

Report to the Council

Committee: Council
Date: 28 July 2022
Subject: Customer Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan Lion

Recommending:

That the report of the Customer Portfolio Holder be noted.

Customer Services

Community Hub

Customer usage of the Epping Community Hub continues to increase since opening in September 2021. From September to December 2021, we had 194 visits. From January to June 2022, we have seen 656 visitors. Examples of services most in demand relate to DWP, Peabody plus EFDC Homelessness, Revenues and Benefits. There were a mix of appointments and walk-ins with the majority being walk-ins. Customer feedback is very positive with 95% rating the support offered as excellent/good. We are working in collaboration with partners to continue promoting this facility to our residents and the services on offer. To find out when each organisation is at the hub visit the [Epping Community Hub webpage](#)

Customer Contact Centre

The contact centre has been impacted by the waste issues at BIFFA caused by a variety of reasons including staff shortages filled by new and temporary staff and vehicle breakdowns. Discussions with BIFFA and the waste management team are continuing to resolve these issues. Call centre agents have received praise from residents on their customer experience when calling the contact centre. As the new Portfolio Holder, I have spent some time in the shoes of our call centre agents, call shadowing to get a better insight into the customer experience as well as our employees challenging front line role. I would recommend this to all members.

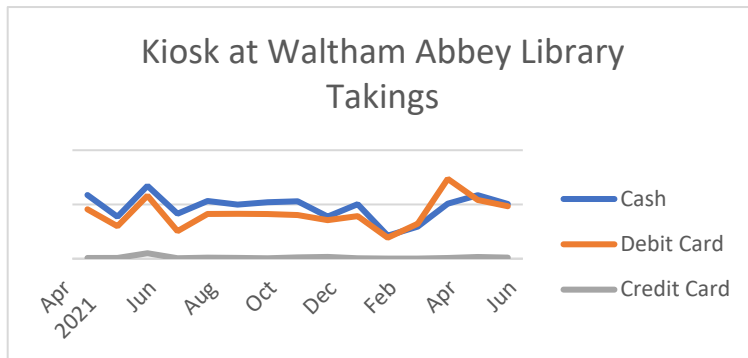
Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are reported to Stronger Council in line with quarterly timelines.

Cash Payments

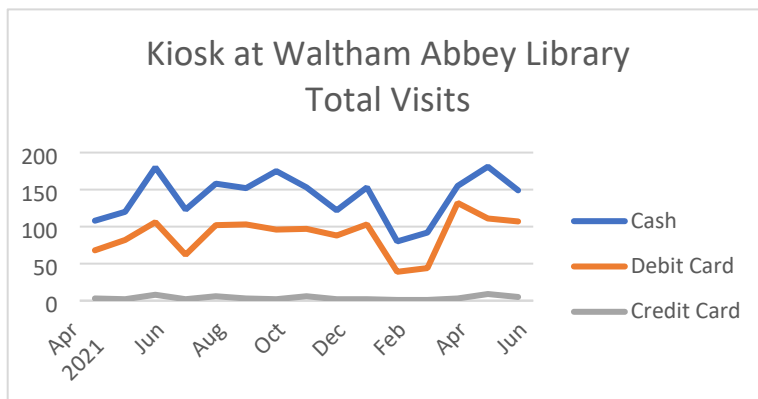
Proposals for alternative solutions for cash payers have now been finalised and were reported and agreed by Stronger Communities Select Committee on 12th July.

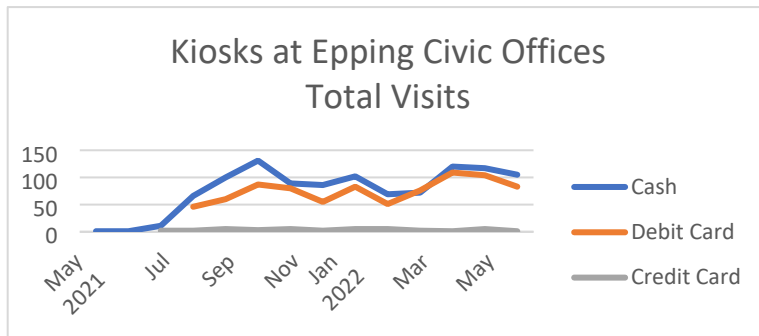
Customer billing for the new financial year in April increased contact at the Debden Cash Office although numbers dropped considerably between April and June.

