



**Resources and Public Realm  
Scrutiny Committee**  
9 January 2018

**Report from the Director of  
Performance, Policy and  
Partnerships**

**The Digital Strategy and the Customer Experience**

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| <b>Wards Affected:</b>   | All   |
| <b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>  | Non-key   |
| <b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b><br>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act) | Open  |
| <b>No. of Appendices:</b>  | Three: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Programme Governance Arrangements</li> <li>• Geodemographic Classification Maps</li> <li>• The Customer Promise and its Themes</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Background Papers:</b>  | Brent Digital Strategy 2017 – 2020  |
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**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Brent Digital Strategy 2017 – 2020 and its impact on the customer experience in accessing services. It also provides an outline for the forthcoming Channel Strategy and seeks feedback from the Committee on its scope and the principles proposed to underpin the ways in which Brent Council will design and deliver its services across a range of contact channels to ensure accessibility and value for money.

## 2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Committee notes the content of this report, including the progress of the Brent Digital Strategy and its impact on the customer experience.
- 2.2 The Committee provides feedback on the proposed scope and underpinning principles of the forthcoming Brent Channel Strategy.

## 3.0 Detail

### *Background*

- 3.1 The Brent Community Access Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in October 2014. It set out a vision for transforming the way in which customers were able to access information, advice and services at that time - including an improved digital offer with greater take up of digital channels, a more consistent and excellent customer experience, access arrangements to meet the differing needs of customers and more efficient demand management.
- 3.2 The Community Access Strategy was designed to support the wider aims of the previous Borough Plan, which has since been superseded by the Borough Plan 2015 – 2019 and, in response to further financial and political changes, the Brent 2020 Vision.
- 3.3 In June 2017 Cabinet agreed the Brent Digital Strategy 2017 – 2020. The Digital Strategy sets out a vision for a sustained programme of change where modern technology will be a catalyst for delivering each of the Brent 2020 priorities: Demand Management, Raising Income, Business and Housing Growth, Employment and Skills and Regeneration.
- 3.4 A digital work programme, which is overseen by the Brent Digital Board, was subsequently established to deliver this vision. The governance arrangements for the programme are included in Appendix 1.

### *Digital Strategy*

- 3.5 The Digital Strategy superseded the Community Access Strategy through the objectives set out in its 'Demand Management (helping people to help themselves)' section. The first four of these objectives directly influence the experience of customers and other stakeholders in accessing services, as well as interacting with and working alongside the council. These objectives are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1:**

| Brent Digital Strategy (2017 – 2020)<br>Demand Management - helping people to help themselves |   |
|---|---|
| Objective   | Additional Details  |
| 1. Design more effective and preventative service models.                                     | This includes utilising advanced data analytics and business intelligence to design more personalised service models that promote self-help, self-care and pathways to partner organisations at earlier points in the customer journey. |

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|---|---|
| 2. Make online the first choice for interacting with all council services.  | <p>This means providing a faster, better and enhanced user experience through a platform that works effectively across the preferred device of service users.</p> <p>This will be achieved by following user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) design principles to ensure that the end user is always at the forefront of what constitutes 'good'; encouraging more customers to choose online and supporting the closure of higher cost channels.</p> |
| 3. Ensure all residents have access to the support they need to confidently access online information and services.   | This includes increased access to free Wi-Fi and self-serve terminals at locations across Brent, as well as assistance for our most vulnerable residents in accessing services via a network of community hubs, delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector.   |
| 4. Integrate channels, applications and workflows to enable seamless end-to-end transactions across a wider range of services, increase automation and maximise the first touch capability of council officers. | Service users will only need to submit relevant details once. This is essential in allowing customers to independently complete full transactions and do business with the council at times of their choosing, providing a digital offer in-line with modern expectations, whilst freeing up officer time for higher value relational work.   |

3.6 There are a range of projects and workstreams within the digital programme (and related work) that support the delivery of these objectives and will change the experience of service users. Throughout the life of the strategy the work programme will continue to grow and evolve in line with wider transformation work across the Council, but key examples of some of the work already underway are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2:**

| Objective | Workstream / Project  |
|-----------|---|
| 1.        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single Person Homelessness Pathway</li> <li>• Predictive modelling for earlier identification and intervention for those at risk of exploitation</li> </ul>  |
| 2.        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brent Customer Services (BCS) service offer pilot and redesign to support accelerated channel shift</li> <li>• Extension of and enhancements to Brent MyAccount</li> <li>• Brent website review</li> </ul> |
| 3.        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harlesden Community Hub model expansion to additional locations</li> <li>• Futureproofing Brent's digital infrastructure</li> </ul>  |
| 4.        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRM build and roll out (first in Housing services then council-wide)</li> <li>• Integrated online form roll out</li> <li>• Introduction of new telephony system, increasing flexible working</li> </ul>    |

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- 3.7 The overarching theme of this work is about making it quick and easy for customers to access services online via their preferred device 24/7, whilst promoting self-help and digital inclusion. It aims to provide a customer experience that meets the expectations set by modern online offers; where transactions can be completed in seconds and users can track the progress of service interactions in real time. This theme aligns with the 'Internet User Classification' map of Brent included in Appendix 2.
- 3.8 The other key theme acknowledges that there is a smaller but significant group of vulnerable service users that are not able to self-help or access services independently. This includes those with learning difficulties, mental health disabilities, severe physical disabilities, severe hearing and visual impairments, as well as those of pensionable age that are unable to navigate on-line services with assistance. For this cohort the future experience for accessing services will be more tailored to their needs, including appointments, relational support in community based settings and earlier interventions by core services. This theme aligns with the 'Older people in Brent' and 'People with disabilities in Brent' maps included in Appendix 2.
- 3.9 The Digital Strategy also includes a final Demand Management objective to '*Trial radical approaches and develop innovative solutions for new models of service delivery*'. Workstreams under this objective will trial and implement new technologies, including chatbots and next generation telephony, across multiple council departments and service areas. In some instances this work will support the closure of non-digital channels by enhancing the online offer and user experience, for example, for private landlord licencing services. In other areas transformation work with individual service areas (and stakeholders) will develop models that utilise both digital and traditional channels in new ways, which will impact the experience of different cohorts of service users.

