



# ACCESS STRATEGY

2021-26

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# Foreword

There is sometimes the risk of making assumptions about how people wish to access council services. Such assumptions could result in alienating some people and communities who can't get the support they need due to a variety of technological and/or cultural barriers.

Recognising this, I am pleased that we have developed an Access Strategy that puts people at the heart of our approach, so they are able to benefit and feel included when accessing and using services and that will support the delivery of our Corporate Plan and ambition.

Our vision for Kirklees is to be a district which combines a strong, sustainable economy with a great quality of life – leading to thriving communities, growing businesses, high prosperity and low inequality where people enjoy better health throughout their lives.

By working with people, our partners, businesses, volunteer groups and communities, we aim to provide access across Kirklees that addresses the diverse needs of people and places.

I look forward to seeing the implementation of this strategy and the impact it will have on our people in how they access services that are most important to them.



Councillor Paul Davies  
Cabinet Member – Corporate

# Introduction – Our Council Vision

Kirklees Council is ambitious for its people, its places, and its partners. We are committed to making sure that everyone's experience of contacting the Council is a positive one. We aim to make people's lives easier.

Our values commit us to listening to and working with people, communities, and businesses, so as to understand their needs, what is important to them, and to put in place appropriate affordable services. This strategy sets out our vision to deliver these commitments and to provide the best possible outcomes for whoever has contact with us, and however they contact us.

Learning from a year that has highlighted existing inequalities and the social isolation people experience, this strategy aims to respond to the ways access is provided so as to ensure those who need and receive our services are supported in the most appropriate and efficient way.

## **As a result of this Strategy, we aim to realise the significant benefits of working in partnership to:**

1. Make a positive difference from the first contact, reducing the need for repeated and multiple contacts
2. Provide more localised services in communities which meet the needs of the communities they serve
3. Continue to develop our online and phone services, increasing take up and access
4. Co-design, co-produce and co-evaluate services with people, to ensure a culture of shared learning, power and voice
5. Build on the trust we have developed with partners, volunteer groups and businesses.

This supports the ongoing journey the council has been on over the last few years. To develop early intervention and prevention approaches, to get closer to our communities through place-based working, and to strengthen our ability to build positive relationships and partnerships. Which we have seen develop even more positively throughout the pandemic.

We are committed to working alongside people, places, and partners, and to ensure we always seek out new and proactive ways to enable, empower and resource our communities. We recognise that communities have needs and ambitions, as well as individuals, and will work towards meeting collective needs and making ambitions a reality.

We will continue to work with many groups to deliver the strategy. Some of the groups already worked with are:

- Councillors and Senior leadership teams
- Partners including LOCALA, Public Health, NHS Commissioning Bodies
- Volunteering Groups, Community Groups
- People and communities of Kirklees
- Businesses.

# What do we mean by 'Access to Services' – a whole Council approach

Access refers to the services we provide as a council, but also how we handle those who contact us when they are trying to access those services.

Access is required across the whole life course. We recognise that the type of contact and services required will vary throughout people's lives.

It is also important we design access that responds to individual needs and the needs of local communities, that are delivered in a way that provides value for their money.

Access to Services covers:

- Contacting the council for information, advice, guidance, support, a service,
- Carrying out transactions like paying council tax or rent, booking tickets, paying for services provided or a pay parking fine,
- Finding out about or reporting a missed bin, fly-tipping,
- Finding support for a child or adult,
- Contacting to volunteer, or in relation to a business or employment and
- To take part – help us co-design, create and procure support and work in partnership with us.

Sometimes we use the term 'channel' in relation to Access to Services – channel is used to describe the different ways people can be in contact with the council, for example via websites and apps, in person, by phone, email and forms, via social media, and through our community and place-based teams.

# Understanding our area and those who live and work in it

In the last census there were 431,000 people living in Kirklees. In 2020 it was estimated that would now have risen to over 447,000. There are approximately 15,000 businesses in the Kirklees area.

We know our population will continue to rise and change demographically. To keep pace with our evolving local population, both demographically and culturally, we need to change the way we do things, to ensure high expectations for good quality services are made a reality.

In an ever-changing world it is important that we understand our area now and what it will look like in the future so that we tailor support to the presenting needs of our population and businesses.

We know that in our higher volume transactional services people want quick and easy access to meet their needs. For example, paying bills or rent, ordering a repair or reporting an issue. We also know that at certain points in people's life a more person centred approach is required.

We know the demographics and needs of our population, places and service users will change. We will embed the use of insight and evaluation to continuously review and respond to changes so that our services meet the current and future needs of our people, our places, our partners and our businesses in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Delivering place-based working is key to ensuring we know who our people, places, and partners are, what their needs may be, and how we can ensure our services meet those changing needs.

