

	<p style="text-align: center;">Cabinet 19 January 2026</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Report from the Corporate Director of Service Reform and Strategy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lead Member –Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Councillor Jake Rubin)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Digital Roadmap 2026-28</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	One Appendix 1: Brent Council Digital Roadmap 2026-28
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Detail)	<p>Sadie East, Director, Communications, Insight and Innovation 020 8937 1507 Sadie.East@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Tony Afuape, Head of Digital Transformation 020 8937 2247 Tony.Afuape@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. Brent Council's current four-year digital strategy ends in April 2026. In the context of pressing financial challenges and the rapid pace of technological change, a two-year digital roadmap has been developed to set out our ambitions for using digital to enable transformation and support delivery of savings from 2026-28.
- 1.2. The council is facing a series of unprecedented financial challenges, caused by a perfect storm of high inflation, reduced government funding since 2010, and rapidly increasing demand for services – including a growing adult social care bill and soaring levels of homelessness.

- 1.3. Brent's mission is to help everyone here live their best lives, and we are radically changing how we organise and provide public services in Brent to do just that. We are embracing our role as a radical place leader, with a strategic change programme that will result in us planning, designing and commissioning services differently. We want to become an insight-led council that understands its communities and takes data-informed decisions.
- 1.4. Building on the foundations we have built through our digital transformation work over recent years and learning from our experience, we now have ambitious plans to ensure digital technology enables Brent to address the challenges it faces to better meet the needs of our residents, and get the most from our data and digital are vital to creating a more sustainable model for the future.
- 1.5. The 2026-28 Brent Council Digital Roadmap is based around three core ambitions to improve the resident experience, use digital to empower the organisation and harness the power of our data to support new, more preventative ways of working. Learning from others and from our experience to date, the roadmap also sets out a new approach and methodologies which will result in a joined-up and shared approach to innovation where digital is everyone's responsibility and is a key building block of wider improvement.
- 1.6. The draft 2026-28 Brent Council Digital Roadmap also sets out the required investment to ensure we can continue to enable our Embrace Change Portfolio vision and deliver 2026-27 cross-cutting digital and resident experience savings - and previously agreed business case savings - as well as to develop a pipeline of further digitally enabled savings for 2027-28 and beyond.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1. Agree the Brent Council Digital Roadmap 2026-28.
- 2.2. Approve a capital budget of £4,435,455 in 2026/27 (in addition to the budget of £817,554 for 2026/27 approved by Cabinet in 2021) and of 4,313,408 in 2027/28. This budget will be funded by prudential borrowing.

3.0 Cabinet Member Foreword

- 3.1. This Digital Roadmap for 2026-28 sets out our plans to build on work to date and drive increased impact for residents through use of digital technologies. It brings together all of our digital and data enabled work into one programme. It will deliver our key priority of digital inclusion - so that all residents who want to are enabled to use effective, user-friendly digital services and support is in place to tackle the barriers to entry, while those with more complex issues continue to be able to access face to face and telephone support. It also supports our priorities to develop AI in a way that benefits residents, staff and

the organisation; and using data to enhance the council's ability to reduce poverty, enhance community safety, and keep brent clean and green.

- 3.2 The investment in the roadmap will enable the delivery of the Council's proposed 2026-27 savings for digital and resident experience. It will also enable other savings and efficiencies in both 2026-27 and 2027-28. Wider benefits from the programme include the benefits to residents from improved resident experience and investment in digital inclusion and the investment in using data to inform earlier intervention and prevention will have an impact in the medium to longer term.
- 3.3 Our digital programme from 2022-26 has supported delivery of our five borough plan priorities. The 2026-28 Roadmap will support Council strategic priorities of through investment in digital skills, infrastructure and partnerships and enabling strong access and engagement for residents and communities. It will support our adult social care transformation ambitions from support for technology-enabled care, and investment in predictive analytics, and integrated data to deliver proactive, personalised support.
- 3.4 It will also support implementation of our draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy through improved use of data to understand causes of homelessness and intervene earlier to prevent people from becoming homeless. It is also key to our work to improve skills and access to employment in Brent as well as to helping our local businesses to thrive. The council's climate objectives are addressed by reducing resource use, enabling smarter operations, and improved measurement of climate change ambitions through investment in data analytics and the Internet of Things. It is also a key enabler of our Data and Insight Strategy and Customer Access Strategies and is also key to delivery of our 2025-28 People Strategy, including the themes of Future Workforce and Employer of Choice.

