

WARDS: ALL

AGENDA ITEM NO. 15

DRAFT REPORT

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET 15TH JUNE 2005

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Dudley Council - Framework for an Access Strategy

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide a strategy framework that is aimed at helping the Council to plan how to give citizens better access to information and services over the next 5 years.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council intends to be even more customer focused. This is evident in the newly created Dudley Council Plus organisation which will help customers to gain access to services more easily. This new organisation will provide access to information and services across the council, no matter how the customer chooses to make contact.
- 2.2 However, for all front line services (i.e. every time a customer interacts with any employee of the Council), high standards of service must apply whilst seeking ways to improve service to customers.
- 2.3 A more structured approach to access to services will aim at improving efficiency by:
- reducing unnecessary repeat contact, e.g. repeat calls prompted by initial difficulties in getting through or by a failure in the service delivery process.
 - deploying staff resources more efficiently e.g. basic requests for information being handled by specialists
 - encouraging self-service e.g. new electronic channels, such as the Internet, will offer some groups of citizens increased opportunities to resolve their queries with little or no direct contact with staff. Savings in staff time can be directed towards citizens who need or prefer more traditional forms of contact.
- 2.4 Currently the Council has many locations and publishes many telephone numbers for citizens to access services. Customer Access To Services has

been established to address these issues for citizens and is successfully meeting targets to create an improved service through Dudley Council Plus.

- 2.5 'One contact – one council' is the agreed principle for Dudley Council Plus; one telephone number will replace many of those currently available in due course.
- 2.6 'Dudley Council - Framework for an Access Strategy' is a paper that summarises the key messages in providing an overarching framework to guide the council in improving its interactions with citizens and others. This framework will guide all interactions, both service access and service delivery.
- 2.7 The proposals in the accompanying paper are in line with existing council strategies and plans, in particular:
- Council Plan 2005/6
 - Dudley Borough Challenge
 - Consultation Strategy
 - Partnership Strategy
- 2.8 Reference may be made to the supporting Technical Document available in the Members' Library.

3.0 PROPOSALS

- 3.1 That the Cabinet approves the paper and that it goes through a formal consultation process with citizens, partners and businesses

4.0 FINANCE

- 4.1 There are no direct costs arising from this report other than for a small cost associated with the consultation process which can be met from existing budgets. Inevitably, the access strategy itself will incur costs to the Council and in due course savings too. These will need to be quantified nearer the time that specific proposals are being considered

5.0 LAW

- 5.1 Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its various statutory functions.

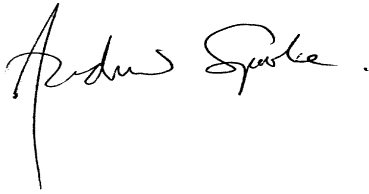
6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- 6.1 The paper actively contributes to the Council policy on equal opportunities with particular reference to improved access to services for disabled and disadvantaged customers.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That the Cabinet approves and adopts the paper, 'Dudley Council - Framework for an Access Strategy'

7.2 That the Cabinet approves the proposed consultation process



.....
Andrew Sparke – Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Tony Hinkley, Ext. 8189

Appendix 1

Title	Dudley Council - Framework for an Access Strategy <i>Key messages</i> <i>From institutionalised services to personalised services -</i> <i>from council services to customer services</i>
Date	13 th May 2005
Paper Objective	Define the Dudley Council Access Strategy
Synopsis	<p>This strategy framework is aimed at helping the Council to plan how to give customers better access to information and services over the next 5 years. This will develop and improve the service we offer our citizens and meet Government targets.</p> <p>It gives an overview of the ways in which citizens can access the Council and the benefits of using these ways (or channels) in terms of cost to citizen and the Council and ease of access.</p> <p>Dudley Council believes in putting the customer first in the delivery of public sector services and recognises that citizens don't experience life as separate events but in more complex ways.</p>

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References

Appendices

1. What is an access strategy?

- 1.1. Basically this is about the ability of citizens, businesses and partners in the public and voluntary sectors, to gain access to a range of information and services through their local authority in ways that suit them and that can be sustained by the council.
- 1.2. An Access Strategy helps the Council to *provide better services* to our customers by knowing who they are, where they are, how they are different and what they need. It helps customers to know about the Council and how to get these services. It will include the hours of service that customers expect, the types of transactions they want to carry out, and the ways in which they want to do all this.

2. Why have an access strategy?

- 2.1. Councils are usually organised from the position of 'what the Council can do best for the customer' (i.e. ***institutionalised services***). The Council knows that people live increasingly complex lives. We need to view access to our services from the customer's perspective and provide ***personalised services***. This is a challenge we are determined to meet.
- 2.2. ***Barriers to access:***
Barriers to access may be divided loosely into three groups –
 - 2.2.1. ***physical*** (e.g. *each Directorate having different ways and different locations for customers to access functions*)
 - 2.2.2. ***operational*** (e.g. *customers would like more access outside of core working hours*)
 - 2.2.3. ***psychological*** (e.g. *customers not knowing who is responsible or where to go for help*)

3. What is the purpose?

- 3.1. This is to ensure all customers have the ***best possible experience*** in accessing services according to what they need and want.