# Who connects with the Council?

Our research has shown that we have seven main groups who access our services, who all have different circumstances and present different needs.

We also know that within these groups some people are comfortable with technology, and some are not. We will take this into account across these groups when providing services.

## The seven groups are:

### Group 1 – Adult Living Well

Adults living fulfilled lives and with stable economic circumstances.

Like Stacey: "I am healthy. I enjoy my leisure time, particularly swimming at the leisure centre pool and keeping fit. When possible, I like to support my local community. I rarely contact the council but when I do it's because something has gone wrong or I need a service that only the council provides."



### Group 2 – Adult at Risk

Adult living with a disability or illness (mental health or other condition) needing help to look after themselves or protect themselves from harm.

Like Colin: "I live with a mental health condition which means I sometimes struggle with daily life. I regularly feel lonely and not part of the community. Sometimes I need help to live well and as independently as possible, but other times I don't need any help at all."



### Group 3 – Adult with Financial Challenges

Those working or on benefits or both.

Like Adele: "I have always worked but struggle to make ends meet as my income barely covers my living costs. I rely on welfare support without which my personal situation would be unmanageable."



### Group 4 – Community Champion

Those with a strong interest in their local community.

Like Shabbir: "I care about my community and like to see it is well looked after. I report problems to the council when I see them. I take an interest and I am keen to have my say on surveys and local plans that affect my community."



### Group 5 – Well Child

Children with no long-term health issues.

Like Chloe: "I am healthy. I enjoy playing outdoors in the park and countryside. I am concerned about climate change and how we make it better."



### **Group 6 – Vulnerable Child**

Children with long term mental or physical health conditions.

Like David: "I am living with a long-term health condition and my home life is difficult."



### **Group 7 – Business Owner**

Business owners who work in Kirklees.

Like Jo: "I run a business in Kirklees. I normally contact the Council for planning or licensing services. I am keen to share ideas with other business owners and like to be involved in the regeneration of the area."



# Our principles

This Strategy is built around our principles. The principles define how we will achieve our aims.

The principles have been developed with feedback from people and groups about what is required to meet both individual and collective access needs. These principles are:

- **Getting the basics right** – Develop the design of service access, the language we use and understand what it means to people. Identify what people want to achieve and how they want us to help them get there.
- **Tackling access inequalities** – using access to services to address inequalities, vulnerabilities and loneliness including cultural, digital, financial, and other barriers
- **Offering multiple contact points** – We recognise that people want choice in how they connect with us and our communication will extend beyond the traditional channels to include our Community coordinators, social media, community buildings and more
- **Working with people** – Ensure regular reflection and improvements to our processes and arrangements by co-producing our services and how we deliver them with the people that access them, so that we are adaptable to meet needs and access to services is the best it can be.

## Getting the basics right

Develop the design of service access, the language we use and understand what it means to people. Identify what people want to achieve and how they want us to help them get there.

It is vital we get the basics right as this helps us address the other principles where more support is required for people who need it.

People interact with the council through channels that best suit their needs. Some of these channels are:

- **Website and online** – we have had significant success through our Digital by Design programme where thousands of transactions take place efficiently and effectively. This is through our website (booking tickets, paying for services) and the citizen account, reporting issues and accessing information (e.g., council tax bills).
  - We have also developed the use of online forms to help ensure the right support is identified quickly for those in need.
- **Phone** – putting callers in contact with those who can deal with their enquiry/issue/request appropriately.
- **Customer Service Centres** – where there is public access equipment (IT, telephones, and other equipment) and the opportunity if needed for a 'face to face' contact with a member of staff.

We already have class-leading services developed through co-production, but we want to do more. We want to continue to build changes around what people need from us so that we can support them in the appropriate way.

## What we will do

- We will improve our digital offer, enabling many of our services to be easily accessed online by ensuring that links and pathways work and are clear, contacts and referrals are followed up quickly and competently, and all possible considerations for contacting a service are included.
- We will continue to promote digital as our channel of choice for most services, enabling people to help themselves through self-serve first.
- We will focus our staffing resources on more complex enquiries where digital may not be appropriate and for those who are not able to use digital channels.
- We will improve the technology that supports our contact centres to ensure they operate effectively.

## The outcomes expected

- Increased usage in our online channels. Our channels will be more tailored to needs, the support people require and how it is provided. What people tell us will be safe and secure. Efficient and effective processes, mechanisms, and experiences.
- Our staff will become more empowered to help people achieve what they need regardless of the channel they use to contact us.
- Improved satisfaction surveys.

