5.16.8   The models shown in this section are based on our current best estimates of channel volumes and on another council's costs. At the next stage of development, we will refine these models as part of business case development.

5.16.9   In conclusion, the Council has a significant interest in managing the volumes of customer inquiries through each access channel to ensure that costs are contained.   Some investment is likely to be required if costs are to be reduced through channel shift.

5.16.10   There are some refinements needed to the raw data used in this modelling to ensure the estimates are more accurate. These will be needed to build a business case for the investments required.

5.17   Access Channel Arrangements Conclusions

5.17.1   In summary, the Council will offer the following access channels to its customers (subject, where appropriate, to a business case):

┊   Enhanced face to face services at Rayleigh and Rochford and services provided through partnership in Hullbridge, Great Wakering, and Hockley.

¦   Telephone services which some extension to hours

¦   Further enhancement to web-services

¦   Managed post and email services

¦   Supported customer assistance through Councillors.

5.17.2   All more detailed recommendations from this section are listed in a summary in the last chapter.

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6 Customer Access Propositions

6.1.1 In this section of our report we consider how each of the Council's customer groups will be served by the channel access arrangements described in the previous section.

6.2 Children Aged 0 to 15, Families and Households

6.2.1 Overall Rochford district is a family area with slightly more married couples with children (21%) than Essex (19%) or GB (17%). Households are larger then the surrounding districts and the schools and leisure facilities rate highly with inspectors and customers:

- 82% of all respondents are happy with parks and open spaces (top quartile)[13]

- 67% of all respondents are satisfied with sports and leisure facilities (top quartile).

6.2.2 There are fewer lone parent households (7% of households) than the Essex (8.5%) and national average (GB 9.6%) The highest proportion of lone parents are in Rochford and Sweyne Park wards.

6.2.3 In spite of the picture of more intact families being happier with key services, 59% of general survey respondents thought that "parents not taking responsibility for their children is a very or fairly big problem".

6.2.4 In addition to this, 59% of general survey respondents think activities for teenagers need improving - most important of all issues listed.

6.2.5 These survey responses reflect a concern in the community in areas where older residents and younger ones live in the same area and the activities of young people are seen as potentially threatening by older residents. We identified this as a key issue facing the Council in our strategic section (2).

6.2.6 There are a series of services which are targeted at the household but which are less associated with the people in it. These are largely around waste management and recycling, where the household is obliged to do certain things (put their bins out on the right day at the right time) and entitled to certain things (to have the waste collected). In these cases, the person who contacts the Council about those services is important, but the location of the household is more important for service delivery.

6.3 Recommendations for Children, Households and Families

6.3.1 In order to ensure a joined up and excellent customer service to these groups we recommend that the Council should:

- *Aim to create and maintain a joined up view of the household with entitlements and contact history linked to the location*

- *Provide information to customers about family and children's services through the web and linked to services from the County*

- *Investigate links to the County Teams Around Schools and Children (TASC) teams.*

---

[13] 2006/07 Best Value General User Survey for BVPI3.

6.4 Young Adults Aged 16 to 24

6.4.1　The issues discussed in the previous Section sometimes stretch to the next demographic group, young adults. Although there are fewer young adults in Rochford District than in the East of England, they are a key group to support with leisure and community infrastructure services.

6.4.2　Youth on youth crime in the area is likely to be low.

6.4.3　There is also a net outwards migration of 3% for this age group (2001) which may be due to the lack of small and low cost dwellings in the district for them to move into as they leave home.

6.4.4　This group is forecast to shrink slightly over the next 22 years.

6.4.5　The highest proportion of the population which are in this age group are in Sweyne Park Ward (20% are 16 to 29) and Grange Ward (17% are 16 to 29); the overall average for Rochford District is 14% (aged 16 to 29).

6.4.6　The preferred channels of choice for young adults differ from those of the rest of the adult population and they are less likely to want to engage with the Council.

6.4.7　The County supports a Youth Assembly to support consultation with the younger portion of this group and Rochford District promotes an annual debate through the offices of the Chairman to the same younger part of this group to identify key issues.

6.4.8　It is perceived that this group is less likely to vote than other age groups.

6.4.9　The Audit Commission's Access to Servi ces inspection report noted that:

" . . . There are marginalised groups that the Council is not reaching, for example young people."

6.5 Recommendations and Conclusions for Young Adults

¦　The Council is currently planning a special sub-website for this age group with content largely fed automatically from other sources. If the Council works with the County then the maintenance of both this, and the Essex County youth sites, will be more efficient.

¦　The Council is to facilitate the building of chill-out areas for youth in the district.

¦　*The Council may include youth polls in the SMS text pilot linked to other youth services such as leisure services or an anti-social behaviour hot -text -line for young people to report issues.*