4. What are the key objectives?

- 4.1. Dudley Council aims to improve access through:
 - 4.1.1. *Making sure people **know what services are available** and how to gain access to them*
 - 4.1.2. ***Understanding, accepting and responding sensitively to the different needs of different consumers***

5. Background:

- 5.1. Dudley Council intends to be even more customer focussed. This is evident in the newly created ***Dudley Council Plus*** organisation which will help customers to gain access to services more easily. This new organisation will provide access to information and services across the council, no matter how the customer chooses to make contact.
- 5.2. However, for all ***front line services*** (i.e. every time a customer and any employee of the Council meet), high standards of service must apply whilst seeking ways to improve service to customers.

5.3. A more structured approach to improving access will aim at improving efficiency by:

- 5.3.1. **reducing unnecessary repeat contact**, e.g. repeat calls prompted by initial difficulties in getting through or by a failure in the service delivery process.
- 5.3.2. **deploying staff resources more efficiently** e.g. basic requests for information being handled by specialists
- 5.3.3. **encouraging self-service** e.g. new electronic channels, such as the Internet, will offer some groups of citizens increased opportunities to resolve their queries with little or no direct contact with staff Savings in staff time can be directed towards citizens who need or prefer more traditional forms of contact.

Council Vision - Local People Matter

Dudley Council is committed to providing the best quality public services for local people and creating opportunities for local people to succeed. As a council we recognise and value the diversity of backgrounds, skills and needs within the borough. We work hard to respond to these needs and serve the different people of Dudley fairly and efficiently to improve quality of life for everyone.

As Dudley Council we will:

- **Listen** to what local people say
- **Respond** to what they tell us
- **Be accountable** to local people for our performance
- Provide **value** for money

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

6. Context

6.1. Customer Access To Services (CATS)

- 6.1.1. The Customer Access To Services (CATS) programme has been established to drive the improvements needed to address many of these issues of easier access to services. The CATS team is responsible for creating a customer services organisation (***Dudley Council Plus***) that provides access to all services through channels that best suit the customer.

6.2. Council accommodation

- 6.2.1. The Council's officers are located in accommodation including old merchants' houses that have been converted to offices, the 1930's Council House and 1960's office blocks. In addition there are specialist locations such as libraries, schools and those needed for refuse disposal, road and street maintenance. Most of this accommodation would not meet modern design specifications or the requirements of such legislation as the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). The Council has begun to address the accommodation issues in order to improve how well council officers deliver services to customers. The CATS programme will be able to help address some of these problems in providing convenient access to services for customers.

6.3. Opportunity to access services

- 6.3.1. **Opening hours:** these are mostly 'normal' office hours of ***09.00 to 17.00***
- 6.3.2. **Locations:** there are many locations for customers to access Council services spread around the Borough; almost all locations offer access to a very limited number of services (usually limited to a single Directorate and often a narrower range of services within a Directorate). Because of this, it is easy for customers to arrive at the wrong place to get the service they need, and have to be redirected elsewhere.

7. Our services

7.1. Access arrangements

- 7.1.1. The Council is divided into 7 Directorates delivering over ***700 different services*** to our customers. By and large, most services are provided by a single Directorate but others are provided by more than one Directorate, working jointly. There are ***over 100 doors and over 100 telephone numbers*** for customers to use to access services.
- 7.1.2. The ***main access channels*** include telephone, post, face-to-face (in many locations) and, increasingly, electronic (including e-mail and web-based).

8. Who is involved?

- 8.1. Very simply, anyone who has an interest in a Council service. This includes customers (people who visit, live or work in Dudley), elected Members, employees, businesses, unions, suppliers and partners (including organisations from public, private, voluntary or commercial sectors that work with us to best meet the needs of our customers).