## What might look different

- Increased effectiveness of online support.
- Consistency in communication of messages whichever way people contact the council.
- Training for staff around digital skills, including data analysis.
- The language and set-up we use for digital services.

## Tackling access inequalities

Using access to services to address inequalities, including cultural, digital, financial, and other barriers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequality of access for communities. We have learned from this and have continued to make improvements to access so that people are supported appropriately.

### What we will do

- We will review our existing services with people to ensure that we fully understand the journey people go on to connect with us, and crucially, from their perspective.
- We will tailor our services to meet needs so that those that need our support are able to obtain it in a way that suits them.
- We will be working with the Inclusion Commission to develop ideas on how to do this even better.
- We will ensure people can access services more locally without the need to travel.
- We will develop our information and advice services by identifying what people are entitled to as well as what they need.
- We will explore human rights models of customer care and delivery which focus on what needs to be delivered to create good inclusive services.
- We will have a culture where the needs and aspirations of people are considered at each stage of service design.
- We will review the training we provide to staff to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to provide the right support for presenting needs.

### The outcomes expected

- Those without digital access can get support.
- More personalised services where people feel remembered by staff and not a faceless customer.
- People do not need to repeat their stories several times.
- Services more localised and easier to access.
- Services more visible and accessible for communities.

### What might look different

- More localised support that reduces the barriers to digital and financial help, advice, and guidance.
- Increased use of services provided.
- Increased involvement in development of services from people, groups and networks.
- Greater confidence levels in delivering good inclusive services.

## Offering multiple contact points

We recognise that people want choice in how they connect with us and our communication will extend beyond the traditional channels to include our Community coordinators, social media, community buildings and more.

Making every contact count, we want to make our services more accessible for local people by utilising our workforce in new ways to ensure people get the appropriate support needed.

This means that whilst we will ensure that there is consistency and clarity in our communications between services and with the people we support, access to services will take a much more localised approach.

Through the work done by our staff and partners working out in communities, through volunteers and through feedback from councillors we know that many don't have easy access to equipment and don't travel to our centres for support.

In line with the council's ambition on place-based working, we aim to improve access on a local basis creating environments that have the right equipment and where staff can and will deal with needs as presented and obtain appropriate levels of support.

## What we will do

- We will work as one organisation offering clear and consistent experiences.
- Ensure our staff have the knowledge, skills, capability and tools to deliver consistent and high-quality services wherever and however people choose to interact with us.
- We will identify key areas where providing more localised support presents opportunities to improve outcomes for local people.
- We will learn from the pilot work in these areas, so we can inform our overall approach to developing place-based provision.
- We will be honest about what we can achieve but our plans and arrangements will always be co-produced with people and communities.

## The outcomes expected

- Better connection and opportunity for people to access services in their local area.
- Increasing the opportunity for people to access all channels in an area more local for them.
- Our staff will become more empowered to help people achieve what they need regardless of where they present, resolving more issues at first point of contact.
- Provide appropriate staff with a single view of the citizen and access to the systems they need to be able to deliver services without having to refer on to someone / somewhere else.
- Develop clear and visible clear escalation routes to address complex, non-standard issues or for when things go wrong

## What might look different

- Where our access points are situated and available.
- Personalised choice and control.
- Less of being signposted for support and more of staff taking ownership to support presenting needs.

## Working with people

Ensure regular reflection and improvements to our processes and arrangements by co-producing our services and how we deliver them with the people that access them, so that we are adaptable to meet needs and access to services is the best it can be.

### What we will do

- Embed co-production principles and listening feedback loops in all that we do.
- Co-production will be viewed as an opportunity for the council and staff, as well as those who access services.
- When things go wrong, we will learn lessons and make changes to ensure they don't happen again.
- We will have strong working relationships with people where they have opportunity and confidence to comment on how well we are doing. This feedback will be listened to, responses will be quick and effective, and solutions will be explored with people.
- We will explore different ways to co-produce services with people and partners.
- We will share learning of what good co-production looks like so all our council contact services can learn from each other.
- Through a better understanding of varying needs and circumstances, we will offer services that are proactive from the council and our partners.
- Where our services are required to protect individuals or the environment, we will do so in a clear and consistent way that makes it easier to understand dependent on situation, condition and personal wishes.
- We will be honest about what we can achieve but our plans and arrangements will always be co-produced with people and communities.

### The outcomes expected

- Increased use of co-production in changes to service delivery.
- Increased confidence in services meeting needs.

### What might look different

- Invitations to give feedback on performance, and to co-produce solutions will be more regularly available.
- Opportunities to co-produce our developing programmes will be more widely available.
- Power and voice will be shared.
- People will be seen as experts on their own situation or that of their community.
- People will be seen as assets to improving access to services