



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

Channel Strategy For Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

CHANNEL STRATEGY 2013

Author	
Version	1.0
Date Issued	
Document status	Initial Draft for Comment

Distribution

	Name	Title	Purpose
1.0			Review and input

Revision History

Version	Date Updated	Revision Author	Summary of Major Changes Made
1.0	15/01/14	Anne Jones	Initial draft for comment
	08/11/14	Lynn Fray	Initial draft for comment

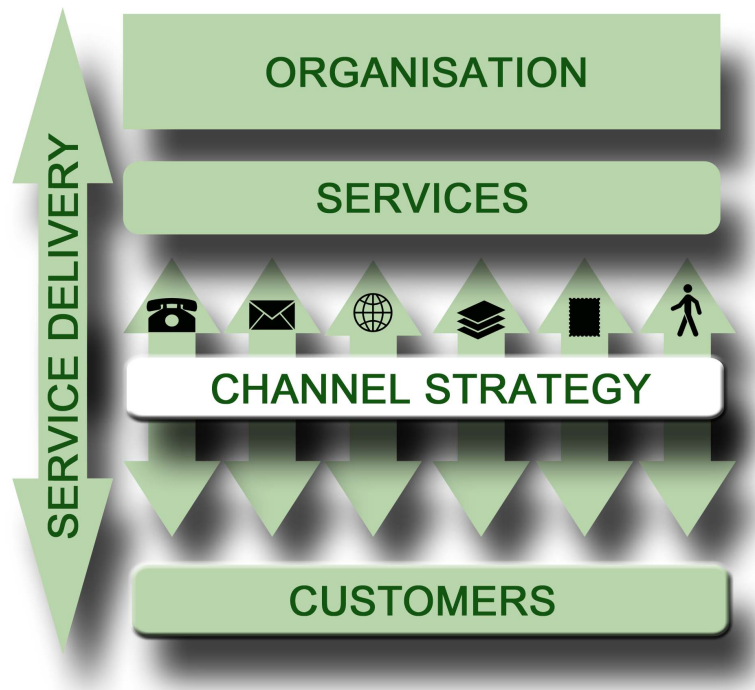
Part 1 - Introduction

WHAT IS A CHANNEL STRATEGY?

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has a responsibility to provide excellent services to the public and value for money to the taxpayer. The channels through which public services are delivered and by which the public has contact with the authority, (be that via telephone, online, in person, or via other means), are a critical part of public service provision, and there is an ongoing impetus for them to be managed effectively and efficiently for everyone.

A channel strategy is an organisation's plan for the channels it will use to deliver services to, and interact with, its customers. A channel strategy explains how an organisation will meet the contact demands of its customers using the resources it has available bearing in mind the needs of the customer.

A channel strategy is not simply a plan to move service provision to online channels.



WHY IS A CHANNEL STRATEGY IMPORTANT NOW?

Customers receive a high standard of customer service from many public and private sector organisations and have come to expect a choice of channel and a consumer experience when interacting with an organisation. However, customers sometimes have low expectations of services provided by local government, and it will be necessary to exceed rather than meet these expectations to achieve channel shift to cheaper and/or more effective channels. To achieve this, the public sector must continue to raise its own standards of service across all the channels it uses and offers.

In order to meet the needs of customers, **Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council** must provide services that are:

- Easily accessible
- Simple to use
- Streamlined
- Convenient
- Cost effective
- Robust

It is also important to bear in mind the target audience's access to technology, the type and complexity of the contact, their personal preferences as well their skill sets when selecting channels.

Rising internet use and customer expectations of accessing public services online present an ongoing opportunity for public service providers. Competent online services are easy and quick to use, available whenever customers need them and have a relatively low administrative burden: online services must be integrated into backend systems to achieve this and make savings. Managed well, online access to services is a very effective channel with considerable benefits for customers and taxpayers.

The public sector must however also meet the needs of people who do not (yet) have access to the internet. 'Digital Inclusion' therefore is a core element of any government/public sector channel strategy.