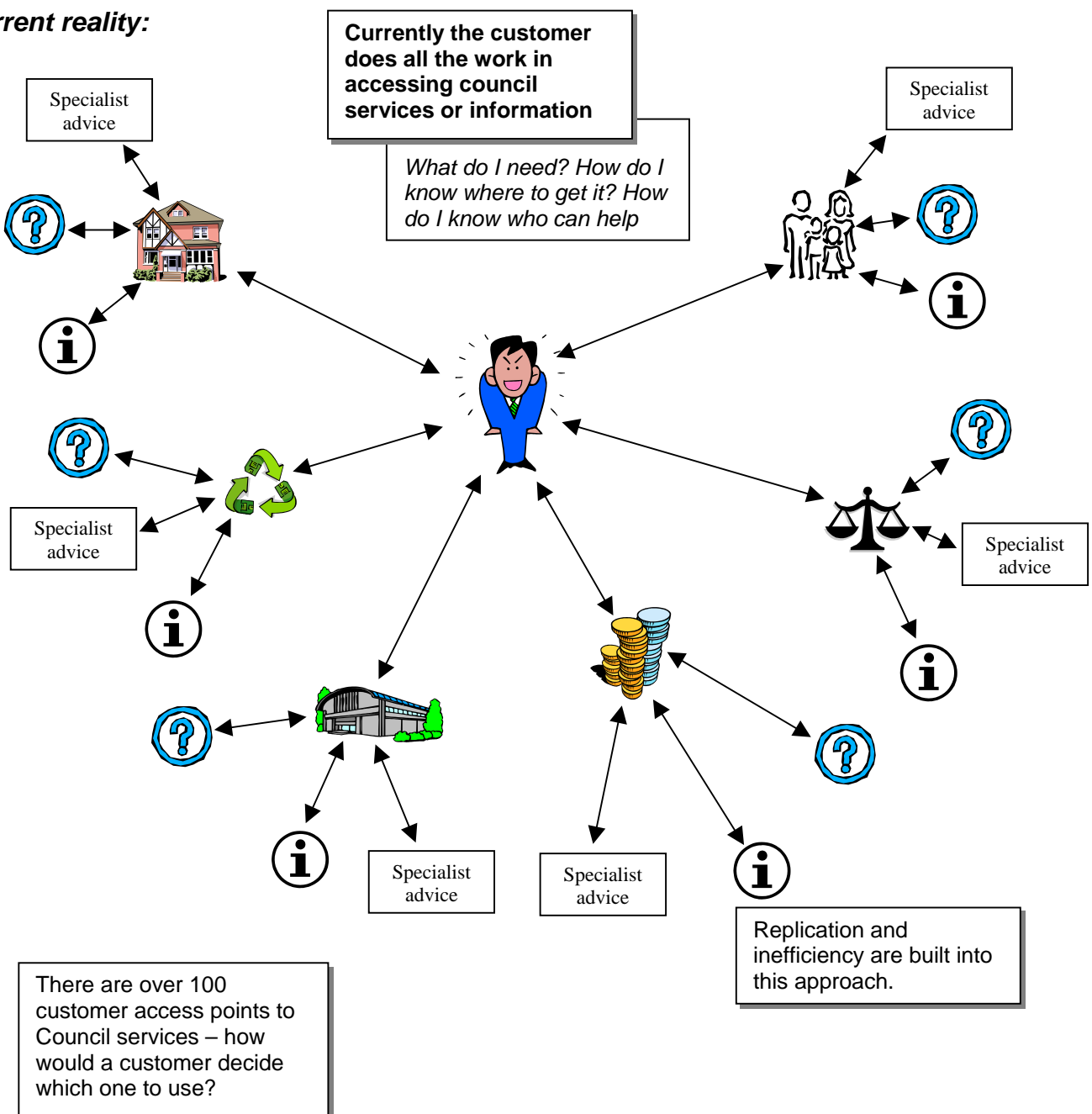
9. Our customers

9.1. **Our customers** include residents, members of the public, people employed in Dudley, businesses, partners (public and voluntary) and other agencies.

9.1.1. Dudley is a Borough made up of a small number of **long-established communities** centred around the areas and townships of central and north Dudley, Brierley Hill, Halesowen and Stourbridge.

9.1.2. Dudley Borough has a **wide range of social or economic advantage and disadvantage**. Some of the Borough's electoral Wards are rated among the 10% most deprived in England, and 21 Neighbourhood Management areas have been identified to concentrate resources to support these areas.

Current reality:



WHERE ARE WE GOING?

10. Business case

- 10.1. Dudley Council's Access Strategy will act as a guide to the Council to provide a better service to customers and to address where we can be more efficient and effective. Where possible, this will be done by reducing unnecessary repeat contact, using staff better to improve efficiency and encouraging customers towards a form of self-service that they will feel comfortable with.

11. Principles

- 11.1. Dudley Council's Access Strategy will support the values and principles described in the **Council Plan**, including social inclusion and equality of opportunity. The Council Plan makes four commitments: ***listen to what local people say; respond to what they tell us; account for our performance; and provide value for money***. In this context the Council will:
- 11.1.1. *focus on customers and their needs rather than on the needs of the Council;*
 - 11.1.2. *ensure that services are provided fairly for all customers (residents, partners, businesses and visitors) in terms of how these groups are different;*
 - 11.1.3. *take into account the views of a wide range of stakeholders;*
 - 11.1.4. *consider how partner organisations can help us provide information and services;*
 - 11.1.5. *assess new ways of offering access, including through electronic channels.*

12. Equality and diversity

- 12.1. The Council will need to know how much different groups in our communities use each of the different channels of access. To help meet needs, access will relate to specific groups rather than be addressed in general terms.