A similar increase was also observed at the kiosks, with Waltham Abbey library in particular seeing a significant increase in both takings and transactions from April to June after a particularly quiet January to March.



The total value of debit card transactions exceeded cash transactions for the first time since before the Covid closure, however more individual transactions continue to use cash.





Digital strategy – Customer stream

As a reminder our aim is to make digital the preferred choice for customers to interact with us as they do in their everyday lives. Earlier on in the year we conducted an exercise find out why our customers needed to call us rather than use our online services. The results told us that:

- 23% could not find information on the website
- 21% required an in-depth discussion with officers
- 19% were chasing lack of response to calls/emails
- 15% did not know they could self-serve
- 12% found form too complicated to complete
- 10% had no access to the internet or no digital skills

The category of 'could not find information on our website' will be addressed by our website improvements work (see below).

For those service areas with the highest call volumes for chasing a lack of response or their callers did not know they could self-serve, they have been tasked with implementing actions to improve.

These actions include ensuring all Officers manage customer expectations on what will happen and response timelines, addressing issues with calls not being responded to and ensuring that the option to self-serve is promoted on outgoing communications. We will measure improvements by repeating this exercise later in the year to determine any changes as well as capturing feedback on improvements from the service areas.

Customer consultation sessions have been held both face to face and virtually.

Exploring the category 'could not find information on our website' in detail. Key messages in addition to not being able to find the information were that they find some of our forms difficult to complete and that the inconsistent look and feel throughout causes issues with trust. The search function is being fixed as a priority.

There are learnings from other Local Authorities who have undergone digital transformation. We are following in Essex County's footsteps by developing a set of guiding principles which will be known as our 'content strategy' to provide consistency for Officers when writing website content. The ultimate aim being it is easy to read and accessible, in particular via mobile phones which are our residents prefer.

The intention now is to take the waste section as an example and develop improved content through reviewing and improving the front-end customer experience and back-office process. The new content strategy principles will be applied, and a mocked up improved waste section developed. Residents who expressed an interest in working

with us to improve our digital experience will be invited to test the new content for feedback. The required outcome is that we achieve our objective of providing residents with a digital experience that they can use with ease, trust it is us they are dealing with and access via any device.

Longer term, we are exploring the feasibility of using Drupal <https://www.drupal.org/industries/government> a publicly owned asset that delivers a better digital experience for residents, improves service outcomes and reduces cost through a shared pool of resources, research and expertise. The platform is built and maintained by a community of developers, content designers and digital leaders from local councils across the UK. Local Authorities currently using it quote they have seen customer focussed content and design that allows residents to access services and complete their business in a faster more efficient manner.

Digital inclusion

From 14th July we are offering digital coaching support in our Community Hub at the Civic through our partners Voluntary Action Epping Forest and West Essex Community Action Network. The initiative will provide customers the opportunity to drop-in and receive one to one digital coaching and support to complete online forms, utilise online services and acquire basic computer skills. Our hub partner DWP in particular has identified a need for support with some of their customers.

This test model will serve as the first phase in a multi phased plan to roll-out digital coaching support across the district with Waltham Abbey, Limes Farm and Ninefields which have been identified as areas in need of support in subsequent phases.

Members Digital Journey

Following collaboration with ECC and EFDC Democratic Services and ICT Managers, all dual-hatted Members can now view both their ECC and EFDC emails on their ECC Laptops. Members have welcomed this opportunity which provides the benefit of easier access to emails in one place.

During the Members email account failure in May, the Members portal was updated to provide Members access to their emails via <https://outlook.office.com/mail/> The benefit being that Members can access their email anytime, anywhere using a web browser without their iPad or the Outlook app.

A series of "How to Guides" were also uploaded to the Members Portal to assist in resetting account passwords and to provide guidance on how to register for and utilise the Member Contact Form.

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/your-council/members-portal/>

We continue to review our current systems and processes, at this time we are looking at reviewing the Member Contact form, Member Portal and Members Dashboard based on feedback received and will keep you update as this work progresses.

Member Services continue to offer IT Coaching to new and existing Members so if you feel you would benefit from a 1-2-1 session with either Lisa Bannister-Wood or Louis Walton please reach out via MemberServices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Please continue to raise tickets for any ICT issues so that we can address these as quickly as possible cc via Membercontact@eppingforestdc.gov.uk