It also looks increasingly likely that, in the future, supplementary services will be built by customers using data released by public sector organisations (and indeed in the private sector).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The need for insight

The process of developing and implementing a channel strategy needs to be guided by insight, and insight specifically relating to:

- The customer
- The services an organisation is providing and each service area in question
- The current delivery channels at the organisation's disposal as well as those that may be available to be used in future
- Other organisation-specific micro/macro factors that may have an impact on service provision and delivery

It is also important to understand the wider online services market, as expectations of online services are driven by customer experiences of using similar services of other organisations.

Organisational challenge

In considering a channel strategy, there is often a considerable challenge and change to existing organisational structures. A channel strategy needs to become an integral part of the structure of the organisation and the way the objectives of the organisation are realised. It cannot be super-imposed or retro-fitted onto existing practices and as such is likely to require or precipitate considerable organisational change.

We also need to recognise that people will use different channels not just for different types of interactions, but also to suit their own convenience. Customers often use more than one channel to complete a more complex task, for example, commenting on a planning application. Particularly at local level, an integrated channel strategy is required that takes into account the varied ways in which local people may want to interact with the council.

Part 2 – Basic Principles & Scope

PURPOSE OF STRATEGY

To outline the broad principles for the ways in which **Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council** will deliver its services through a range of contact channels that provide better value for money, are more accessible and are designed with the customer in mind.

SCOPE

1. This strategy document sets out the basic principles by which Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council will deliver its services to the public through the contact channels currently available.

Contact channels in scope include:

- Face to face
 - Email
 - Web (designed responsively, to suit the customer's device of choice))
 - Social media
 - Telephone
 - SMS text messaging)
 - Automated telephone technology
 - Post
2. This document focuses on three key types of contacts between the authority and the customer
 - **Transactions** (e.g. reporting a problem or paying a bill)
 - **Interactions** (e.g. obtaining advice, public consultations)
 - **Information Provision** (e.g. leaflets, web pages)
 3. This strategy should be relevant to the nature of the services provided by the authority and ensure that its services are provided through a range of contact channels appropriate to the customers' individual needs and preferences in a non-discriminatory way.

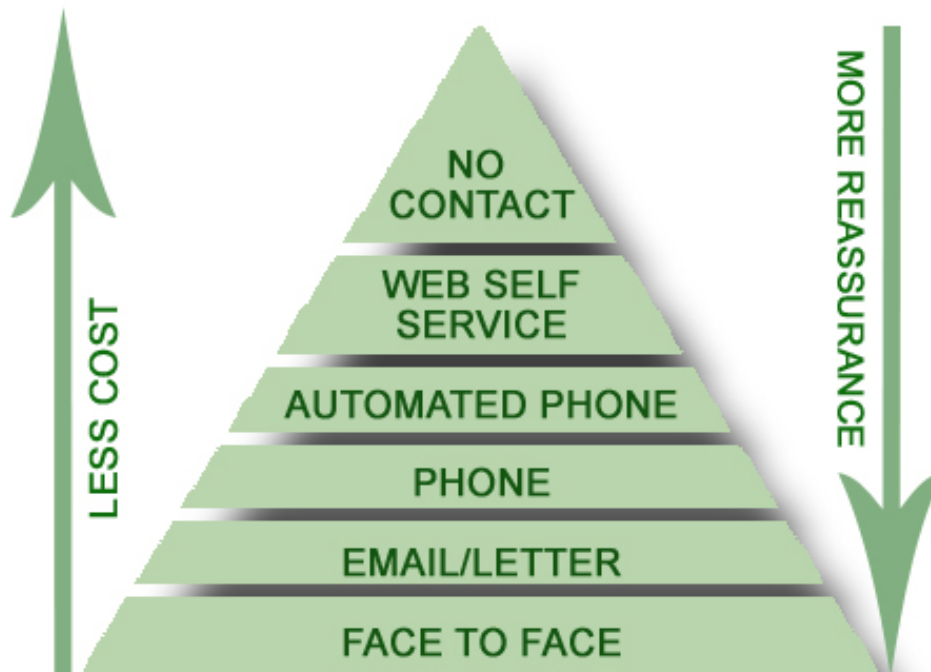
CHANNELS HIERARCHY & DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The choice of contact channels available to the public is growing all of the time as new technologies are developed and released. For example in the last 5 years we have seen the emergence and growth of channels such as digital social media (Facebook, and Twitter), mobile internet, interactive TV and more recently mobile and tablet applications (apps).

