

SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 4 – DIGITAL STRATEGY

MINUTES

Thursday 14th July 2016

PRESENT: Councillors: Joanna Camadoo (Chair), Natasha Ahmed-Sheikh, Patrick Cogan (Substitute for Munir Ahmed) Paul Conlan, Joanna Dabrowska, Tariq Mahmood, Gary Malcolm (Vice-Chair), Rajinder Mann, Karam Mohan (Substitute for Chris Summers), Swaran Padda.

Other Members Present:

Cllr Peter Mason Portfolio Holder for Prosperity, Skills, Employment and Transformation

Ealing Officers Present:

Mike Ibbitson Director of Business Services Group
Kieran Reid Director of Strategy and Engagement
Alison Reynolds Director Customer Services
Kate O'Connor Policy Officer, Policy and Performance

1. Apologies for Absence
(Agenda Item 1)

Councillors Ahmed and Summers were substituted at the meeting by Councillors Cogan and Mohan.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Proud, Murray and Nagpal.

2. Urgent Matters
(Agenda Item 2)

There were none.

3. Declarations of Interest
(Agenda Item 3)

There were none.

4. Matters to be Considered in Private
(Agenda Item 4)

There were none.

5. Panel Operations 2016-2017

(Agenda Item 5)

The Chair asked that Members approve the proposed scope of the Panel.

The proposed work programme was also considered by the Panel.

There was a discussion about whether to have co-optees from different organisations representing a cross-section of Ealing residents (such as Age UK representing the elderly, etc.). However, members felt that the remit of the panel was too broad ranging to have co-optees and that it was better instead to invite appropriate groups/individuals to speak at relevant meetings.

There was a discussion on whether members should travel to visit external sites or use digital technology –such as video conference— to communicate with relevant people in other sites instead.

Resolved: That

(i) the Panel's Terms of Reference be agreed;

(ii) there be no co-opted members appointed to the Panel but relevant individuals be invited to the appropriate meetings; and

(iii) that visits and their form be agreed at a later date.

6. Developing Ealing's Digital Strategy

The Panel considered a report by Kieran Reid, Director of Strategy and Engagement, which informed the panel of Ealing's Digital Strategy.

The Chair invited Kieran Reid (Director of Strategy and Engagement), Alison Reynolds (Director Customer Services) and Mike Ibbitson (Director of Business Services Group) to make a presentation to the panel on the state of development of Ealing's Digital Strategy.

The presentation comprised an overview of the Council's ongoing Digital Strategy as a whole, explaining its rationale, its aims and the opportunities it afforded in the context of Ealing Borough. It comprised mainly two key themes of 'digital thinking': digital customer and digital council.

Kieran Reid addressed the panel and explained Ealing's Digital Strategy timeline. The Digital Strategy was endorsed by Ealing Council's Corporate Board on 16th October 2015, when its Board and strategy aims were agreed. A call for evidence was undertaken between February and April 2016, and the Society of Information

Technology Management (SOCITM) was engaged as consultant at the end April 2016 –working with Ealing Council between May and July 2016. Currently the draft strategy is being finalised (by mid. August), and the next steps include a consultation with partners and the public (end August to end September) and updating this Panel in its October 2016 meeting. The final strategy will be produced by the end October 2016 and presented to Cabinet on 15th November 2016.

He also explained what is understood by ‘digital’ and the reasons why it matters for Ealing Council. He highlighted the following points:

- The use of digital technology is important for local government as it helps improving outcomes for residents. For instance, digital technology helps the Council to acquire a deeper understanding of local patterns of need and interaction with government, allowing resources to be managed, planned and directed to where they would have the greatest impact. It also allows more effective management of demand, and faster access to, and sharing of, data between councils, customers, and partner organisations.
- Demand for high quality digital access is on the rise and residents’ expectations of local government digital services have soared.
- There are savings to be achieved through the use of digital technology. Nesta’s Connected Councils report (April 2016) suggests that, on average, savings between 13-30% could be achieved through digitisation programmes.
- Currently, Ealing’s digital position in terms of broadband speeds is above the national average (24Mbps compared to 19Mbps) but it varies across the borough, with Southall experiencing the slowest average download speed (12Mbps) and falling below the national average. Ealing Broadway and Ealing Common have the fastest average download speeds (28Mbps); 4Mbps higher than the overall borough average.
- Research carried out by GO ON UK into UK digital exclusion levels suggests that the ‘likelihood of overall exclusion’ in Ealing is low compared with national levels, with 10% of adults who have never used the internet. This compares with London at 8.7%.
- Findings from the most recent Residents’ Survey indicate that 90% of Ealing residents had access to the internet in 2014, up from 86% in 2012. There were significant increases in numbers of respondents accessing the internet using mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) but laptops and MacBooks remain the most used devices for accessing the internet in 2014 (64%).