13. Regeneration

- 13.1. Economic Regeneration is about ***reviving the economic fortunes of the Borough***, and providing opportunities for local people to find good jobs at reasonable rates of pay. Dudley Council can help to create significant opportunities for employers by helping to revitalise town centres and providing support to local businesses. The Council will continue to develop a more integrated approach to this Economic Regeneration.
- 13.2. Dudley Council's Access Strategy will set out what it intends to do to support the Council's Economic Strategy and regeneration activities by improving access to services for businesses, partners and stakeholders.

14. Channels (and channel technology)

- 14.1. Access channels include any way in which a customer might access a service. Specific access channels include face to face, post, e-mail, telephone, web-based, digital TV, smart cards, video-conference, kiosks and Short Message Service (text). Many customers will want ***easier access through increased use of electronic channels*** and this will be encouraged.

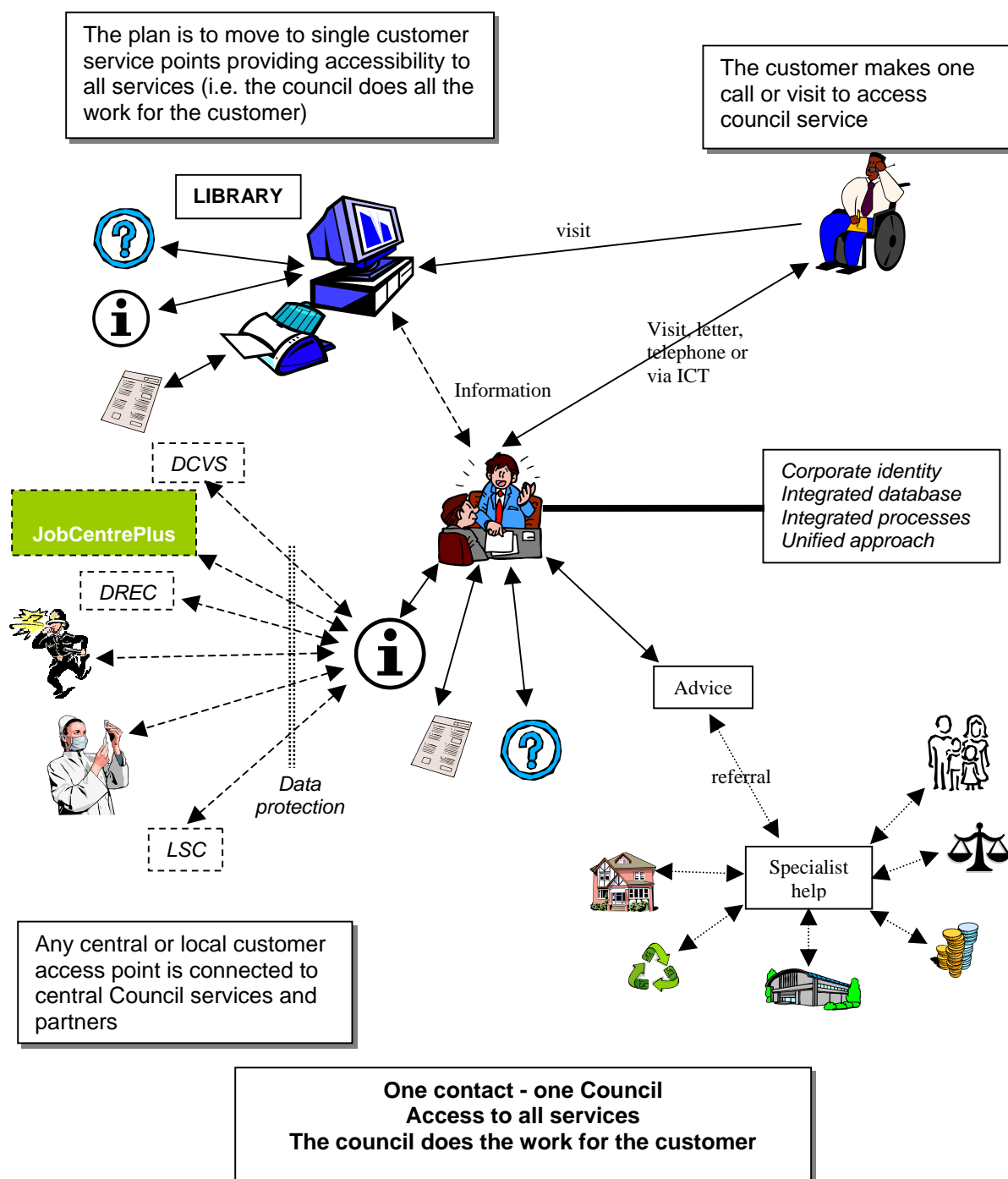
15. Accommodation

15.1. The Council intends to have a Dudley Council Plus Centre in each of the major areas and townships in Dudley and, at the same time, address the Council's office accommodation. This will provide **better access to services** whilst **improving working conditions** and **reducing waste** caused by maintaining old and inappropriate buildings.

