

Customer Services Review Consultation

Introduction and background:

The way that customers access services has changed over recent years, due to changes in technological advancements and increasing access as well as the Covid-19 pandemic.

UK Government figures estimate that in January/February 2020, 96% of households in Great Britain had access to the internet, an increase from 93% in 2019 and 90% in 2018. Internet connections in households with one adult 65 years and over have increased by seven percentage points to 80% since 2019. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) indicates that in quarter 1 of 2020 93% of people in Greater Manchester had used the internet in the last 3 months or prior to that, an increase from 92.9% in 2019 and 91.4% in 2018.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created unique circumstances where many residents are no longer reliant on face-to-face services. Some evidence of this change can be seen following the Council introducing web chat in early 2019/20. Since implementation over 12,000 enquiries have been responded to via this channel.

Since March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic no face-to-face Customer Service function has been offered. Residents wishing to contact the Council have had to make contact via other channels, including telephone, email or Webchat via the Council website.

Another consequence of the coronavirus pandemic has meant that this has been one of the most challenging budget rounds faced by the Council. The Council's 2021/22 revenue budget assumes savings proposals of £8.9m that increase to £14.8m by 2025/26. However, despite these levels of savings, the Council still has a financial gap to close of £14.3m in 2022/23 which increases to £22.3m by 2025/26 based on current assumptions.

It is incumbent upon all Council services to review the service provision from time to time and ensure services are cost effective whilst meeting residents' needs.

These circumstances of accelerated change combined with decreasing budgets have presented an opportunity to review the way we deliver services.

Proposed changes to the service:

We are proposing to undertake a review of the face-to-face Customer Service provision.

Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic face-to-face Customer Services based in Tameside One in Ashton offered a reactive drop in service handling all types of enquiries including those categorised as Level 1 (in-depth housing benefit and Council tax enquiries) alongside Level 2 enquires (book, pay, request a service and verification of housing benefit documents).

Level 2 enquiries can also be dealt with at the 8 libraries within the Borough.

The proposed service model for the future would be based on providing the most appropriate access channel according to customers' requirements. It would be very similar to the current offer but with the addition of face-to-face contact where necessary and only for those where other channels would not be suitable. The principles would be:

- Not to re-open the drop-in customer service centre based in Tameside One in Ashton in the previous format
- Retain Level 2 enquiries at all Tameside Libraries

- Promote, encourage and support a digital-first model with the expectation that where possible, residents should self-serve utilising the Council website or other technology such as mobile applications where available.
- Where this is not possible, provide a supported service offer over the telephone, web chat, email etc. to assist customers with their enquiries.
- Where more detailed assistance is required, for example completing a housing benefit application, a telephone call back service by appointment would be available
- Face-to-face appointments only for the most vulnerable to ensure that residents are able to access services and assistance without disadvantage. These will be bookable via telephone.

There is no doubt that some customers may be more vulnerable and/or do need additional support to access services or make enquiries. Any new service model must take into account all residents' needs and therefore some face-to-face element would be retained. It is proposed that this would be by appointment only rather than drop in and would be following a triage process to understand the nature of the enquiry and the assistance required.

We want to hear your views on the proposed changes to Customer Services.

You can find more information about the proposals [here](#).

To have your say, please complete the following survey: [link](#)

If assistance is required in completing the questionnaire this can be obtained at libraries, subject to Covid-19 safety measures being in place.

The consultation will run from 28 June 2021 – 19 September 2021. All returns will be considered along with our existing information to form firm recommendations for the Council's Executive Cabinet to consider.

Questions:

1. Please tick the box that best describes your interest in this issue? (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ I am a Tameside resident
- ☐ I am a Tameside Council employee
- ☐ I represent a community or voluntary group
- ☐ I represent a partner organisation
- ☐ I represent a business /private organisation
- ☐ I am an Elected Member
- ☐ Other (please specify below)

Accessing Customer Services

- 2. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic there were a number of ways to access customer services. How did you typically access customer services prior to the pandemic? Please indicate any methods that you have previously used to contact customer services by ticking all that apply.**

☐ Face-to-face

☐ Online

☐ Telephone

☐ Webchat

☐ I have not contacted customer services within the last 2 years (Go to Q13)

☐ Other (please specify below)

- 3. Please tell us why you chose to use the methods of contact indicated at Q2? Please give your comments in the box below.**

- 4. Do you have access to the internet at home? For example using a computer/laptop, a mobile phone or tablet? Please tick one box only.**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Face to Face Customer Services

5. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the suspension of face-to-face customer services in March 2020, did you visit customer services in Tameside One during the previous 12 months i.e. between April 2019 and March 2020? (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Please go to Q8)

6. How many times in that previous 12 month period (April 2019 to March 2020) did you use face-to-face customer services? (Please give your best estimate)

- ☐ Between 1-5 times
- ☐ Between 6-10 times
- ☐ Between 11-15 times
- ☐ Between 16-20 times
- ☐ More than 20 times

7. Which of the following reasons did you use face-to-face customer services for in the 12 month period between April 2019 and March 2020? (Please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Adult Services
- ☐ Blue Badge
- ☐ Children's Services
- ☐ Council Tax
- ☐ Democratic Services (Elections)
- ☐ Highways
- ☐ Housing Benefit
- ☐ Libraries
- ☐ Licensing
- ☐ Parking
- ☐ Parks/greenspaces/environmental
- ☐ Planning
- ☐ Registrars
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Tameside Resettlement Scheme/ Homelessness

- ☐ Waste & refuse
- ☐ Welfare Rights/Debt Advice
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Accessing Customer Services since Covid-19 Pandemic (March 2020 onwards)

8. Have you needed to access services or assistance from the Council since the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020 to present) i.e. during the time face-to face customer services has been suspended? Please tick one box only.

- ☐ Yes (Please go to Q9)
- ☐ No (Please go to Q13)

9. How have you accessed services or assistance from the Council since face-to-face customer services were suspended due to Covid-19? (March 2020- present) Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ Online
- ☐ Telephone
- ☐ Webchat
- ☐ Friends/family helped me
- ☐ Other (please specify below)

10. What was your experience of using these methods of contact? Please describe in the box below.

11. When you contacted the Council to access services or assistance via one of the methods mentioned at Q9, was your query resolved? (Please tick all that apply)

☐ Yes (Please go to Q13)

☐ No (Please go to Q12)

☐ Partly resolved / in process of resolution (Please go to Q12)

12. Why were customer services unable to help resolve your issue? Please give details in the box below.

The Future of Customer Services

13. Having read the proposals around how customer services may be delivered in future, please explain how the proposals will impact you / your family or friends / or other users of the service (Please state in the box below)

14. Please give any other comments you wish to make regarding customer services in Tameside (Please state in the box below)

ABOUT YOU

We would like to ask some questions about you. This information will help the Council to improve its services. The information you provide will be kept entirely confidential, will be

used for statistical and research purposes only and will be stored securely. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, please move on to the next question.

15. Are you: (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other (Please state below)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

16. Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

17. What is your age? (Please state)

18. What is your postcode? (Please state)

19. What is your ethnic group? (Please tick one box only)

White

- ☐ English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ Any other White background (please specify)

Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Groups

- ☐ White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ White and Black African
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background (please specify)

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- ☐ African
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ Any other Black / African / Caribbean background (please specify)
- ☐ Any other Black / African / Caribbean background (please specify)

Asian / Asian British

- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Any other Asian background (please specify)

Other ethnic group

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Any other ethnic group (please specify)

20. What is your religion or belief? (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Sikh
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ No religion
- ☐ Any other religion (please specify)

21. What is your sexual orientation? (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ Heterosexual / straight
- ☐ Gay or lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe
- ☐ Other sexual orientation (Please state below)

22. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? Include problems related to old age. (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ Yes, limited a lot
- ☐ Yes, limited a little
- ☐ No

23. Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either, long-term physical or mental ill-health / disability or problems due to old age? (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, 1-19 hours a week
- ☐ Yes, 20-49 hours a week
- ☐ Yes, 50 or more a week

24. Are you a member or ex-member of the armed forces? (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

25. What is your marital status? (Please tick one box only)

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Civil Partnership
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Prefer not to say

26. Are you pregnant, on maternity leave or returning from maternity leave?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

27. If yes, are you:

- ☐ Pregnant
- ☐ On maternity leave
- ☐ Returning from maternity leave