### *Channel Strategy*

- 3.10 To ensure consistency and provide greater clarity on how the Digital Strategy Demand Management objectives will change the customer experience across all council services and channels, an aligned Brent Channel Strategy is being developed.
- 3.11 The contact channels proposed to be included in scope of the Channel Strategy are detailed below. It is requested that the Committee provide feedback on this scope:
- Face to face
  - Email
  - Web
  - Phone
  - Mobile
  - Post
  - Social Media
  - Emerging channels (video, voice recognition / headless interface, virtual and augmented reality)

- 3.12 The Channel Strategy will incorporate the learning from the Brent Customer Services (BCS) pilot, which ran between June and September 2017 and evaluated the impact of a new service model that included accelerated channel shift delivered with significantly reduced resources. The outcomes of this pilot included reductions in phone calls received via the contact centre and reductions in face to face appointments, with a concurrent increase in take up of online self-service and digital assistance (in particular webchat). Feedback from customers that experienced the pilot offer, as well as levels of complaints, remained similar to what had been recorded over earlier periods.
- 3.13 A Channel Strategy paper is currently scheduled for Cabinet on 12 March 2018, which aligns it with a complementary paper setting out the evaluation of the Harlesden Community Hub pilot and proposals to expand the hub model to additional locations. This paper will include details of user experiences and the multiple needs identified throughout the pilot in providing services to vulnerable residents. The learning from this paper will also inform the Channel Strategy.
- 3.14 Additional current and planned work that will feed into the development of the Channel Strategy includes the rationalisation of published telephone numbers, email addresses and online forms; the migration of new services onto the Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system and comprehensive analysis of contact data across all channels. It will also include the final Brent website review report, which incorporates feedback from a number of workshops with a diverse range of residents and stakeholders.
- 3.15 It is proposed that the development of the Channel Strategy will be underpinned by principles derived from the Digital Strategy Demand Management objectives outlined in Table 3 (with additional details in Table 1). It is requested that the Committee provide feedback on these principles.

**Table 3:**

| Proposed Channel Strategy Principles  |   |
|---|---|
| Digital Strategy (Demand Management) objective  | Derived Channel Strategy Principle  |
| 1. Design more effective and preventative service models.   | The service will promote self-help, preventative measures and support the most vulnerable in accessing it in the best way for them. |
| 2. Make online the first choice for interacting with all council services.  | Online will be the first choice for interacting with the service.   |
| 3. Ensure all residents have access to the support they need to confidently access online information and services.   | Support in accessing services will meet the needs of the individual.  |
| 4. Integrate channels, applications and workflows to enable seamless end-to-end transactions across a wider range of services, increase automation and maximise the first touch capability of council officers. | Service users will only need to submit relevant details once.   |

## *Customer Promise*

- 3.16 The Customer Promise was developed alongside the Community Access Strategy in 2014. Following consultation, five Customer Promise themes were later developed. These are the things that customers and members identified as being most important to them and the things that staff felt would inspire them to deliver excellent customer service. Full details of the customer promise and its themes are included in Appendix 3.
- 3.17 A scorecard based on the aims included in Customer Promise was developed to monitor delivery of these standards, but this did not include information relating to online services and performance relating to email, post and some face to face contacts required manual collection by departments.
- 3.18 Due to the complexities and inconsistencies in capturing this data it was not possible to use the scorecard to accurately monitor performance against the customer promise.
- 3.19 With the Community Access Strategy being superseded by the Digital Strategy and forthcoming Channel Strategy, new monitoring arrangements will be developed to reflect these changes. The monitoring arrangements for the Channel Strategy will remove reliance on manual collection of data by incorporating digital solutions, including the new CRM and telephony systems, to generate robust, real-time information showing how the council is performing against customer expectations. Accurate performance data will be available towards the end of 2018 and a baseline for the key measures of success and customer priorities will be gathered through the next Residents Attitude Survey, scheduled for May 2018.

## **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The Digital Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in June 2017, including £5.6M funding to deliver the digital programme.
- 4.2 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report other than that already approved by Cabinet in June 2017.

## **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from the Recommendations in this report.

## **6.0 Equality Implications**

- 6.1 The changes to the service offer during the BCS pilot (outlined at 3.12) is the subject of an Equalities Analysis (EA). During the pilot period, due regard was given to vulnerable customers through the retention of appointments for them and additional staff support within the customer service centre for assistance in accessing online services. The learning from this model and its EA will inform development of the Channel Strategy.

6.2 Initial evaluation of the equalities implications of the Harlesden Hub Model and Brent Website Review are due to be completed by January 2018 and will also inform development of the Channel Strategy.

6.3 Additional work around the equalities implications of the Channel Strategy will commence when the scope and principles are agreed.

## **7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

7.1 The Lead Member for Digital (The Deputy Leader) was consulted throughout the development of the Brent Digital Strategy and is its champion.

7.2 This paper is part of the pre-policy consultation work for the Channel Strategy.

**Report sign off:**

**Peter Gadsdon**

Strategic Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships