

Resources and Transformation Scrutiny Committee	
Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Corporate & Customer Services
Area for Scrutiny	How we provide improved and more cost effective customer access to Council services through use of Channel Shift.
Link to Council Plan	Channel Shift cuts across all themes of the Council Plan, including: helping communities to help themselves, promoting independence, where people want to live, better connected, education & skills, transforming services and transforming community engagement.
Context	<p>Channel Shift typically refers to encouraging and enabling a council's citizens, businesses and visitors (i.e. its customers) to move from more traditional means of making contact, that can generally only be handled during normal office hours (i.e. face-to-face, telephone and email), to digitally-enabled contact methods, that typically have 24/7 availability, when they wish to obtain information or to transact.</p> <p>The potential for automation created by digitally-enabled channels provides opportunities for cheaper and more effective service delivery, and so releases valuable resources to allow additional assistance to be provided to those in our communities that need it. Channel Shift also encompasses how councils consult with and listen to their various communities, through online questionnaires, social media, etc.</p> <p>The potential savings from Channel Shift are highly desirable in times of austerity. Successfully delivering these savings depends upon many things; from how we support and enable our customers to 'shift', how we ensure that the channels that our customers have access to and use are the right ones for their needs, how we ensure that our information and services are consistent and simple to access across all applicable channels, to how we enable each and every customer contact to result in the outcome that is needed, at the lowest possible cost to the Council and the customer.</p> <p>While younger generations now generally expect to be able to conduct their business (be that with Amazon or Dudley Council) over the internet via their smartphones and tablets, some of our customers are less able or willing to do this. Successful Channel Shift must recognise and accommodate this range of needs and abilities, with services targeted to appropriate channels (be they online self-service, or traditional face-to-face that is also digitally-enabled behind the scenes), with support in place for those who need it.</p> <p>Hence successful Channel Shift is about people, and is enabled by digital technology that is fit for purpose – it's about having digitally-enabled self-service channels that are so good people choose to use them, while still supporting those who either choose not to or simply cannot use them.</p>
Rationale	There are strategies and proposals under development that have a direct relationship with channel shift, including our: Corporate Customer Access Strategy, Corporate ICT Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy, and the Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning IT offer.

	<p>To enable successful channel shift with the outcomes of improvements to our services and their resulting savings, we must have in place digital technology that is fit for purpose and which ensures that: our customers can successfully self-serve should they so choose; the delivery of services accessed via more traditional channels is equally digitally-enabled behind the scenes; our delivery processes (regardless of access channel) are consistent, transparent and as far as appropriate, automated; and that we are able to keep step with our customers' growing and changing expectations for digital service access.</p> <p>We must also ensure that we understand the drivers of customer behaviour, and make good use of customer intelligence gained from the use of data which will give us clear insight into our customers' current and forecast future needs, as well as indicating how well (or otherwise) our related strategies are working.</p>
<p>What are we asking from the Scrutiny Committee?</p>	<p>To consider whether our strategies and implementation plans will be successful in realising a shift to digitally-enabled access to services and will meet the needs of all of our communities, in a sustainable way.</p> <p>That our strategies recognise the need for diversity in our approach to service delivery to support traditional channels where needed and appropriate.</p> <p>That our approach releases cashable and non cashable savings while ensuring there is an ongoing investment in making service delivery more effective and efficient through the digital route.</p>

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Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Corporate & Customer Services
Area for Scrutiny	The latest Welfare Reforms & their impact upon Dudley
Link to Council Plan	Regeneration, skills and employment Caring for the elderly and vulnerable
Context	<p>The Government's programme of welfare reform is ongoing and in his final Budget of this Parliament the Chancellor, assuming the Conservatives are in Government after the general election, made it clear that welfare will continue to play a major role in delivering future public sector savings. The Chancellor announced that he intended to achieve public sector savings of £30b of which £12b will be found from the welfare budget.</p> <p>A further £13b will be found from a range of Government departmental expenditure, including DCLG. A proportion of those cuts will therefore be allocated to local government, meaning that pressure on local authority expenditure is set to continue.</p> <p>At this time it is not clear where the £12b savings from welfare will be found from but some proposals have already been announced by the Government. However, these proposals, taken together, do not come close to delivering £12b, which could indicate that finding this amount will be difficult.</p> <p>As the Government continues to protect pensioner benefits, the £12bn savings will be made from the remaining £74b costs of welfare for working age claimants.</p> <p>At a cost of just over £18bn a year, the largest non pensioner benefit cost is housing benefit (administered by local councils) which means that housing benefit will inevitably continue to see changes aimed at reducing its overall costs.</p>
Rationale	The Government's stated objective is that welfare reforms are intended to 'make work pay' and end a benefit culture. The Council will want to protect its citizens whilst at the same time maximising training and employment opportunities within the Borough.
What are we asking from the Scrutiny Committee?	<p>To consider the impact upon Borough residents of recently implemented welfare reforms, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the abolition of housing benefit and its replacement with Universal Credit (a small element of UC commenced in Dudley in March 2015) - the Council's role in delivering Universal Credit - changes to our Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, which provides crisis and community care awards - a review of our localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which provides assistance to low income households in paying their council tax