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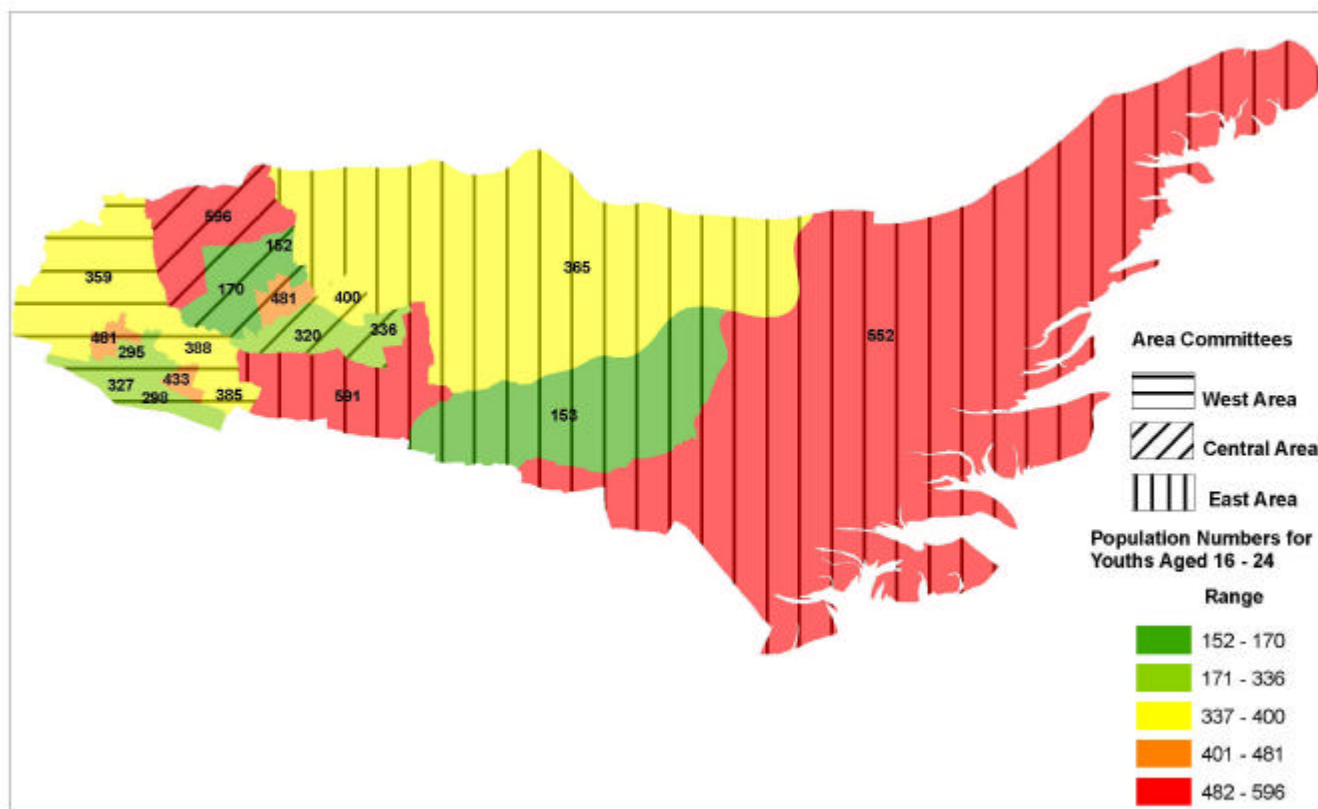
Figure 41: The highest densities of people aged 16 to 24 in the district are in Hullbridge, Rochford, and Foulness with the next most dense areas of young adults in Sweyne Park, Rayleigh and Hockley – source ONS.

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6.6   Older residents Aged 65 and Over

6.6.1   The district has a slightly higher proportion of older people aged 65 and over than the rest of England. They make up 21% of the total population.

6.6.2   This group is expected to grow significantly more than any other age group.

6.6.3   About 660 dwellings of the social housing now managed by Rochford Housing Association are allocated to elderly people of a total of 1,755 social housing dwellings managed by them in the district.

6.6.4   There is at least one caravan park in the district which is allocated entirely to over 55 year olds and there are many older people in the other parks.

6.6.5   As the older group of residents grows, the District and the County Council will face the need to support a disproportionate increase in age-related disability.

" . . . Average lifespan has been increasing at the staggering rate of 2.2 years per decade (or 5 hours a day) for the last 100 years. There is no sign of this slowing down, even in the countries where life expectancy is highest [Science, vol 296, p 1029]. . . .Unfortunately this increase in lifespan has not been matched by an extension of health. The years we gain are mostly spent with disability, disease and dementia. Between 1991 and 2001, life expectancy in the UK increased by 2.2 years; people experienced ill health for an extra 1.6 years of their lives. This is because we have not been able to slow the ageing process; much of the increased lifespan is due to increased survival with chronic diseases."

-- Guy Brown in the New Scientist, vol 196, No 2625, page 42. Guy Brown works on molecular mechanisms of cell death and degenerative disease at the University of Cambridge.

6.6.6   The Council offers a range of targeted services to this age group or those with key disabilities including home improvement or adaptation services, the Handyman service, the bin pull-out service and taxi vouchers. It is likely face an increase in demand for these services.

6.6.7   There are many sources of evidence to suggest that older people are more likely to reject the internet - 16% of those who do not use the internet state that they feel "too old" to use the internet.

6.6.8   This age group are more likely to prefer to postal payments and to use the telephone for contact with the Council. However they also prefer face to face contact for complex issues.

6.6.9   This age group is more likely to also have some of the key indicators for potential social exclusion.

6.6.10   They are also more likely to live in Hullbridge, Hockley and Rochford, which are also the areas with higher densities of young adults.

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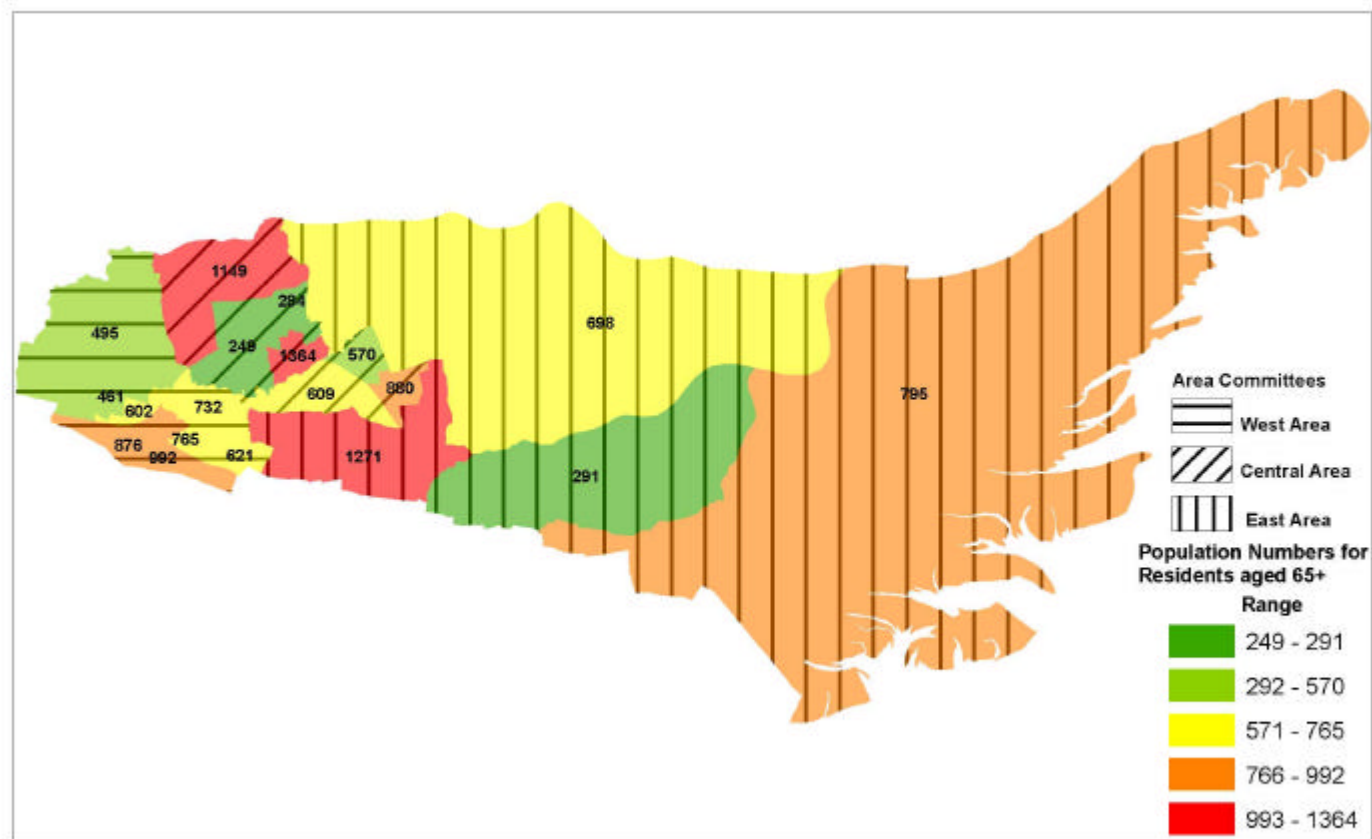
Figure 42: The highest densities of people aged 65and over in the district are in Hullbridge, Rochford, and and Hockley – source ONS.