Without a channel strategy many organisations typically adopt one of two approaches to using these channels by either 1) launching all of their products and services on all new channels without much thought to the relevance and cost of doing so or 2) focusing on switching their customer contact to the cheapest channel (often assumed to be the internet) without much thought as to the relevance of this channel to their entire customer base.

There is however a generally accepted model for the effectiveness of the major channels of contact available today as shown below

CHANNEL EFFECTIVENESS



What this model shows is that as we move up the triangle the cost of delivery typically gets cheaper for the organisation. However for some types of contact a greater level of human contact is required, particularly for contacts that require some level of reassurance

For example..

If a customer received a letter asking them to pay a bill or the bailiffs will turn up at their house. They have just paid the bill and now want reassurance that their personal belongings are safe. They are unlikely to log on and have a look at the organisation's website's FAQ page for reassurance (even though this might be the most cost-effective solution for the organisation) but may be more inclined to ring up the contact centre to request a letter confirming that matters are in hand. In this example, there may be a case for having online FAQs relating to debt recovery in terms of best practice, but there is probably little chance of shifting this individual contact online

It is therefore vital to fully understand each type of contact and the level of reassurance that the customer is likely to require before focusing the organisation's efforts on the design of any contact channel for that service.

Further, there may be little hope of shifting the channels that a certain group uses if that group simply doesn't access that channel. For example, internet penetration is currently lower amongst older people on lower incomes (Comment: many younger people on low incomes use a smart phone) Therefore it may not be a good use of corporate time, and taxpayer's money, to attempt to shift contacts specific for these customer's contacts online. Conversely, mobile telephone penetration is very high amongst younger people, so SMS messaging might be a good channel to access these customers. Customer Insight goes a long way in the design of any channel strategy.

There are more factors to consider including “channel hopping”, (an individual’s propensity to use different channels for the same transaction depending on what is convenient to them at the time) and the public’s increasing confidence in new channels that develops over years and sometimes months, creating a continually changing landscape.

The key factors to an effective channel strategy therefore would be

1. **Detail** - the deliberate design of the channel strategy for **each type of service**, bearing in mind the level of human interaction required and the needs of the targeted customer base
2. **Fluidity** – the constant reviewing of the effectiveness of the channel strategy for each type of contact bearing in mind changing technologies, channel hopping and changing customer habits (Comment: for example, this year on Christmas Day, 75% of web traffic to the John Lewis website came from smart phones/tablets – new precedent?)
3. **Simplicity** – the optimum channels for the organisation should be the easiest to use for the customer to drive a shift in customer behaviour
4. **Inclusion** – no group should be denied access to a service because of disability, language or cost of the access channel (e.g. mobile phone costs, broadband access). Options should be made available other than the organisation’s preferred method of contact.
5. **Cost effectiveness** – particularly in the current economic climate, finding ways in which to deliver services effectively but at lower cost will be increasingly important.

PROOF OF CONCEPT

This section provides the baseline information on which we can make assumptions, the data is taken from the most up to date information sources in 2013/14.

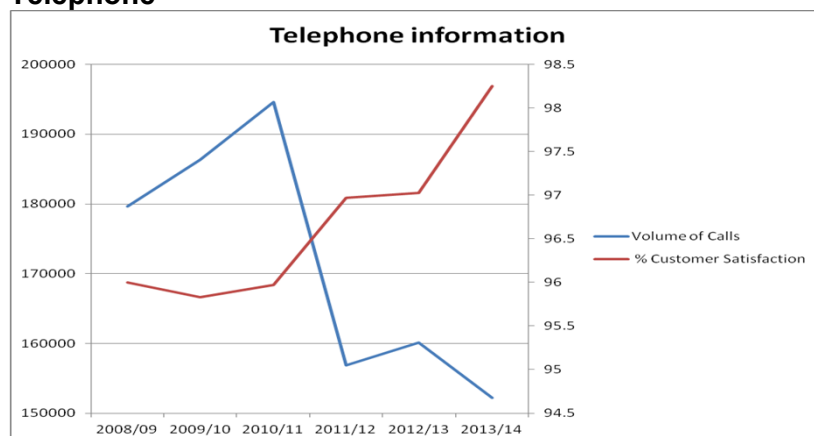
Website

The number of visitors for the website as a whole: 366480 (274,201 in 2011- first full year of new site)