15.2. Opportunity to access services

15.2.1. **Opening hours:** extended beyond 'normal' office hours to 08.00 - 19.30 on weekdays and 09.00-12.00 on Saturday mornings for Dudley Council Plus.

15.2.2. **Locations:** town centre locations and information points spread throughout the borough offering customers access to all Council services



16. Consultation strategy

- 16.1. Consultation is all about ***giving people the chance to express their opinions***, provide suggestions for improvement and contribute to or influence decisions that are taken. It is a way to share some of the power that traditionally sits with the Council over people's lives and the decisions that affect them.
- 16.2. Consulting with citizens and partners is only the start. We will also make our citizens and partners ***aware that we are listening by providing feedback*** to them that contains three messages:
- 16.2.1. *We are listening to you*
 - 16.2.2. *We are acting on what we have heard*
 - 16.2.3. *We will continue to listen to you regularly*
- 16.3. Particular attention will be given to the groups who, on the one hand, are most likely to need public services and, on the other, are the least likely to access them.
- 16.4. How do we consult?
- 16.4.1. There are many ***different consultation techniques*** and we need to ensure that the most appropriate method is selected for the particular purpose. For example, a decision affecting only a few people may involve a tightly focused group but if the decisions affect a larger group of people then wider consultation, perhaps involving a cross-section of the whole population, may be needed.
- 16.5. What should consultation achieve?
- 16.5.1. Services more closely provide what people want and expect
 - 16.5.2. Performance standards relevant to customer needs are set and monitored
 - 16.5.3. Customer satisfaction becomes an important aspect of service quality and can be monitored over time
 - 16.5.4. Problems arising from proposed changes to services are alerted
 - 16.5.5. Results of consultation are used to help make decisions about policies, priorities and strategies
 - 16.5.6. Local people are involved more in decision making, which will in turn strengthen interest in the local democratic process
- 16.6. How do we use consultation to help us improve our services?
- 16.6.1. Reports are taken to various management teams, for example:
 - 16.6.1.1. *Corporate Board or Directorate Management Teams (for issues specific to Council provision)*
 - 16.6.1.2. *The Local Strategic Partnership (for matters which require a co-ordinated response from several agencies)*
 - 16.6.1.3. *Senior managers who have asked for the surveys to be carried out (for issues relating to a single agency external to the Council)*
 - 16.6.2. The results are ***incorporated into plans*** to ensure that services reflect local needs and views. Where the Council makes changes, we measure the effects on satisfaction levels, reporting to the Partnership Working and Consultation Group.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

17. How can access be Measured and Evaluated?

- 17.1. Measurement and evaluation start with clear objectives. What is the Council trying to achieve? How will the Council, its stakeholders, partners and the public know when improvements have been achieved?
- 17.2. In evaluating access, the Council will focus on the following issues:
 - 17.2.1. **Outcomes** (*what has been achieved?*)
 - 17.2.2. **Equity** (*who is getting access, who is not?*)
 - 17.2.3. **Satisfaction** (*based on understanding of what the public expects, needs and can receive – within resources available*)
 - 17.2.4. **Methods** (*comparing use of different methods, differentiating between types of enquiry/need*)
 - 17.2.5. **Information** and communications
 - 17.2.6. **Availability** of services (*times of access, etc*)
 - 17.2.7. **Improvements** – *strengths and weaknesses; factors affecting these*
 - 17.2.8. **What more can be done** *to provide access and involve those citizens who have been excluded and possibly cut themselves off from appropriate and available services.*

18. What does Best Practice look like?

- 18.1. In providing good access Dudley will have a clear **policy framework** and **implementation programme**. These will be owned by councillors, senior managers, partners, contractors and front-line staff.
- 18.2. Our policies, procedures and practices for improved access will address the **diversity and different needs** of our population.
- 18.3. Different **methods of access** suit different people. We will address these different needs and different technical capabilities and recognise that customers prefer to access services in different ways. We will do this through the provision of different facilities.
- 18.4. **Monitoring, evaluation and improvement** will be a normal way of life not an 'extra'.
- 18.5. This will ensure that thinking and acting about improving access are embedded in the way the entire Council works.