Digital Customer

Kieran Reid and Alison Reynolds explained about the Borough’s Digital Customer plan and highlighted:

- The aim is to make customer transactions with the council digital by default and to offer citizens the experience they expected in other sectors. The data

thus generated allows the Council a 'whole citizen' view which is then used to improve services.

- Technology maximised the efficiency of staff and their interactions with citizens. The Council used its online presence to communicate and engage with residents effectively (webpage, twitter, etc.)
- The volume of customer contact in Ealing over the phone has decreased by 6% (1.3 million calls) and face to face contact has shrunk by 76% since 2012. Over half of all customer contact with the Council happened via a 'digital' channel.
- Ealing provided digital services including MyAccount customer portal, Agilisys Engage and a variety of integrated online services (environmental service reporting, parking, planning and digital libraries).

-Via MyAccount customers can access services relating to Council Tax and benefits. Future developments includes providing e-billing, housing rent, Love Clean Streets as well as being able to provide single sign-on to Jadu eforms.

-Agilisys Engage is designed to examine online user behaviour in terms of what customers look at, for how long and how they choose to navigate around the website. It continuously gathers customer data which provides a host of valuable information about our web visitors and can help Ealing Council identify opportunities to improve the web services on offer and promote further channel shift.

- Web chat. Customer services are preparing to launch web chat this summer. Initially, web chat will be offered to customers who are struggling to register or sign into the MyAccount customer portal.

Digital Council

Mike Ibbitson continued the presentation and explained to the Panel about Ealing Digital Council. He raised the following points:

- It comprised four areas of scope: gathering information about Ealing to plan and evaluate service delivery; working within LBE in the most effective and efficient way; working with partners and exploiting future opportunities.
- Data gathered digitally helped the Council understand and predict when a service is required—sometimes in real time—and the nature of need in the Borough. For instance, the use of geo-location would help the Council identify patterns and hotspots for services. Information on children's school attendance, GP/ health visits, and family rent delays would let Ealing Council identify families potentially in distress for early intervention.
- Digital technology could encourage mobile and more flexible working patterns, and improved collaboration.

The Chair thanked Kieran Reid, Alison Reynolds and Mike Ibbitson for presenting Ealing's Digital Strategy, and invited Members to comment and/or ask questions.

In response to a question by Councillor Mahmood about what the Council planned to do regarding improving broadband infrastructure for the Borough, Kieran Reid said that whilst average infrastructure is good, the council was exploring whether they needed to encourage providers to improve broadband infrastructure.

Councillor Natasha Ahmed-Sheikh asked whether it was feasible to have Facebook ward groups linked to official ward sites. It was felt that her question tapped on a key issue –namely the need for the Council to adapt to multiple digital channels of communication. That is the direction in which thinking in Ealing's digital strategy goes. However, it was also noted that with a plurality of channels available some difficulties appeared, such as the need to have sufficient staff to attend to them and respond to citizens' expectations.

Panel members felt that Ealing Council's new website was a clear improvement but expressed concerns about the ongoing need to log on multiple times to access different services online, the difficulties in using e-forms (particularly in attaching documents), the provision of a transcription option for webchat, the shortage of links to third party sites and the limited availability of static data in it. Members also felt there was a need to ensure that the 10% of residents without internet access were not excluded from local service delivery.

Officers replied that the single log-on to the website's services via MyAccount had been planned and would be rolled out in the next 2-3 months. As regards difficulties with the use of e-forms officers said they were aware of them and had been working to fix them. They explained that the problem derived from the old digital technology not being entirely compatible with the new one. Officers also said that they expected that a form of transcription –for instance, sending a memo via email— would be rolled out for the appropriate services. Officers also acknowledged councillors concerns about the scarcity of archival data on the webpage. Overall Officers felt that, whilst Ealing digital services were not yet in the position they wanted them to be, they were working towards developing them and the functionality of these services was being improved.

In response to a question by Councillor Gary Malcolm about procedures to examine website user data, officers replied that whilst Ealing Council did not have the level of resource available to central government, statistics on web use and its traffic were generated and monitored.

The Chair asked how much data Ealing Council shared with other public sector bodies. Officers replied that sharing data was an area of increased relevance, and that at the moment most data sharing happens in the area of health care.

Members also enquired about the databases that the Council held on residents, the number of resident's email addresses held and about prevention of data misuse. Officers responded that the council gathers a lot of information in over 200 functionally different systems (such as planning and many other areas) sometimes in different formats and that the Council was working on integrating them. They said that the Council has approximately 70.000 email accounts in multiple systems that were being consolidated.

Officers also stressed that as a public body the Council was the custodian of public and personal data. They reassured panel members that Ealing's Data Governance Board was in place to prevent instances of misuse.

Resolved: That the panel note the overview on Ealing's digital strategy and will seek to examine its various elements in further detail and depth at the forthcoming meetings.

7. Date of Next Meeting

(Agenda Item 8)

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would take place on Thursday 13th October 2016.

Councillor Joanna Camadoo, Chair.

The meeting ended at 8.50pm.