4.0 Detail

What we have delivered

- 4.1 Our 2022-26 Digital Programme has enabled the Council to deliver savings and efficiencies, freeing up staff time to better support residents, to modernise its technology, to improve services to residents – for example through an improved, more accessible website, to increase connectivity in the borough and to increase digital inclusion through greater access to digital devices and skills.
 - Innovations like the [Fix My Street](#) app and or first AI-powered parking chatbot have enabled residents to **report over 129,000 local issues**. These solutions have helped to reduce calls to our contact centre by 25%, making it easier for residents to carry out simple tasks online and enabling those with more complex needs to contact us more easily.
 - **More than £10.49m has been delivered in savings** and efficiencies across the Council enabled by smarter ways of working, automation and better use of technology.

- **72.98% of the borough now has full fibre broadband** to the premises, enabling more of our resident to access fast broadband – exceeding our target of 62% by 2026
- More than **1,700 top-range laptops** have been distributed to **schools, foster carers and care leavers** in Brent since 2021 with around **half of Brent's schools** having received devices as part of the scheme
- In total, **4,500 digital devices** have been provided since 2021, along with **SIM cards and broadband support** where needed.
- With support from **over 200 digital champions** and our community hubs, residents have been able to access education, apply for jobs, increase their skills and use online services through our digital inclusion scheme
- Our fully accessible **website is used by up to 15,000 visitors per month** and is making it easier for residents to find information and access services. Online satisfaction has increased to 65% and we have ambitious plans to further increase this via the work set out in this roadmap
- **50,000 residents have accessed our digital online skills platform**, enabling them to learn skills such as coding which can be used to increase access to well-paid employment
- We have created **10 digital and data apprenticeships** within the Council and three of four people who completed their apprenticeships in 2024-25 now have permanent jobs with the Council
- Through Robotic Process Automation and trials of Artificial Intelligence tools, we have identified ways to **work more efficiently and effectively**. 50 processes have been automated – freeing up staff time from carrying out administrative tasks to spend delivering better outcomes for our residents.
- We have developed and published our first **Social Progress Index**, an interactive, public-facing data tool that measures how Brent's wards are performing across a wide range of social outcomes. This is helping us to track outcomes and to meet the needs of local areas.
- A number of front door tools to provide improved access to self-serve tools to have been implemented for Adult Social Care, for example the BetterCare online self-assessment tool for customers.
- **Digital support has been provided for 122 Brent businesses** through workshops and one-to-one diagnostic sessions.

4.2 Through this work, Brent Council has steadily advanced its objective to become both a “digital council” and a “digital place.” The council has rolled out multiple initiatives that reshape how residents, local businesses, and its own workforce interact with public services. The council’s improvement programme has focused not only on modernising internal systems, but also on tackling digital exclusion by making devices, connectivity and training available to residents, expanding broadband infrastructure and creating accessible, resident-friendly digital services. Brent has deployed a range of digital tools from citizen-facing apps such FixMyStreets and the resident online portal MyAccount. We have also moved our website to a new modern platform which is more user friendly and accessible and have removed paper and

document-based processes to improved online forms. Brent's conversational AI Parking chatbot is helping residents navigate parking queries and reducing pressure on staff and Adult Social Care has deployed a range of digital and assistive technology, with self-assessment tools such BetterCare Support, JOY App, AskSARA, and a financial calculator.

4.3 Equally Brent has invested in digitally enabling its workforce and deployed tool such as Co-pilot and Magic Notes to streamline internal processes and enable more efficient operations. It has deployed Robotic Process Automation (RPA), across multiple back-office processes (rent changes, debt recovery, data clean-up, reporting etc). The move to cloud-based systems and integrated platforms has also streamlined core council operations. Recently Brent has migrated its telephony/contact-centre systems to a unified contact centre and communications platform. Brent is committed to becoming a fully digitally enabled borough, making access to digital services and tools the standard for all residents and staff.

Vision and ambitions

4.4 Brent's vision is about offering public services differently, with staff who are curious, empowered, accountable, and confident to try new things. This means always doing things with our residents in our minds, developing a deep understanding of local communities and working together across different organisations for the people we serve. Ongoing digital transformation is vital to achieving this vision. It will enable us to:

- Improve resident experience making it a more seamless and intuitive process for residents to access council services and enabling more people to transact digitally
- Deliver better outcomes for residents while more effectively managing demand in high pressure areas such as social care and homelessness
- Maximise the benefits of new technologies such as AI to drive productivity, increase efficiency and improve ways of working – while also managing the risks
- Understand the cost of delivering services and use this to drive improved outcomes for residents while delivering cashable savings
- Become an employer of choice through providing a modern, accessible workplace where employees are upskilled in using new technologies, enabling them to focus on work which makes a difference
- Ensure our values of collaborating proactively, being bold and curious and celebrating and sharing our success are built into our approach including using The Base to support innovation, experimentation and learning
- Place Brent at the forefront of this work, opening up opportunities to collaborate with other public services, business and academia and to generate income
- Our key priorities for digital will enable the Embrace Change Portfolio vision and support the Council in identifying and delivering cashable savings and in developing our future operating model.