6.7 Using Customer Access to Address Young-Old 'Rubbing Points' in the Community

6.7.1 Hullbridge, Hockley and Rochford are all areas where there are more likely to be older people and young people living near each other.

6.7.2 These are also sites of previously reported tensions between these groups, which have been addressed by the Council

6.7.3 In order to assist with the perceived issues in this area, we recommend that frontline customer service can offer:

- *Hotlines for anti-social behaviour (SMS text and telephone) offered jointly with community policing*

- *Online information for children and youth activities in the area*

- *Online information for older residents about lunch clubs and other socially connecting services*

- *Investigate the viability of support for extended services in the Hockley and Hullbridge areas with partners.*

7 Customer Access Service Model

7.1.1 In this section we outline the way that the proposed Customer Access Strategy would be delivered to the public once all changes are implemented, and assuming that that key business cases stack up.

7.2 A Vision for the Customer Service Model

7.2.1 The Council has a vision for the delivery of better access to services. This vision has been tested with the evidence we have gathered and has been sustained and reinforced by the research now available.

Vision for the Service Model

Reception – As we no longer use central paper files, we have taken the opportunity to demolish the old filing room to make way for a modern purpose built, east facing reception area. We no longer have a separate planning reception but almost the whole ground floor area of 3-5 South Street is open to the public.

Customer Relationship Management – We have a team of operators who man our switchboard in shifts. They receive extensive training and utilise our EDRMS to handle telephone enquiries at point of contact. When a particular issue is current, they have the necessary information to deal with this, for example, during elections. We ensure that we only capture data once but with CRM we can use it many times, for instance, if an elderly resident is having disability adaptations to her house, we can offer assisted bin collection and benefit advice.

Data Management – a central team situated in the former Council Tax building receive all communications arriving at the Council. Correspondence is scanned and indexed. Applications are processed. Data records are maintained and updated. The team also receive and process data from internal sources. The team comprises several specialist groups each dealing with specific service areas. There are supervisors for each major system including GIS and several individuals with particular expertise in areas such as LLPG, Crystal Reports, SQL, etc. Our career matrix provides an opportunity and encouragement for anyone with the right aptitude and skill sets to progress.

Communications Team – Online, a dedicated team constantly update the Council's intranet and website. Data is always current because it is processed as it is received. The Communications Team is responsible for outward communication of all Council information including RDM, press releases, leaflets, etc.

-- Vision developed by Corporate Director, Internal Services, John Honey,

7.3 A Single View of the Customer, Household and Business

7.3.1 The Council is implementing the Comino Contact Management module as a single central source and link to information about customers[14]. This would be the core system that would assist in managing relationships with customers.

7.3.2 Using such a system or systems to collate and record information for each individual with whom the Council has contact will provide a better service to the individual and the opportunity for more efficient service.

7.3.3 It will also enable the Council to analyse data at an individual level and create and pass data and information to partners in a secure manner to support joined up service delivery

7.3.4 However, in order to protect the individual, we recommend that not all data stored about an individual or a household should be visible to all users.

7.3.5 Key fields that such a system would need to be able to store include the following data classes for an individual:

- Names and addresses (in government standard format)

- One or more unique identifiers which identify the individual in this system and in other systems such as Pickwick, the electoral system.

- Date of birth

- Language preferences (including British Sign Language)

- Special communications needs such as hearing loops

- Personal flags such as whether they are potentially violent, an agent or partner of the Council (such as a Councillor), or have an allocated case manager.

- Memberships – groups that they belong to

- Entitlements – services that they are entitled to.

7.3.6 There are similar reasons for developing a single view of the household and the business.

7.3.7 Households would be reflect a dwelling and would be recorded as a unique property reference number (UPRN).

7.3.8 Businesses would also have a unique identifier generated by the system but their records would also be able to include other unique identifiers such as VAT number and Companies House registration number.

7.3.9 Customers are keen to find out what happens to their requests and issues. Focus groups reflected this view:

"They should have a call logging system to record and deal with your query – it can be hard to get he same person each time"

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[14] Note: Tribal Consulting has not undertaken a review of system capabilities as part of the development of the Access to Services Strategy.

7.3.10 Recommendations for managing a single view of the customer:

¦ *the customer relationship management system should be configured to generate or link to a unique reference number for each customer request (sometimes known as a ticket) which can be used to track progress on the service request*

¦ *the customer relationship management system or service systems should be able to expose service request progress on the internet for customers to track progress using the unique number.*

7.4 Business Process Re-engineering, the Data Management Team and Single Views

7.4.1 In order to ensure that the Council's customer facing processes are optimally efficient and effective for both the customer and the Council and that there is a seamless service to customers regardless of the service provider, the Council will need to build the most efficient processes.

7.4.2 In order to support an increase in the level of customer inquiries that are resolved at first point of contact, the Council will re-engineer high volume, high impact processes.

7.4.3 With the introduction of contact management systems, there will also be an opportunity to automate more processes and to save money.