19. Key outcomes

- 19.1. We will ensure that people who need services:
 - 19.1.1. *Know what is available*
 - 19.1.2. *Know how to apply*
 - 19.1.3. *Can easily do so ...*
 - 19.1.3.1. *... by a method that suits them best*
 - 19.1.3.2. *... with help if they need it*
 - 19.1.3.3. *... with minimal delay*

20. Key outcome measures

20.1. There are lots of measures, many of which feature in a number of inspection regimes the Council is subject to. These include:

- 20.1.1. *Customer satisfaction*
- 20.1.2. *Resolving an enquiry at the first point of contact*
- 20.1.3. *Availability of electronic access points close to where people live*
- 20.1.4. *Staff satisfaction*
- 20.1.5. *Staff retention*
- 20.1.6. *Changes we see in the different patterns of channels used*
- 20.1.7. *A reduction in average cost per transaction*
- 20.1.8. *Electronic government 2005 target is met with 100% of services available to customers through information communication technologies*
- 20.1.9. *The management of data, content and knowledge is improved and streamlined*

21. Managing change

21.1. We want to build Dudley as a Council fit for the 21st century. This means facing the challenge of change. We want transformational change – change which results in an entirely new set of behaviours, running throughout the organisation and its structures. We intend to have an overall sense of direction that determines the series of step-by-step changes. We recognise that change can lead to an apparent reduction in performance in the short term. So our approach will be to keep this short term as short as possible, whilst securing early improvements for the benefit of our customers. More rapid change will follow as we develop our capacity to learn, change and develop. We would therefore expect the majority of our intentions to be effective by year ending 2010.

22. Delivering change

22.1. The Council recognises that it needs to embrace change.

22.2. The Council is formulating this Access Strategy as an overarching framework for the links between strategic plans including:

- 22.2.1. *Accommodation Strategy*
- 22.2.2. *Channels Strategy*
- 22.2.3. *Communications Strategy*
- 22.2.4. *Community Strategy (Borough Challenge)*
- 22.2.5. *Consultation Strategy*
- 22.2.6. *Council Plan*
- 22.2.7. *Human Resources/Organisational Development Strategy*
- 22.2.8. *Information Communications Technology Strategy*
- 22.2.9. *Implementing Electronic Government*
- 22.2.10. *Marketing Strategy*
- 22.2.11. *Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy*
- 22.2.12. *Partnership Strategy*
- 22.2.13. *Strategy for improving access to Council buildings & services*

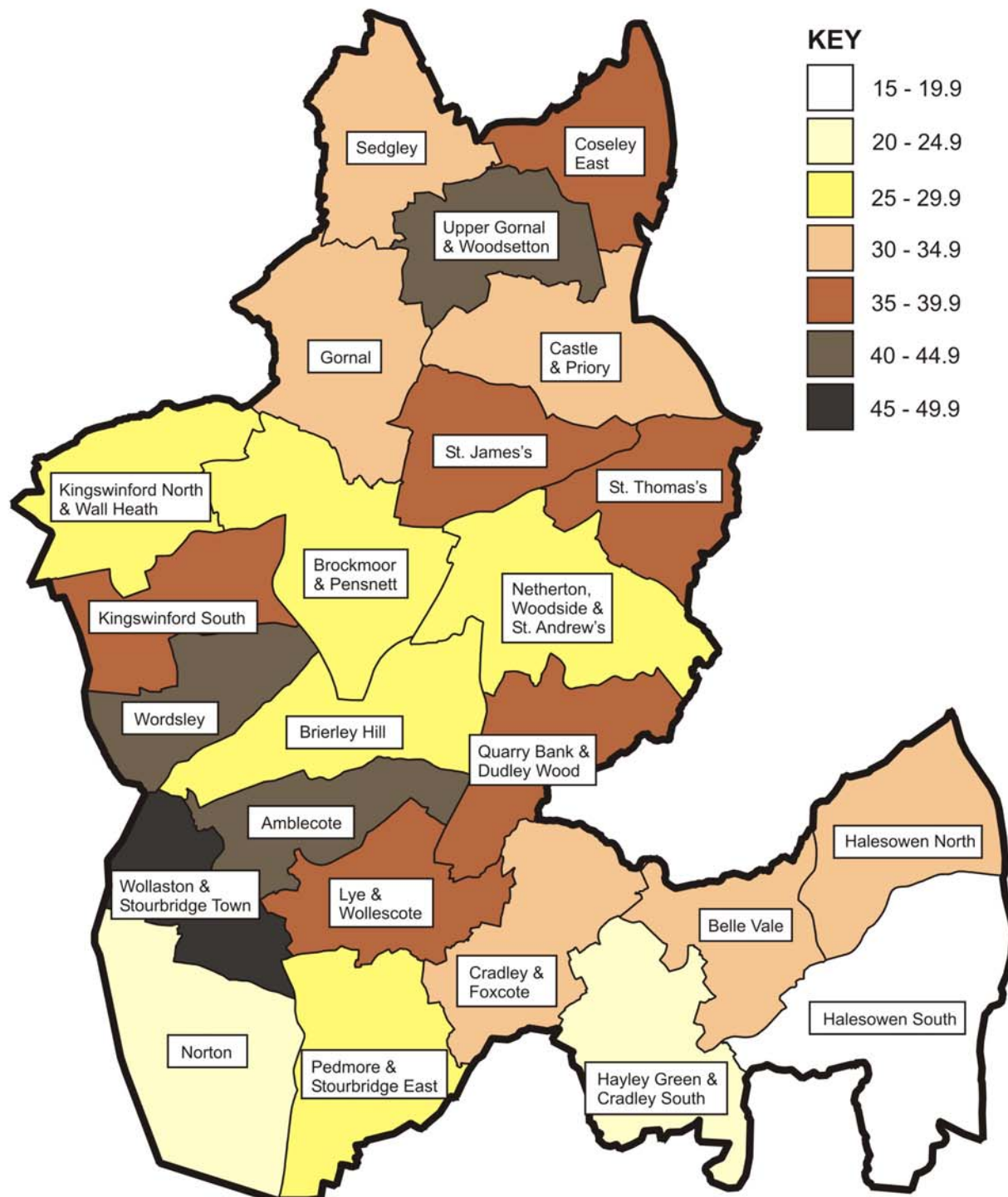
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 - 11.2. Data Protection Act (1998)
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 - 11.3. Freedom of Information Act (2000)
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APPENDICES