The number of customers using online methods to carry out a function ie) pay a bill, comment on a planning application or report a missed bin (Comment: We need to decide what we are going to measure. For example, submit a planning application (via planning portal) - planning would need to supply this data. Apply for a house (via Choice based lettings) – Housing would need to supply this data).

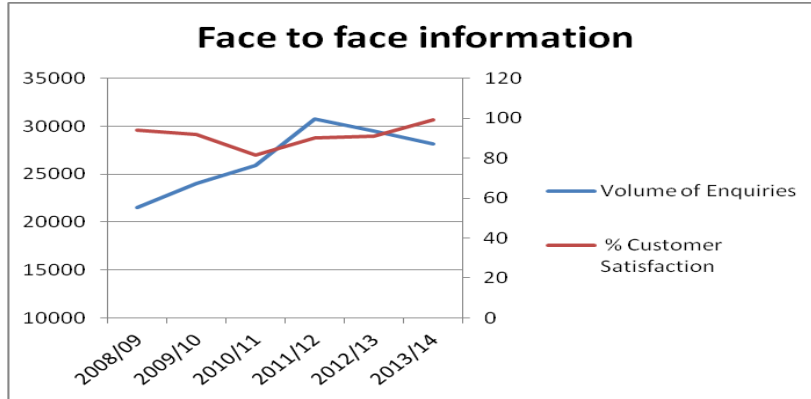
Online forms: 14,565 submissions (first full year of data 2013 via Google Analytics)

Telephone



2013/14 figures have been projected using previous years data

Face to face



2013/14 figures have been projected using previous years data

Surveys for both telephones and face to face interactions show customers already use their preferred method of contact with only around 10% of customers indicating they would prefer to use the web.

Part 3 – Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council 's Channel Strategies

LOCAL CONTEXT

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council is one of seven District Councils in Leicestershire. Hinckley and Bosworth is a largely rural borough of 297 square kilometres in south-west Leicestershire. The majority of the 105,078 (census 2011) population live in the southern urban areas of Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell and Earl Shilton. Significant housing growth is planned for both Earl Shilton and Barwell. The rural nature of the Borough means that broadband is limited and the Council is engaged in a project with the County Council to increase coverage across the County.

Historically, the economy of the area has relied on manufacturing (mainly textile, hosiery, and shoe manufacture), coal mining, and farming. The good road links via the M1, M69 and A5 have encouraged the growth of warehousing and distribution in recent years. Farming remains the mainstay of the rural economy, complemented by tourism.

Unemployment is at four per cent which is lower than regional and national averages, and overall deprivation levels are relatively low. There are however pockets of deprivation, which in turn increases the demand for services and face to face contacts.

For 2013/14 the Council set a revenue budget of £10,570,271. The Borough Council's portion of the council tax was set at £112.09 for a Band D property, which is well below the district council average.

Few services are outsourced and recently housing repairs have been brought into house. This has taken the headcount to 438 (375 FTE's). The majority of the staff are employed in the Direct Service part of the Organisation which is made up of Housing Repairs, refuse and recycling and grounds maintenance. In addition to staff employed directly by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, a number of staff employed by Partner agencies are hosted by the Authority these include staff working for the County Council in Supporting Leicestershire Families (12 FTE) and Children's services (5 FTE) and the District Council's network (2 FTE).

The future of the organisation is positive in the context of Councils facing reduced resources, the Council takes a pro active approach to shared services which supports this position.

The significant challenges other than a reduction in resources are the increasing needs of our customers in the current economic climate, particularly in benefits and housing, as well as an ageing population and a significant increase of 10% in housing in the Borough due in the coming 10 years.

The local area and the unique nature of our residents are key considerations in the development of this channel strategy.

OVERARCHING CHANNEL STRATEGY

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council will make access to its services available through appropriate contact channels designed with the needs and preferences of its customers. In order to achieve efficiencies and to direct resources appropriately, the Council will seek to encourage greater usage of the most effective contact methods, by targeted channel shifts.

OWNERSHIP OF THE CHANNEL STRATEGY

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's Channel Strategy and its implementation will be the responsibility of Chief Officer (Corporate Governance and Customer Engagement)

REVIEW PERIOD OF THE CHANNEL STRATEGY

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council will treat this strategy as "business as usual" with a view to constantly evolving the strategy.

A formal review and re-publishing of this document will be made in January of each year subsequent to its initial publication.

GOVERNANCE OF CONTACT CHANNELS AT HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

At the moment it is not envisaged that there will need to be any structural changes in the organisation, however it is noted that it may be desirable in the future to more closely align certain areas of the business.

It is felt that Customer Services and the Communications team working closely together under the same Chief Officer and in proximity will ensure that customer contact through different channels can be monitored closely and effectively.

In order for the Strategy to be effective there needs to be clear accountability and communication through all parts of the organisation both vertically and horizontally and every member of staff must recognise the need for flexibility.

We will also consider centralising web publishing to ensure that the same messages are given out regardless of the channel the customer chooses to use (Comment: Devolved publishing is considered to be a barrier to digital.)

THE AVOIDABLE CONTACT STRATEGY

To reduce the need for our customers to contact us by working with Partner organisations to provide joined up services and ensuring that we deliver the right service at the first point of contact.

Why should we minimise avoidable contact?

Local authorities are fundamental points of contact for the customer when seeking access to public services. They provide key services for their local communities that greatly affect the quality of life for individual customers and the overall community.

Local authorities and their customers also have limited resources and want to interact as efficiently as possible. By identifying customer contact that is 'avoidable', the local authority and its partners are better placed to redesign the way services and information are made more accessible for their customers, so they do not have to make unnecessary, valueless contacts which are both frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the provider.

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council will work with its partners and internal departments to design processes that reduce the need for customers to make contact with the public sector multiple times to complete one transaction. For example notifying a change of address once, rather than contacting multiple agencies.

The Key Actions That We Will Take To Reduce Unnecessary Contact

1. Being realistic with the customer and responding when we say we will
2. Reviewing complaints and comments and making changes to services to improve the process
3. Designing processes from the view of the customer

The Key Actions That We Will Take to deliver the “No Contact” Strategy

1. We will work with partner organisations to streamline services to eliminate multiple customer contacts with multiple organisations – e.g. registering a birth or death.
2. We will continuously improve our services to deliver proactive services anticipating customer need

Performance Management and Governance

- The Chief Officer will have the day to day responsibility for Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's Channel Strategy and its implementation
- The Customer Service Manager will have day to day responsibility for the strategy of minimising avoidable contact, working closely with Service Heads

CHANNEL SHIFT STRATEGY

“To design cost effective, efficient and user friendly means of contacting the council and then encourage our customers to use the channels that offer the biggest efficiency and work best for them”

What is Channel Shift?

Channel Shift is the process by which organisations seek to encourage customers to access, or interact with, services via channels other than those to which they normally choose.

Deliberate channel shift is the design and marketing of effective and efficient channels because they are the most appropriate channels for the type of contact, customer and organisation in question. Channel shift forms one part of an overall channel strategy, and implemented well it can lower costs, build reputation, empower the customer and improve the overall service proposition. Shifting customers to particular channels involves behaviour change on the customer's part, but once they are aware of the channels available, they will use the one that works best for them.