7.4.4 The Council is in the process of signing new contracts for waste management and other environmental services, and there is an opportunity to improve efficiency and customer service in creating a more seamless service. This is the Council's first priority in re-engineering frontline services.

7.4.5 With the introduction of contact management and new processes, there will, also, be an increased requirement for regular data cleansing and management in order to maintain clean single view master data sets.

7.4.6 BPR recommendations:

¦ *that service processes will need to be re-engineered before they are rolled into the central customer service operation*

¦ *that the first phase of process re-engineering is used to optimise frontline service for the new environmental contracts*

¦ *that the design and function of the central data management team should be developed as the Council re-engineers customer-facing processes as they are rolled into the new central customer service.*

7.5 Addressing and Numbering Approach

7.5.1 A consistent addressing strategy will be implemented which reduces the number of routes into the organisation and enables better contact management and performance measurement.

7.5.2   The following table outlines a draft addressing schedule.

Customer Focused Service	Phone Number	Email address & web address	Postal addres	Service provider
General inquiries and tourism	01702 546366	Information@rochford.gov.uk www.rochford.gov.uk	Information RDC Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW	RDC
Household and Environmental	01702 XXXXXX	households@rochford.gov.uk www.rochford.gov.uk/households	Households RDC Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW	Contractor
Development and Building Control	01702 XXXXXX	building@rochford.gov.uk www.rochford.gov.uk/building	Building RDC Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW	RDC
Revenues and benefits	01702 XXXXXX	money@rochford.gov.uk www.rochford.gov.uk/money	Money RDC Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW	RDC & Capita
Businesses and agents	01702 XXXXXX	business@rochford.gov.uk www.rochford.gov.uk/business	Business RDC Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW	RDC
Leisure and sport	01702 XXXXXX	sport@rochford.gov.uk www.rochford.gov.uk/sport	Sport RDC Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BW	RDC & Virgin Active
ASB hotline		ASB hotline ASB SMS text line	ASB address	Community Policing
Flood hotline		Flood hotline Flood SMS text information service	Flood aftermath address	RDC

Figure 43: A model of the addressing schedule to be refined and adopted as part of the new approach to access to services.

7.6   Increasing the Rate of First Time Contact Resolution

7.6.1   In order to increase the rate of first time resolution that customers experience, frontline staff will require more training and access to a comprehensive information or knowledge-base.

7.6.2   This training should be linked to an enhanced competency framework which reflects the skills required to see a customer inquiry to the end. Typically to equip a frontline staff member with the skills to provide an effective and broad services to the public, councils

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that run formal training programmes offer between four and six weeks fulltime training to new staff.

7.6.3 The Council's current competency framework should support the delivery of an efficient, effective and economic service.

7.6.4 The following table shows how the attributes and performance table can be translated into a competency framework.

	Systems knowledge and typing speed	Techniques for questioning customers and closing calls	Friendly	Service and process knowledge	Customer care; dealing with difficult customers	Dealing with customers with special needs (including literacy)	Presentation & customer empathy	Managing stress
Efficiency	✓	✓						
Effectiveness			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Economy				✓		✓		

Figure 44: The attributes framework translated into the beginning of a training and competency matrix.

7.6.5 Frontline staff that are able to resolve customer issues first time will need access to comprehensive knowledge-base, populated and maintained by the back office and professional staff.

7.6.6 This very same knowledge-base would be able to be made available to the public through the website for self service. The knowledge-base would build on the existing website and include a searchable set of pages (one for each of the Council's customer-facing services) which give basic information about the service offered and how it is accessed.

7.6.7 The Council's current frontline service in Rochford is provided by staff who provide two main services – that of switchboard service and of face to face reception and information services. This means that there is a severe limit to the time that they can give customers who either call or visit. This limited time, also means that they cannot successfully resolve very many customer inquiries at the first point of contact.

7.6.8 Customer service recommendations:

⁞ *That the Council develop a customer service competency framework*

⁞ *That the Council expand information available on the intranet and internet in the form of a service knowledge-base with a good search engine.*

⁞ *That the Council split the switchboard and reception and information services provided in Rochford (also noted in section 5).*

7.7 Centralised Customer Service and Service Teams

7.7.1 The Council will need a frontline customer service with the critical mass in order to support increased resolution, more efficiencies and increased hours of operation.

7.7.2   In order to gain the economies of scale possible for the Council, while also improving the quality of the service offered, the Council will prepare a business case to consolidate its frontline services.

7.7.3   A centralised service would include a team of multi-skilled customer agents and some specialist frontline staff. The more truly multi-skilled the staff, the more economic the service is likely to be.

7.7.4   However, few district let alone unitary authorities have succeeded in delivering services from a single multi-skilled team. In addition to the difficulty of true multi-skilling, there is a generally accepted range for the workable size of a customer agent team that can be managed by a team leader. This generally falls to between 8 and 15 people.

7.7.5   Hence, based on current information, the Council will consider the creation of two service and customer focused teams of customer agents:

¦   **General and household** team dealing with tourism (in the future), environment, leisure, sport, arts, and democratic services

¦   **Business and building** team dealing with development and building control, licensing, business-focused environmental health, land charges.

7.7.6   However, these staff should be trained to work on all customer channels – telephone, face to face, email, post and fax and all would start with a basic grounding in all services. This will help with the management of peaks and troughs, and ensure consistency of provision across all channels.

7.7.7   Customer service model recommendations:

¦   *That the Council develop a business case for centralising the management of frontline customer service*

¦   *That the service is provided by two teams each focused on key customer groups and service areas.*

7.8 Sizing the Service

7.8.1   The art and science of sizing a centralised or consolidated frontline service involves developing a good understanding of the patterns of service demand made by customers and using queuing mathematics to estimate the numbers of staff required to serve those customers.

7.8.2   We have sized the call answering resource required using the average number of calls each hour of the day and assuming that 70% of all in-bound calls would be answered by a central service.

7.8.3   Using this information there would be an average of 1035 telephone calls a day; with the calls peaking between 9 and 10 in the morning.

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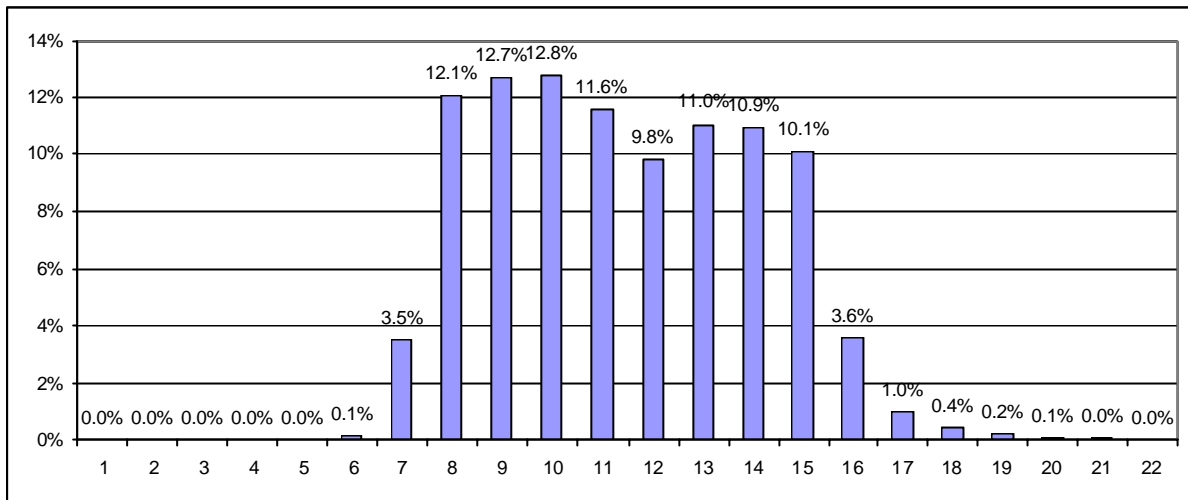
Figure 45: Average number of calls in each hour of the day based on the October sample.

7.8.4   By using a sizing tool and by creating a series of shifts, the following table shows the staff required to answer 70% of all in-bound calls to the Council, if there was a centralised service.

	Centralised but lower levels of resolution	Centralised, lower resolution and lower response time	Centralised, higher resolution rates, and lower response times
Calls per hour (70% of all inbound calls)	156	156	156
Call duration	2.5 minutes	2.5 minutes	4 minutes
Time between calls	30 sec	30 sec	30 sec
Call response standard	90% in 30 sec	80% in 30 sec	80% in 30 sec
Maximum call agents needed at any one time (seats)	13 call agents	13 call agents	17 call agents
FTEs	13	15	22
People needed	23 people	22 people	28 people
Productivity	59% talk-time ratio	65% talk-time ratio	68% talk-time ratio

Figure 46: Three scenarios for the sizing of a centralised call answering service.

7.8.5   We have appended the shift patterns which have been used to make these calculations (appendix C).

7.8.6   There are a number of implications which include:

    ⁞   Even with centralisation the customer service staff will not be fully occupied with call answering (they will be occupied answering calls between 59% and 68%)

    ⁞   This means that they would be able to handle other access channels in some of the balance of the time (email, post, fax, supporting web interactions, and SMS text).

    ⁞   The smaller the service, the lower the efficiencies available to the Council

    ⁞   Higher rates of resolution at frontline (translated into longer calls) will require more staff, but will also, with centralisation, provide higher levels of economies of scale.

    ⁞   In order to optimise staffing, there is a need for a 'late shift' between 5pm and 6pm. This is not likely to be filled; but it does mean that the cost of adding longer hours at the end of the day could be marginal.

7.8.7   Significantly fewer staff will be needed to staff the face to face service in both sites, with an average of fewer than one visitor per hour across the year. With the longer opening hours and both sites offering a broad service, the issues which drive staffing levels will relate more to rostering, holidays and safety. Our estimate is that the service will require about four full time and six part time staff to ensure a single person on at each site in the day time and two on one late night.

7.8.8   The face to face staff are likely to need to retain some limited telephone answering duties in order to meet peak demand and thus the total size of the service is not necessarily the sum of the two groups.

7.8.9   The Council has made a very rough estimate of staff who are occupied more than 50% in frontline service. This shows 36 FTE staff. This centralisation model shows that the service is likely to need about 33 FTE.

7.8.10   When the Council develops a business case for the changes proposed in this strategy, these savings will be estimated with more accuracy.

7.9   Measuring Success and Responding to Customer Opinion

7.9.1   This strategy has an associated report on measuring performance and value for money in customer service and there is a Council working party considering and developing the appropriate measures.

7.9.2   This strategy has been built on both primary and secondary research into what customers are, how they currently access services, and how they want to access services.

7.9.3   This strategy will be updated on a regular basis when new customer research or service information is measured.

7.9.4   Measurement and research recommendations:

    ⁞   *The Council aims to meet the goal of excellent cost effective customer service by supporting and maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction. In particular, it will do this by:*

        ▪   *regularly measuring customer opinion*

> ▪ *Responding to customer opinion in a cost effective manner such as increased opening hours and extending the services available in Rayleigh.*

7.10 Phasing in the Enhanced Customer Access

7.10.1 There will be a cost of reforming access to services and the Council will not have the resources to introduce the changes too swiftly. In addition to this, there is a risk of a reduction in service if changes are phased in too quickly.

7.10.2 We have divided the improvement programme into four main sub-programmes:

⁞ Business case development

⁞ Quick wins and existing projects

⁞ The main access to services improvement programme

⁞ Local customer services through partners.

7.10.3 The first two can be initiated after the approval of this access strategy, but the main access to services improvement programme would be initiated only after the business case is written and approved and budgets are available. Initial discussion with partners can begin after the approval of this access strategy.

7.10.4 Hence it is not possible to create a fixed timeline for the main access to services improvement programme and the development of local services through partners.

7.10.5 These sub-programmes each include a series of projects and they are listed in section 8.2.

7.10.6 After the business case is developed considerably more detail will be developed on the phasing of service delivery.

8 Conclusions

8.1.1 This detailed Access to Services Strategy and associated recommendations is designed to support the next stages of development for access to services at Rochford District Council.

8.1.2 The table overleaf summarises how the Strategy and service model is designed to meet the Council's strategic access to services objectives.

