FINAL VERSION FOR CABINET

Hounslow Digital Strategy 2021–2025

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London Borough of Hounslow

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1. Vision from the leader of the council

Our vision is to use digital to create connected and inclusive communities supported and empowered by innovative and digitally-optimised services.

If we work together and engage our communities and partners in this change, we can build a digitally-optimised council of the 21st century that delivers real benefits for all.

Steve Curran, Leader of the Council

2. Delivering the vision – the portfolio holder

Our priority is always to keep improving services and opportunities for the people of our borough. Digital is firmly at the heart of how we achieve this.

We remain committed to protecting and caring for our vulnerable residents and providing the services they need, whether that be digitally or otherwise.

We will assist people who need help, building their confidence and gaining useful life skills that will help them in our increasingly digital world.

Pritam Grewal, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Corporate Performance

3. Our Strategy – from the Chief Executive

When we developed our strategy, we committed to ensuring all Council services are designed with the customer at the centre. This commitment could not have been more critical than it was at the start of the first national lockdown when we needed to ensure that our most vulnerable residents had access to the services and support that they needed.

Within days of the first lockdown being announced, we were able to launch a Community Hub and dedicated call centre to help support our most vulnerable residents, all whilst transitioning into a predominantly remote workforce.

We worked across teams and with partners to improve outcomes, forming strong partnerships with the third sector and bringing us much closer to our communities. Throughout the year we have been able to leverage these connections and partnerships to take steps towards reducing digital exclusion, making improvements to access to technology, connectivity and digital capabilities.

It shows the power of digital, of being connected and the partnerships that we have across the borough. This revised strategy will ensure that we build on all the positive work over the past year!

Niall Bolger, Chief Executive

4. Our strategy

Our strategy in a nutshell

Vision: We will use digital to create connected and inclusive communities in Hounslow supported by innovative and digitally optimised services. Delivered through four pillars:

Staff and workforce

Providing all our staff with modern technology and empowering them to help customers to interact online whilst **continuing to protect and support vulnerable people** who cannot use digital.

Opportunities for **more fulfilling types of roles** to support digital services, with **flexible and mobile working** where needed.

Engaging with schools, colleges and local organisations to **build a digitally fit workforce**, with the skills and tools needed to support a thriving borough.

Services and customers

Making online services so good that most people will **choose** to use them.

Being **customer-focused** in all we do.

Working **collaboratively** to re-design services to be **easy to access and intuitive to use**.

Engage with services, frontline teams and seek **customer input** to develop future solutions.

Ambitious in transforming our services and using modern technology in innovative ways to better **meet the outcomes we seek**.

Place and community

Enabling a **better-connected** borough.

Working with partners to provide our communities with **high quality internet connectively** and build the skills and confidence to benefit from the opportunities and benefits digital brings.

Engaging with our diverse communities, and with businesses and partners to create a thriving borough that is digitally fit for the future.

Collaboration and data

Working as **one council** to build the future, **sharing data** within the council to plan more effectively and **design better services**.

Sharing data and working with partners across the borough to plan more strategically.

Using **insights from data** to drive what we do and learn how to be more **effective in achieving the outcomes** we seek for our communities.

Staff and workforce

By empowering our staff with the capabilities needed in the digital-era, we can, in turn, help our less confident residents benefit from digital services and technologies. There are great opportunities for staff to learn new skills that can be applied across departments and public services, and, by helping our residents learn the skills and confidence to use digital ways to interact with us, we are helping them gain useful life needs. This might help people tackle many things in a new way, from finding a job or training and qualifications, to finding out about care or health and well-being.

Our intended outcomes:

- all staff have access to the tools and facilities they need to perform their role well.
- our workforce is supported and enabled to develop the confidence, competence and skills to make the best use of digital technologies and opportunities.
- our staff have the skills and are empowered to help residents or small businesses who may not feel confident in using digital services.

We will provide:

- robust systems, technology and tools that support digital services and are accessible by all staff wherever they are working.
- pop-up 'genius bar' sessions, training and support to help upskill staff on new and existing tools.
- opportunities for our staff to learn skills that enable them to work effectively across multiple areas of the business.
- common tools and processes across services wherever feasible in order to improve collaboration whilst reducing duplication.
- new types of roles for staff with skills that are transferable across the organisation.

Staff and workforce – what this means

What we have done

Improved the stability and capacity of the council's infrastructure to provide remote workers with reliable connectivity.

Increased the delivery of replacement laptops to 55% of devices being less than fours years old from 25% and deployed additional laptops to enable colleagues to work remotely.