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council will encourage residents to shift to new and more effective channels by a number of means, including the following actions

The Key Actions That We Will Take To Create Channel Shift

1. We will provide multiple access channels to offer choice
2. We will ensure that web delivered services are quick and easy to use
3. We will carry out user testing to ensure our site is fit for purpose for residents the website must be customer-focused and not for staff. It should have only as many pages as required and not become an archive of documents for convenience.
4. We will listen to our customers when considering any changes

Performance Management and governance

- We will compare the effectiveness and usage of different channels for each service and seek to shift contacts to the most appropriate channels
 - Business cases will be prepared to move more transactions online (including information transactions), that take into account the dual benefits to the public, and ease of use in the contact centre
- We will monitor the number of transactions which are made online

We will do everything we are able to maximise Digital Inclusion.

What is a Digital Inclusion Strategy?

A significant proportion of the UK population do not use online channels, including websites such as NHS Choices, Directgov and hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk

Exclusion from access to digital channels matters for these users, especially as the digitally excluded group includes socially excluded and hard to reach groups who are likely to have the greatest needs from public services.

It also matters for the delivery of efficient public services, because when people cannot access services online they invariably access them via alternative means which are generally more expensive. The priorities set out in the Digital Britain report reinforce the importance of digital inclusion; the report sets out the Government's plans to drive digital participation in the context of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan and the Digital Switchover of Public Services programme which started in 2012. The report also reiterates the Government's commitment to ensuring that public services online are designed for ease of use by the widest range of customers.

It is therefore important that any channel strategy includes plans for communicating these hard to reach groups.

The Key Actions That We Will Take To Reduce Digital Exclusion

1. To continue to provide public internet access at our key locations, e.g. community houses and Council Offices
2. To participate in the government's "Digital Britain" programme of broadband expansion and provide additional funding where budgets allow.

Performance Management and Governance

- The Head of Customer Services will have the day to day responsibility for Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy

ACCESSIBILITY OF CONTACT STRATEGY

We will ensure that our customers can access services in the way that they need to ensure the successful delivery of that service to them as individuals.

What is an “Accessibility of Contact” Strategy?

In the context of this document, accessibility of contact refers to the ease or difficulty that a customer may experience whilst using different electronic access channels to obtain services from the authority. For example, someone with hearing difficulties may find the telephone unusable and may prefer to communicate through email. Equally a customer who does not have English as their first language may not be able to access any contact channel without appropriate translation services.

The Key Actions That We Will Take To Provide Access For All

1. To endeavour to provide a range of language and easy to read options where practical on our website and when it is not practical to do so to clearly indicate how a customer can obtain translation services or obtain information in a format suitable for them (e.g. Large text, audio etc.)
2. We will provide alternative methods of contact for customers with specific needs

Performance Management and Governance

- Carry out an Equality Impact Assessment of the channel mix and regularly consult with disability advocacy groups and make reasonable adjustments to the channels as needed.

Part 4 – Glossary of Terms

Customer

A person using a public service. The person could be using the service for personal reasons, for business reasons and either for themselves or on behalf of someone else.

Service

A service is a provision of information or a transaction that an organisation delivers to its customer.

Service delivery

The process by which a customer receives or accesses a service. Service delivery often involves multiple stages, for example a public sector service delivery process may involve:

- Enquiries and requests for information (e.g. “What benefits am I entitled to?”)
- Service fulfilment (e.g. registering for benefits and payment of benefits to customer)
- Follow-up and after care (e.g. reviewing benefits entitlement after a change in circumstances)

Public sector service delivery can involve a complex chain of actions across multiple organisations.

Channel

A means of communication by which a service is delivered or accessed. Examples of direct channels used by the public sector include post, telephone, mobile telephone, web and face-to-face

Channel strategy

An organisation’s plan for the channels it will use to deliver services to its customers. A channel strategy explains how an organisation will meet the demands of its customers using the resources it has available.

Efficient

Channels that are efficient deliver services without wasting time, money or effort for either the customer or service provider.

Effective

Channels that are effective deliver services which meet the desired outcome, with minimal difficulty for the customer or service provider.

Insight

An insight into a customer is a deep truth based on an understanding of customer behaviour, experiences and attitudes, and their needs from a service. Organisations with insight into their customers can deliver the services their customers need, through the right channels.