4.5 The Roadmap sets out three key ambitions which will be the focus of our digital programme for the next two years. These ambitions are aligned with our Embrace Change Portfolio and our cross-cutting savings work.

- **Ambition 1 – Improving the resident experience**
- **Ambition 2 - Empowering our teams, services, and partners**
- **Ambition 3 - Harnessing data and enabling collaboration**

Approach

4.6 Our digital programme to date has been successful in driving efficiencies and has supported service improvements and better ways of working. We have put many of the building blocks in place, including developing our data lake, digitising many of our resident access channels and ensuring we have a modern and accessible website, automating more of our processes and piloting new AI solutions. We have also invested in driving improved digital connectivity in the borough and tackling digital inclusion to ensure our residents and businesses are able to operate in the digital age. We have also started to address the gap in skills and confidence amongst our staff. This puts us in a strong position to really maximise the benefits of our investment in digital and to accelerate our progress, supported by a new approach to digital.

4.7 Our Digital Roadmap sets out how we will build on these foundations to maximise the return on our investment in digital and support the council to improve services to residents while managing increasing demand. In order to achieve our ambitions, we need a joined-up and shared approach to innovation where digital is everyone's responsibility and is a key building block of wider transformation. We will learn from our experience in Brent and build this into a new model for innovation and improvement which is owned by all leaders, with digital used as part of a toolkit to support improvements to services and delivery of savings in areas from the resident experience to Adult Social Care. We will also learn from others and proactively seek opportunities to collaborate.

4.8 The Roadmap sets out how we plan to work differently through:

- Building an innovation culture where innovation and improvement is owned by leaders and digital is part of a toolkit for driving change and improving outcomes
- Developing a new framework for identifying and delivering benefits from digital
- Increasing capacity to support service re-design, better design of systems based around the needs of users, change management and user adoption
- Increased collaboration with partners

5.0 Investment

5.1. Investment is required to deliver the roadmap, including to maintain a digital team (including additional business analysis, service design, user experience design and data specialists as well as project managers and developers),

external development support and systems costs and to support departments to provide subject matter expert capacity to deliver change. The overall investment over two years is £8.78m. This is an invest to save programme of work where an upfront investment is required to generate greater financial savings and/or improved service outcomes in the long term.

- 5.2 This is an invest to save programme of work where an upfront investment is required to generate greater financial savings and/or improved service outcomes in the long term. Return on investment will include delivery of the savings for 2026-27 which are included in the draft budget. It also includes development of a pipeline of savings for 2027-28 and beyond. The total savings for 2026-27 will be up to £5.67m. A further pipeline of savings for 2027-28 in the region of £2m will also be developed. A benefits framework is included at Appendix 2 which sets out KPIs for the wider benefits outlined in the roadmap.
- 5.3 Our digital ambitions will also need to be supported by ongoing investment in IT infrastructure which is provided for Brent via our Shared Technology Service (STS). A separate business case for capital investment of approximately £6.7m in technology infrastructure is currently being developed for 2026-28 and Cabinet approval will be sought in early 2026. This investment will ensure that the Council's IT systems and infrastructure are reliable, resilient and robust, enabling officers to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently. In light of ongoing cyber threats, it is essential that Brent maintains resilient and robust IT systems with strong protections against security vulnerabilities. The investment will equip STS with the tools to enable a modern approach to managing and monitoring our datacentres, cloud environment, networks and devices to ensure efficiency in operations and secure protections are in place.
- 5.4 £8.78m of additional investment producing up to £8.5m of anticipated savings over the two-year period

6.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 6.1 The Lead Member for Digital Transformation has been consulted on these proposals.