Developed a suite of resources to encourage upskilling and help colleagues adjust to remote working, including supporting mental health and resilience.

Launched a Digital Ambassador initiative to increase digital capability within the organisation and embrace opportunities that the digital era offers to change our ways of working.

Enabled and supported multiple live online events and webinars, including a borough-wide recovery conference involving over 200 people, a month-long Digital Festival, and all public meetings.

Implemented a new approach to performance management to help increase engagement between employees and managers and increase staff development and well-being.

What we are going to do

Establish a face-to-face and remote popup 'genius bar' service to provide colleagues and members with easy access to help and advice.

Review our systems and processes to ensure that we always have accurate records of who works for us and which systems and technology they can access.

Develop a clear framework and approach for the Digital Ambassadors' initiative, with a strong emphasis on developing collaboration skills and promoting cross-team working.

Implement a digital leadership academy and associated learning pathways to help councillors and colleagues develop their digital capabilities.

Design, develop and deliver a programme of activities and challenges for the Hounslow Innovation Network, linking with the recovery programme as appropriate.

Reconfigure our council buildings to make usage more flexible, offering colleagues a variety of workspaces and ways of working, including hybrid meetings.

Services and customers

Our priority is to improve people's lives and we can only do this if we ensure our services are designed with people's needs truly at their heart. Regardless of how people interact with us, their experience should be simple, consistent, frictionless and seamless. By enabling the majority to interact with us online, we can devote time to supporting people who don't have access to technology and make sure they are supported in a way that works for them. (Approximately 8-10% of our population are digitally excluded according to the ONS.)

Our intended outcomes:

- our services are designed around the needs of our communities and are accessible online, on any device by default.
- our digital services are so easy to use and convenient to access that most people choose to use them.
- people without access to digital technologies are assisted with their access to council services.
- digital exclusion in the borough is reduced, with more residents having basic digital skills, access to good broadband and devices they need to use online services confidently and securely.

We will use proven methods to design user-friendly services. At the heart of this will be engagement with staff and with our communities to help us design services that meet their needs and expectations. We will reimagine how our services are provided, maximising the potential that digital technologies offer, and fundamentally improve the experience of our users.

Services and customers – our priority projects

- Our priority service redesign projects are:

community enforcement and regulatory services

housing services

planning, assets, properties and streets

registration services

school admissions, early years and children's services

- These projects are are focused on improving the way we provide services and support our communities, involving the people receiving the services as well as the people delivering them, and with digital inclusion a critical consideration throughout.

- Not only will these projects deliver better services for our communities, empowering people to self-serve and manage their accounts, claims and benefits, there will also be huge benefits to staff as well. Digitising, streamlining and automating as much as possible will significantly improve the way our staff work; freeing them up to focus their efforts on the people who need our services the most.

Services and customers – what this means

What we have done

Enabled all councillors to interact digitally by providing updated equipment; giving them support and training where needed to enable them to champion digital services.

Recruited staff with new skills in business analysis, content, user experience and service design.

Commissioned and procured new solutions to support the priority service design projects and enable more efficient and collaborative working designed around people's needs.

Launched a Community Hub and dedicated call centre within days of the first lockdown, so that our most vulnerable residents had easy access to vital additional support.

In 2020, customers carried out over 320,000 online transactions across more than 100 different services, an increase of 30% from 2019.

Agreed new Customer Experience principles and new governance arrangements for the digital platform to improve our residents' interactions with us and make them consistent and reliable across all channels.

What we are going to do

Unify and simplify legacy and fragmented communications systems as possible to enable a faster and more efficient experience for staff and residents and provide a more digitally inclusive and accessible system.

Apply service design practices throughout all projects, engaging with staff and our communities, and reimagining service provision.

Produce and implement a Digital Inclusion Commitment to enable us to reach out to and engage with residents who cannot or struggle to access digital services, ensuring they are provided with the support they need.

Review the improvements to services introduced by new ways of working, retain and develop them to offer seamless multichannel experiences for residents, visitors and businesses.

Fully review and document the organisation's online presence, allowing us to optimise its architecture, prioritise improvements, reduce duplication, minimise confusion and meet common needs.

Modernise our digital estate through adoption of common reusable components across our digital estate such as GOV.UK Pay and Notify and experiment with alternative technologies such as chat and robotic process automation.

Place and community

Our vision is to use digital to create connected, engaged and inclusive communities in Hounslow, supported by innovative and digitally-optimised services. As well as reliable infrastructure, digital skills and confidence are keys to success for the people, businesses and economy of the borough. A thriving borough depends on environmental sustainability and green initiatives, many of which harness advances in technology and data analysis, and will help us to become a Net Zero Carbon borough.

Our intended outcomes:

- a thriving borough that is digitally fit for the future where our communities have high quality internet connectively and have the skills and confidence to benefit from the opportunities and benefits digital brings.

We will achieve this by:

- working with and supporting residents, voluntary organisations and businesses to help them to benefit from the digital age.
- empowering our staff to help all parts of our diverse community interact with us using digital technologies and develop vital life skills.
- encouraging digital skills in schools and further education.
- deploying state of the art connectivity through 5G and fibre networks.
- providing all our locations with good quality wifi for visitors.
- working with partners to develop Smart City and Internet of Things technologies to help monitor and ultimately improve the environment, air quality monitoring and transport.
- harnessing technology and data analysis to help progress towards becoming a Net Zero Carbon borough.

Place and community – what this means

What we have done	What we are going to do
Signed our first master wayleave agreement which enables the supply of free high quality internet connections to some of our most vulnerable residents as well as our community facilities.	Develop a clear framework and approach for the Digital Inclusion Group, with a strong emphasis on building our communities' digital capabilities to help them benefit from the digital age.
Provisioned 750 devices for children being schooled at home and 150 4G internet connections to schools across the borough, to help bridge the digital divide in the borough.	Work with our communities to reimagine and redesign our services to ensure they meet their needs, are fully accessible, intuitive and seamless, regardless of the channel used.
Worked with the third sector to secure and provide residents and schools with 200 recycled devices, with a further 900 secured for distribution this year.	Introduce Smart City and Internet of Things technologies to help monitor and ultimately improve the environment, working with partners and learning from experiences elsewhere.
In partnership with our local Community Voluntary Service, we created, trained and supported 100 digital champions across the borough.	Embrace advancements in smart home and neighbourhood technologies to support the future of urban liveability, mobility, independence and connectivity.
Established a council-wide Digital Inclusion Network which will monitor the progress of the delivery of devices and connections and development of skills within our communities.	Reimagine and redesign the buildings we own to make them work more effectively by sharing them with our residents, voluntary organisations and businesses and improving wifi access.
Delivered a month-long Digital Festival covering a huge range of topics and reaching hundreds of staff, partners and residents.	Apply data science techniques to help us to create low carbon neighbourhoods and improve environmental well-being.

Collaboration and data

We recognise that redesigning or building new services requires the collaborative efforts of people across the organisation and out in our communities, and that our data holds valuable information which isn't always immediately visible. By working collaboratively, sharing data appropriately and engaging our communities, we can get the insights and understanding that we need in order to design services which improve people's lives.

Our intended outcomes:

- we are powered by data and insight and have a thorough understanding of the needs of our communities.
- we have the right governance and infrastructure to share data and insights within the organisation and with partner organisations, so that we can work together to improve people's lives.
- we have a collaborative culture which works in the open, invites constructive feedback and is agile in its approach.

We will achieve this by:

- building on the work undertaken during the pandemic to share data and insights into the needs of our residents, incorporating additional datasets, improving data quality and establishing information governance assurance.
- collaborating with other boroughs, network groups and private sector bodies, sharing our experience, learning from theirs, and re-using components and best practice.
- developing people's understanding of the collaborative tools available and encouraging openness and transparency.
- providing analytical tools that enable all service areas to gain insight from data.

Collaboration and data – what this means

What we have done

Developed emergency data sharing arrangements to enable greater insight into the needs of our most vulnerable residents.

Redeveloped our open data website, making it much easier for people to access various sources of data, increasing the organisation's transparency.

Established effective governance to review and monitor progress on delivering the benefits of digital to all.

Implemented a new system and associated process for managing Data Protection Impact Assessments, improving our ability to share data safely and make data-driven decisions.

Established a new Data Science and Quality team to improve the integrity of our data and empower data-driven decisions.

Migrated our file storage to the cloud, taking a big step towards achieving a fully mobile and collaborative workforce whilst reducing the amount of storage in our data centre.

What we are going to do

Improve the quality and integrity of our data and information, ensuring we have appropriate retention schemes in place.

Develop greater awareness and understanding of data through a range of initiatives, including the establishment of a community of Data Champions which is passionate about using data for good.

Improve access to data and insight by implementing solutions which brings our data to life.

Create a holistic, joined-up view of our residents, enabling us to support them more effectively through their life events and gain insights from a more complete picture of our communities' needs.

Work with partners and other boroughs to share and join anonymised data and insights.

Improve and encourage collaborative working by developing people's understanding of the collaboration tools available and demonstrating the benefits of openness and transparency.

London Borough of Hounslow

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