13. Maps
 - 13.1. Population densities around the Borough
 - 13.2. Distribution of relative advantage in the Borough's wards
 - 13.3. Number of business per hectare

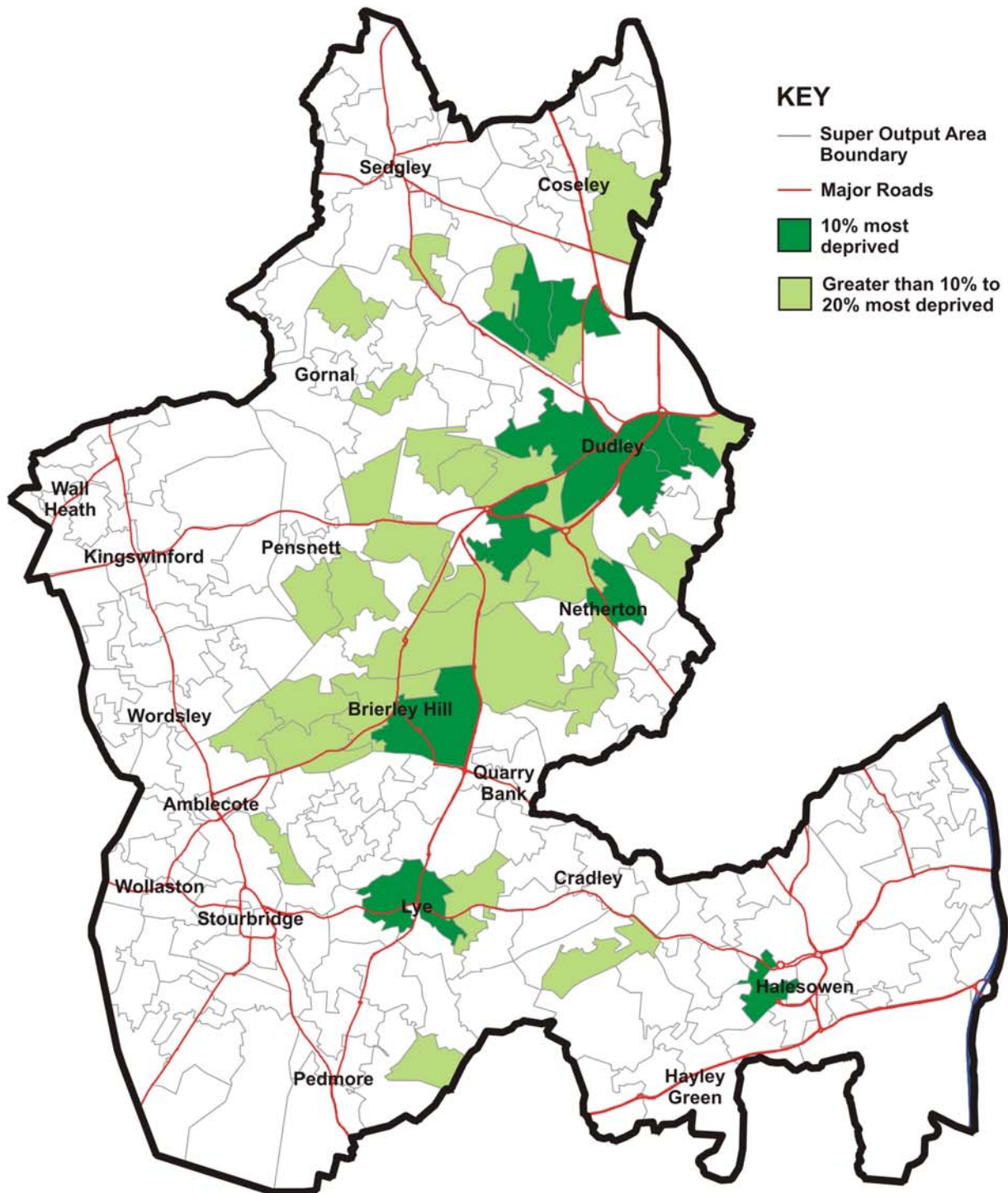
Population Density (Number of People per Hectare) by Electoral Ward, Dudley Borough



Source: DMBC Strategic Research & Intelligence Team/2001 Census

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The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 Super Output Areas in Dudley Borough that are in the 20% most deprived in England

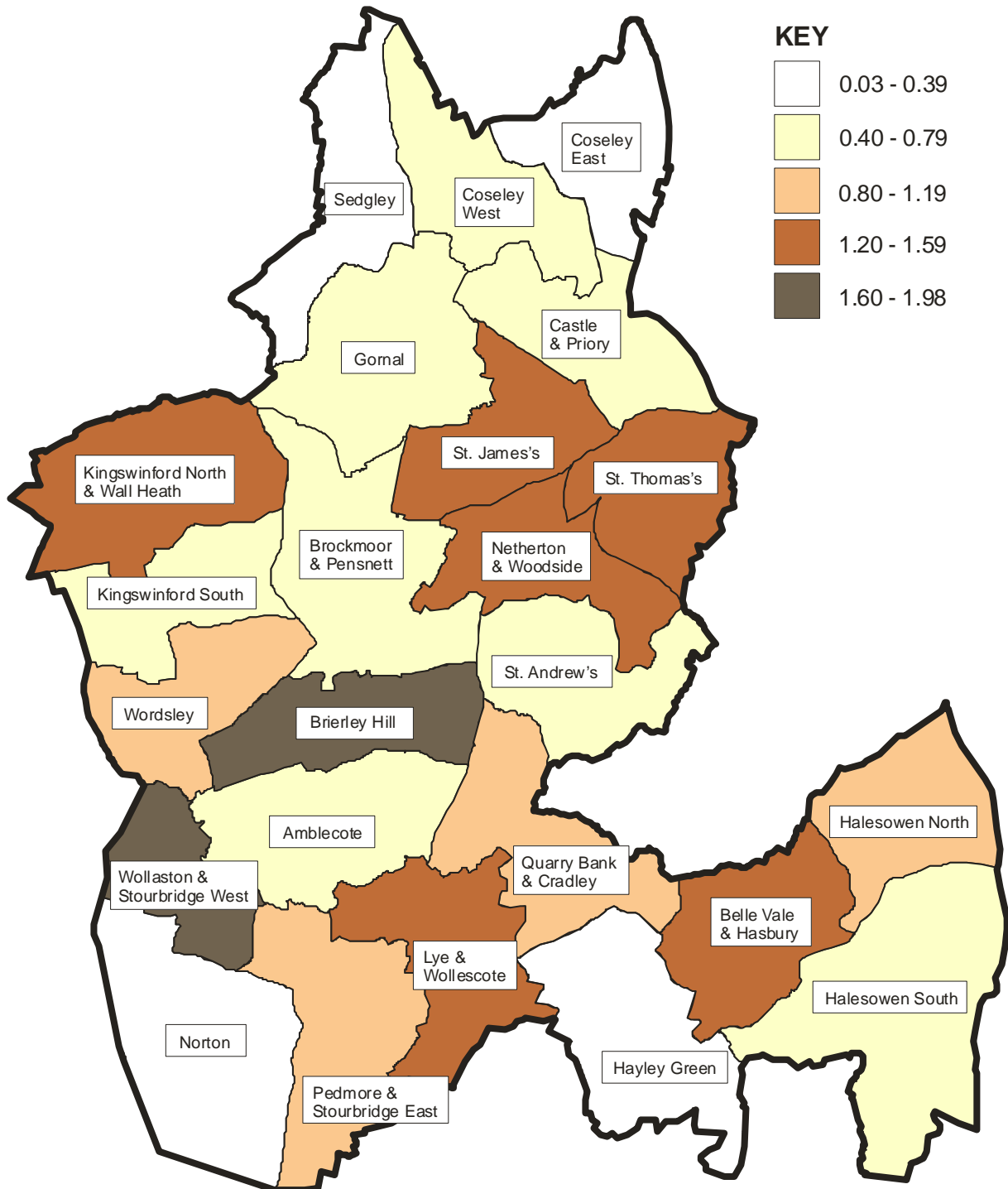


Source: DMBC Strategic Research & Intelligence Team/Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004

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Number of Business per Hectare by pre-June 2004 Electoral Wards, Dudley Borough

Note: Only those business for which a full postcode is available were used in this analysis. This covers 94.7% of businesses on the CMS



Source: DMBC Strategic Research & Intelligence Team/Black Country Chamber & Business Link Client Management System 21/02/2005

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