7.0 Financial Considerations

- 7.1. The capital budget request is as follows:

Item	26/27	27/28	Total
Core staffing	£2,096,009	£2,106,408	£4,202,417
SME capacity in services	£200,000	£200,000	£400,000
External support	£1,920,000	£970,000	£2,890,000
Systems costs	£1,037,000	£1,037,000	£2,074,000
Total	£5,253,009	£4,313,408	£9,566,417
Previously approved 26/27 budget	£817,554		£817,554
Total new investment required	£4,435,455	£4,313,408	£8,748,863

7.2 Cabinet approved a four-year digital roadmap in December 2021 for 2022-2026. This included £817,554 budget for 2026/27 which is shown in the table above as previously approved 2026/27 budget.

7.3 The costs, including staff costs, are valid capital expenditure under local government accounting requirements because they involve investment in intangible assets and development of new software. Regulations allow software licenses lasting for at least one year to be treated as capital. The digital team and relevant service areas will keep track of costs for each project and work with Finance to ensure each separate asset is added to the asset register.

7.4 The budget will be funded by prudential borrowing with the revenue costs on interest covered by the savings the project is intended to generate. Once all the £8,748,863 new budget has been spent, capital financing costs are estimated at £787,397.67 assuming average borrowing costs of 5% and minimum revenue provision (a prudent charge for the repayment of debt) of 4%.

7.5 This investment will enable the delivery of the savings included in the draft budget proposals for 2026-27, including digital and resident experience savings proposals. It will also support implementation of additional business cases for digitally-enabled savings. It will also provide capacity to develop a further pipeline of savings for 2027-28 which will be brought forward as part of the budget setting process.

Description of benefit	Financial/non financial benefit?	Estimated benefit amount	When will the benefit be realised	One off or recurring	Capital or revenue?
Identified digital savings	Financial	Up to 5.67m	2026-27	Recurring	Revenue
Indicative digital pipeline savings	Financial	Up to 2m	2027-28	Recurring	Revenue
Rental income from small cell roll-out	Financial	0.03m	2026-27	Recurring until 2030	Revenue
WLA Social Investment Pot connectivity funding	Financial	0.57m	2026-27	One off	Capital
Social investment	Non-financial	0.11m	0.04m 2026-27 0.07m 2026-28	One off	N/A
Grant funding (estimated)	Financial	0.11m	Dependent on individual grants	One off	Revenue

8.0 Legal Considerations

8.1 Each project and proposal pursued under the road map will need to consider and comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 which may include individual Data Protection Impact Assessments, as well as specific legislation and guidance relating to the specific proposal.

9.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

9.1 The Digital Roadmap sets out a proactive approach to embedding EDI across our digital programme. Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken for all major programmes and projects to identify and address potential impacts on people with protected characteristics. Where potential impacts are negative, we will identify mitigating activities to minimise the impacts, and maximise positive benefits where possible.

9.2 The roadmap commits to expanding digital inclusion through borough-wide initiatives that improve access to devices, connectivity and skills, including targeted support for digitally excluded residents and businesses. Our work will also be guided by the Data Ethics Board, which will advise on the ethical and inclusive use of data, with a focus on transparency, accountability and bias mitigation.

9.3 Accessibility is embedded in our digital design principles and is being integrated into our procurement processes, ensuring that all new resident-facing platforms meet accessibility requirements. We will continue to ensure our approach to accessibility is rigorous, and that we are compliant with the Equality Act.

9.4 Our website and My Account remain fully compliant with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018,

meeting at least the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standard, and compliance is monitored regularly.

10.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 10.1 Further use of AI and Cloud systems could result in increased use of data centres which have high energy and water consumption. We will work with the external partners providing these data centres to seek commitments about what they are doing to mitigate this impact and ensure that these services align wherever possible with the council's climate and ecological goals.
- 10.2 Ambition three of the roadmap should enable greater support to the delivery of the council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and associated delivery plans. This should manifest itself through:
 - Improved monitoring and accuracy of the sources of data which can be analysed to indicate the direction of travel towards Brent's Carbon neutrality goal;
 - Supporting the development of new Green Neighbourhoods programmes and ensuring that both the decision-making around selection of the localities and the creation of localised action plans are evidence-led; and
 - Supporting improved data management systems relating to the council's corporate buildings and operations, as part of the council's plan to decarbonise its own estate and operations by 2030

11.0 Communication Considerations

- 11.1 The delivery of the Digital Roadmap will involve engaging effectively with staff, residents and stakeholders, including to drive behaviour change to ensure adoption of new channels and systems. Communications will also contribute to achieving the cultural change required to integrate using digital and data innovation into our way of working.

<u>Report sign off:</u>
Rachel Crossley Corporate Director, Service Reform & Strategy