Objectives	Measures to meet this objective
• resolve 80% of our customers' queries at the first time they contact us and work to ensure our customers get to the right person first time	• Staffed to enable longer customer contact time on first contact • Staffed to avoid extensive call transfers • Staff are well trained • Staff use a wide ranging knowledge-base
• provide information on the progress of customer inquiries for customers	• service request tracking facilities in the CRM or line-of-service systems
• ensure that none of our residents are unfairly excluded from our services through age, ethnicity, disability or circumstance	• continuing implementation of current policies, procedures, and training • records of special needs in the CRM system • by appointment interpreting services and communications technologies • outreach services to Hullbridge, Great Wakering, Hockley, and home visits
• provide a joined up service to customers that makes it easier for them to access services and makes our services more efficient	• creation of a single view of the customer, household and business which includes entitlement information • training for staff pro-actively to offer services to customers
• provide a choice of cost-effective access channels for customers to use	• further enhancements to the website, and a drive to encourage website channel uptake based on a business case • increased ability to provide joined up information from and with partners on the website • key pilots with SMS text
• ensure the processes used to fulfil customer requests are efficient and effective for the customer	• service process re-engineering to ensure the most efficient end to end process • increased process automation where there

Objectives	Measures to meet this objective
	is a business case to do so
• treat compliments, comments and complaints with systematic and timely responses, including careful investigation and updates for the customer	• introduce an EDRMS –based system for managing compliments, comments and complaints.

8.2   Summary of all recommendations

The recommendations are summarised in the following list under each of the proposed projects:

8.3   Business case development

¦   Use regular reporting to monitor performance of all advertised lines

¦   Review the current telephone opening hours

¦   Investigate the option of offering an automated information line for use during peak demand periods.

¦   Review opening hours for face to face services aiming for extended opening hours

¦   That the Council develop a business case for centralising the management of frontline customer service

8.4   Quick wins & current projects

Customer insight intranet content

¦   This project will publish the customer research gathered for this and other customer service projects on the intranet

Early business process re-engineering (BPR)

¦   That the first phase of business process re-engineering is used to optimise frontline customer service for the new environment contracts

Separate switchboard and reception

¦   Separating the switchboard function from the reception function – i.e. separating telephone from face to face service

Enhance customer services at Rayleigh

¦   An increase in the range of customer services available at Rayleigh over time

¦   Phasing out of on-demand meetings with professionals in favour of agreed appointments for meetings with professional and technical staff (through the use of electronic diaries)

SMS

¦   Work with the deaf community to consider a pilot SMS text service for those who have hearing impairment

¦   The Council may include youth polls in the SMS text pilot linked to other youth services such as leisure services or an anti-social behaviour hot-text-line for young people to report issues.

¦   Hotlines for anti-social behaviour (SMS text and telephone) offered jointly with community policing

¦   Develop a business case for SMS text parking payments

Web phase 2

¦   This includes a series of projects which are currently planned to improve the Council's website.

8.5   Access to services improvement programme

Improved customer access foundations

¦   Investigate the cost-effectiveness of a call-off contract for British Sign Language interpreting using a video link

¦   Further review translation services

¦   Reduce the number of advertised lines so that they can be managed more closely and can be staffed all of the time the service is open

¦   Rationalise the Council's advertised addresses for email and post

¦   Increase the training and information available for frontline staff

¦   Equipping Councillors and field workers with the ability to report customer requests and issues from the field which do not necessarily directly relate to the service they are in the field to deliver

¦   That the service is provided by two teams each focused on key customer groups and service areas.

BPR for new service

¦   that service processes will need to be re-engineered before they are rolled into the central customer service operation

¦   that the first phase of process re-engineering is used to optimise frontline service for the new environment contracts

¦   that the design and function of the central data management team should be developed as the Council re-engineers customer-facing processes as they are rolled into the new central customer service.

Knowledge-base & appointments system

¦   That the Council expand information available on the intranet and internet in the form of a service knowledge-base with a good search engine.

Contact management system changes

¦ Introduce a customer relationship management system which is able to record the special needs of customers

¦ Continue to roll out Comino, with a view to harmonising the processes used to respond to customer emails and letters across the organisation with better reporting of response times and contact volumes.

¦ Aim to create and maintain a joined up view of the household with entitlements and contact history linked to the location

¦ the customer relationship management system should be configured to generate or link to a unique reference number for each customer request (sometimes known as a ticket) which can be used to track progress on the service request

¦ the customer relationship management system or service systems should be able to expose service request progress on the internet for customers to track progress using the unique number.

Change and HR management

¦ Consolidate call answering teams to ensure full time coverage of lines

¦ That the Council develop a customer service competency framework

Customer service staff training

¦ Increase the training and information available for frontline staff

Telephone systems

¦ Review and divert lines which are not able to be answered all the time

Web phase 3

¦ Increased promotion (even on top of the planned campaign)

¦ Further investment into the site with:

? Better integration with sub-sites, such as the CMIS, and the Public Access for Planning site, a better search engine, better reporting and Government-standard compliant meta data

? Better automated exchange of content from other local partners such as the County and PCT (syndicated content) with very good sign-posting about the origin of the material

¦ A review of Council policies and procedures which may be a barrier to transacting a process online, for example those which require a signature or those which might be created to encourage web-based transactions

¦ A significant increase in the content on the site in the form of a customer service oriented knowledge-base.

¦ Provide information to customers about family and children's services through the web and linked to services from the County

¦ Online information for children and youth activities in the area

⋮   Online information for older residents about lunch clubs and other socially connecting services

Accommodation

⋮   Consolidation of the two reception areas at Rochford

⋮   Consider investment in better designed brochure stands to hold all brochures at Rochford reception

8.6   Customer services through partners

⋮   Work to increase the District Council information and services offered in key areas with more rural isolation and with rubbing points between old and young – Hullbridge, Hockley and Great Wakering – through partnership working.

⋮   Investigate links to the County Teams Around Schools and Children (TASC) teams.

8.7   Continuous Improvement

⋮   The Council aims to meet the goal of excellent cost effective customer service by supporting and maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction. In particular, it will do this by:

        ⋮   Regularly measuring customer opinion

        ⋮   Responding to customer opinion in a cost effective manner such as increased opening hours and extending the services available in Rayleigh.

Appendix A – Access to Council Services – Public Consultation Report

*** Note:** Document under separate cover.*

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Appendix B – Draft Home and Remote Working Policy

Introduction

We are committed to the concept of flexible working. Home working is about using the employee's home as a base for work instead of the employee coming into the workplace. There are various ways this may operate:

- ❑ Working at home 100% of the time
- ❑ Working at home for a percentage of the time and making outside visits for the balance
- ❑ Working at home for a percentage of the time and coming into the office for the balance
- ❑ Occasional home working – those who work at home on an ad hoc basis to complete specific reports or projects

In any of these cases, as a 'remote worker', an employee can use information technology to access the systems they would normally use in the office.

Benefits

There are a number of benefits in home/remote working for both the employee and the employer. For the employee these may be:

- ❑ Relief from the time, expense and inconvenience of commuting
- ❑ Greater flexibility to schedule working time more flexibly around other commitments
- ❑ Increased job satisfaction and greater personal responsibility

For the employer the benefits may be:

- ❑ A more effective or efficient service (e.g. employees based locally in the community they are serving or more efficient use of the employee's time)
- ❑ Savings on accommodation and a reduction in the demand for car parking
- ❑ The retention of skilled and experienced staff who, because of for example domestic commitments or long term health problems, find it difficult to attend an office and might otherwise have to give up work altogether
- ❑ Increased ability to attract potential employees with relevant skills and experience and access a wider pool of labour for recruitment purposes including carers and people with disabilities
- ❑ A good 'green message' in reducing travel to and from work (part of the agenda 21 initiative to reduce traffic and pollution).
- ❑ A reduction in absenteeism

What jobs are suitable for home/remote working?

It is not possible to offer home/remote working as a universal right to all employees, as the requirements of some jobs will not be suitable for such arrangements. Jobs that involve project work or identifiable output particularly lend themselves to this type of work and those where external visits are required.

Only occasional home working can be granted to managers who have staff to supervise.

Not every employee will be suitable for working in this manner as it presents a very different set of demands upon the employee than working from the office.

Employees most likely to work successfully from home or remotely should be able to:

- ❑ Work effectively without close supervision
- ❑ Be self reliant and able to cope effectively with isolation

❑ Organise working time and meet scheduled deadlines
❑ Demonstrate self motivation and self discipline
❑ Have a domestic environment conducive to working from home
❑ Cope with additional pressures of balancing working from home with domestic responsibilities
❑ Be flexible in approach

All individual employees requesting home/remote working will be judged against this list. The list is not exhaustive and can be varied.

Working Arrangements

8.7.1 Working Hours

Home/remote working is a flexible working arrangement. Employees and managers should agree an appropriate working pattern. Variation of the agreed working pattern must be agreed with the manager in advance.

Requests from home/remote workers to change their hours or work (i.e. part-time, job share, full time) will be treated in the same way as office based employees.

8.7.2 Annual Leave

Annual leave or any other leave must be agreed with the line manager in the normal way, prior to taking leave. Annual leave entitlement will be unaffected by the home/remote working arrangement However, where the individual works their contractual hours flexibly in a pattern that suits them, it would be better to express their annual leave in hours.

8.7.3 Reporting Sickness Absence

If the employee is sick during an agreed period of remote/home working then the normal Council sickness reporting rules prevail. Failure to follow the sickness reporting rules could result in disciplinary action.

8.7.4 Workload

Workload will be agreed in advance with clear targets, planning and scheduling of work. Managers must agree with the individual supervisory arrangements, performance standards, arrangements for the collection/delivery of work, attendance at training, meetings, feedback etc.

8.7.5 Communication

In all home/remote working arrangements (permanent or occasional), employees must remain in contact with the main office by appropriate means e.g. telephone, e-mail and/or fax, as agreed with the line manager. Protocols and clear guidelines must be established for:

❑ What information will be shared between employees, who is responsible for sending communication and how it will be shared e.g. telephone, e-mail, supervision, team meetings or telephone.
❑ Response times to others' e-mails or phone calls, e.g. half a day or a day
❑ Contact times for home/remote workers to be available to respond to e-mail/telephone messages and receive re-directed calls from the main office
❑ What the office-based team members will tell service/customer users about the whereabouts/availability of home/remote workers to avoid them appearing remote/difficult to access or being contacted at inappropriate times.
❑ The decisions that employees can make on their own away from the main office and those that need to be referred to the manager/team.

- ❑ The structure of team meetings/supervision sessions
- ❑ The actions an employee should take if he/she feels isolated or unable to cope with the workload or work planning; and
- ❑ The advice/support available from individuals and team/section members.

Permanent home/remote workers must attend the Council offices as requested by their line manager to attend regular supervision/team meetings and/or training sessions. This should be once a week as a minimum.

8.7.6   Training and Development

Permanent and occasional home/remote workers will be provided with the same training and development opportunities as office based colleagues. However additional support may be required to help staff work flexibly e.g. advanced IT training. Managers may require assistance in adapting their management style to accommodate flexible working and, therefore, the Council will ensure suitable development opportunities are made available to these managers. Training needs should be identified through the PDR process and supervision.

8.7.7   Policies and Procedures

All home/remote workers, whether contractual or informal arrangements exist, will be expected to comply with Council policies and procedures e.g. Code of Conduct. Particular attention should be paid to the IT Code of Practice and Health and Safety procedures.

8.7.8   Use of Employee's Home for Meetings

The employee's home should not normally be used for meetings with the line manager or colleagues, and never with clients. However there may be occasions when the home may need to be visited by Council officers e.g. for the installation of equipment or to undertake a risk assessment of the workstation. On these occasions the homeworker should be given appropriate notice and a mutually convenient time agreed.

8.7.9   Use of Employee's Home Address and Telephone Number

In order to protect the privacy and security of the homeworker, neither of these should be used for business purposes. Employees with lots of client contact should go ex directory.

Changes to Personal Details

If you decide to move home you must advise your manager of your intention at the earliest opportunity and tell him/her the date of the move as soon as you know it. The Council will then consider whether it is appropriate for the homeworking arrangements to continue. Home/remote workers must inform the Human Resources section of any change of address or telephone number using the 'Change of Personal Details' form.

8.7.10   Council Equipment

The type of equipment needed will obviously depend on the job to be done and may range from simply a desk and chair to a complete computer work station.

Any equipment provided by the Council for the purposes of home/remote working will be maintained by the Council. The employee is to take reasonable care of all equipment, to keep it secure and to use it in accordance with operating instructions. The employee must ensure that any such equipment provided is returned upon resigning, retiring or dismissal or the withdrawal of the flexible working arrangements.

Equipment supplied by the council is not for personal use, although the employee may access the internet for personal use if the appropriate authorisation has been given. All policies of the Council apply to homeworkers including then e-mail and internet policies.

The necessary paper and stationery for use on the computer will be provided by the Council. At the beginning of any home/remote working arrangement an inventory of personal files and equipment held by an employee should be prepared and signed by both parties.

Where staff have their own computer equipment at home, then this may be used for business use provided that:

❑ The equipment complies with the VDU Display Screen Equipment Regulations
❑ There is adequate security of Council information
❑ The Council accepts no responsibility for the cost of maintenance of the equipment
❑ The Council has the right to access its own data

Any data exchange between home and office should be in accordance with the IT Code of Practice.

8.7.11 Health and Safety

Most of the regulations made under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 apply to employees working at home/remotely as well as to employees working at Council accommodation. A risk assessment must be undertaken for workers designated as home workers and a health and safety inspection of the work area in the home to ensure that the work can be undertaken safely without endangering the health of the homeworker or their family. The risk assessment should take into account the psychological impact of working alone. People who derive most or all of their social contact from their work environments are unlikely to cope well with the absence of face to face interaction. The risk assessment should also take into account the presence of other persons for whom the homeworker may have responsibility e.g. the elderly, the very young and the infirm.

Electrical equipment provided by the Council should be regularly tested. The objective is to ensure that the introduction of homeworking does not introduce hazards to the home additional to any that may already exist as part of normal everyday living.

Employees must take all reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others and must inform the Council of any changes that may affect health and safety. The home/remote worker is responsible for day to day health and safety issues and for reporting any concerns to their manager. All accidents and injuries occurring during the course of work for the Council must be reported in accordance with the Council's accident reporting procedures.

The Council has the right to make periodic checks on the home by prior appointment during working hours to ensure that the working arrangements are satisfactory.

Employees must meet customers at Council premises and never at home. Employees should also not release their home address and telephone number to non employees. Where making site visits or attending meetings the lone worker policy must be followed so that the office is aware of the individuals movements.

8.7.12 Insurance

Employees are advised that working from home may affect the provisions of any home contents insurance and must therefore advise their insurers prior to commencing working from home (a draft letter to assist is enclosed at Appendix 2). The employee should inform their household insurers that they use their home as an office base and confirm to them that there is no liability on the household insurance for any equipment stored at the home address. This may result in an increase in the premium which the Council will not reimburse.

A little bit

Home/remote workers working with the agreement of their manager are covered by the Council's insurance policy for employer's liability and personal accident in the same way as office-based employees.

Equipment supplied to the home/remote worker is also covered by the Council's insurance arrangements providing it is used for work purposes only.

8.7.13   Home Working Expenses and Tax Issues

The Inland Revenue only allow reimbursement of household expenses (with no tax deduction) incurred as a result of home working if a post is designated a home working position by the Council, is advertised as such and at no time either before or after the employment contract is drawn up is the employee able to choose between working at the Council premises or elsewhere. There must also be no office facilities available to the employee on the employer's premises. In this case broadband (standard package) would be paid for and an allowance of £2 a week paid to contribute to increased utility bills.

Where an individual has the choice of whether to work at home then any provisions agreed by the Council would be liable for tax.

8.7.14   Planning Regulations/ Tax

Using a room or part of a room to work in would not normally require planning permission.

Employees are advised to avoid dedicating any particular room in their home for the purposes of work, as this can have tax consequences if the home is sold and a capital gain is made.

8.7.15   Mortgagee/Landlord

Before commencing homeworking employees must advise mortgagees or landlords that they intend to work at home (a draft letter to assist is attached at appendix 3). The Council will not be responsible for any additional costs as a result.

8.7.16   Data Protection

All information stored and accessed (including that held on computer) must be secure and not be able to be accessed by anyone other than the home/remote worker in order to comply with the Data Protection Act. The individual should seek technical advice on the best way of securing their computer. The computer should also be password protected.

8.7.17   Telephone Costs

The Council will reimburse to the employee the cost of any telephone calls made from home in the course of pursuing their official duties upon receipt of an itemised telephone bill when agreed in advance.

8.7.18   Contract of Employment

Informal arrangements, where employees may work on an ad hoc basis from home, by agreement with their line manager, may be established without any contractual change.

The decision to designate an individual or groups of employees as home workers (on an occasional or permanent basis) will be made by the Head of Service in consultation with the Human Resources Manager and Trade Union

Terms and conditions for home/remote workers are the same as for office-based employees, with a few additional points to cover the fact that the workplace is in the home. Please see appendix 1 for details. A home/remote working agreement must be signed by the employee and the manager to ensure that the employee is aware of and agrees to the special conditions that working from home require.

Any employee wishing to work flexibly should initially raise the issue with their line manager and put a request in writing to their Head of Service. Serious consideration will be given to any such requests and a decision regarding the suitability of home/remote working based on all the circumstances, including the nature of the job, workloads, working practices and the suitability of the employee will be made. The decision of the Head of Service will be final.

8.7.18.1 Monitoring and Review

The home/remote working arrangements will be kept under review and may be subject to amendment after consultation. Withdrawal of home/remote working will be at the Council's discretion. The home/remote worker will be given one months written notice of the withdrawal unless it is a withdrawal as a result of a breach of trust in which case no notice will be given. Additionally where capability issues arise (i.e. the performance of the employee is in question) the Council reserves the right to immediately withdraw homeworking without notice to enable the employee to be more closely monitored at the office base.

Where the employee wishes to cease home/remote working the employee must make a written request to this effect, giving their reasons, to the Head of Service. The Council has no obligation to discontinue home/remote working and provide work at the Councils normal place of work.

Appendices to this policy can be found with the original policy.

Appendix C -- Assumed Shift Patterns

	Start	Finished	Duration	Shift FTE	Agents			Agent FTEs		
					Short calls, high service	Short calls, lower service	Long calls, lower service	Short calls, high service	Short calls, lower service	Long calls, lower service
Day shift	0900	1700	7.5	1	8	8	12	8.0	8.0	12.0
Morning shift	0900	1300	4	0.5	5	4	4	2.7	2.1	2.1
Afternoon shift	1400	1800	4	0.5	3	2	2	1.6	1.1	1.1
Late shift	1700	1800	1	0.1	4	4	5	0.5	0.5	0.7
Team leaders1	0900	1000	1	3	0	1	2	0.0	3.0	6.0
Team leaders2	1200	1330	1.5	0	3	3	3	0.0	0.0	0.0
					23.0	**22.0**	**28.0**	**12.8**	**14.7**	**21.9**