

SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 4 – DIGITAL SERVICES

MINUTES

Thursday 13th October 2016

PRESENT: Councillors: Joanna Camadoo (Chair), Natasha Ahmed-Shaikh, Paul Conlan, Joanna Dabrowska, Tariq Mahmood, Gary Malcolm (Vice-Chair), Rajinder Mann, Karam Mohan, Lynne Murray, Kamaljit Nagpal, Ian Proud and Chris Summers.

Ealing Officers Present:

Harjeet Bains	Scrutiny Review Officer
Mike Ibbitson	Director of Business Services Group
Paula Portas	Democratic Services Officer
Alison Reynolds	Director Customer Services
Keith Townsend	Executive Director Environment & Customer Services

1. Apologies for Absence

(Agenda Item 1)

Councillor Padda was substituted at the meeting by Councillor Mohan.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Padda, Cllr Theo Blackwell (London Borough of Camden), Cllr Peter Fleming (Local Government Association), David Cressey and Kieran Reid.

Cllr Theo Blackwell was scheduled to do a presentation on digital transformation at the meeting but was unable to attend due to ill health. However, he sent some useful comments which were circulated to the Panel. He also invited the Panel to a tour of Camden Council's modern public offices in King's Cross and offered to do this presentation then.

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. Minutes of Previous Meeting.

The Panel considered the minutes of the first meeting of the Panel which had taken place on 14 July 2016.

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 14 July 2016 be agreed as a true and correct record.

6. Digital Council Presentation.

The Chair invited Mike Ibbitson (Director of Business Services Group) to make a presentation to the Panel on the state of development of the Digital Council theme in Ealing's Digital Strategy.

Mike Ibbitson addressed the Panel and explained that becoming a Digital Council meant making the best use of technology and data to fulfil organisational functions. This aim comprised four areas of development. It focussed on the way officers and councillors worked, on the way the Council worked with partners, on how data was managed and exploited, and on how the 'positive disruption' brought about by digital work was transformed and used.

- A. Officers** - A Digital Council would mean more mobile and flexible working patterns for Ealing Council's workforce. Mobile working required the right tools and data but it could change the way the Council worked – becoming more patch based, instant. If handled well, flexible working was expected to improve productivity and morale. Yet it would also imply challenges, such as needing different styles of management.

Mobile working could bring about enhanced collaboration without the need for a permanent physical location. Working together would not need to be structured around office meetings and specialisms –with skype meetings, webinars, instant feedback tools and instant messages allowing more variable ways to collaborate.

- B. Councillors** - The theme of a Digital Council pondered whether digital technology could make the Councillors role more effective, providing opportunities for greater democratic engagement and reaching more citizens. In practice it would mean:
- moving away from paper based meetings and towards e-agendas and packs accessible via tablets.
 - mobile and flexible working, for instance, having skype surgeries, communicating with residents on the move and in real time, etc.
 - having a digital knowledge storage and retrieval, such as a permanent Dashboard.
 - improving democracy in the Council via the emerging capacity for e-voting / referenda.
- C. Working with Partners** - Data was one of the main drivers for open collaboration –i.e. joined up work through data sharing in education and health. Data ought to be open by default, as more people were convinced of the value of this strategy in terms of transparency and collaboration.

- D. Data management and exploitation - Management and exploitation of data to be based on a standard of open data; of recording data in a single data store to facilitate access to intelligence and analysis (rationalising IT systems and avoiding duplicate documents); and of protecting data and dealing with risks – the single data store would give easy retrieval for Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and would be inherently safer than paper.
- E. Cultural change - The harnessing of 'positive disruption' (shaking up how we work, facilitated by technology) requires skills, leadership, and adequate (quicker, shorter, flexible) procurement.

The Chair thanked Mike Ibbitson for his presentation and invited Panel Members to comment and ask questions.

Councillor Mahmood asked about the low speed for internet data in some parts of the Borough and how this could be improved. Officers replied that as a local authority Ealing Council had relatively little influence on data speed. The Council could ensure via its planning procedures that the necessary infrastructure was provided for a certain area. Officers stated that slow data speed in some areas would not deter the Council from going digital.

Councillor Dabrowska commented on the sparse communication of digital functionality improvements between officers and councillors and asked whether the Egress system was still providing security to digital correspondence. Officers replied that in most local authorities digital technology had been taken up by officers more than by councillors, and that that was an important conversation to have. They confirmed that the Egress system was still in use.

Councillor Summers asked about the wide variations on data speed in Ealing. It was advised that among the main factors determining data speed were infrastructure, distance from the connection cabinet and line quality.

Councillor Mann asked what would be the unintended consequences of going digital. Officers advised that, in their view, the more serious consequences were to do with not engaging in digital services. Being digitally enabled gives residents access to services and resources that other people use.

Councillor Murray asked whether home working would lead to the atomisation of the workforce. Officers advised that there was a balance to be struck between remote and on-site working. They noted that there was already a policy on flexible working. The experience so far, for some Housing Benefits teams, was that home work had reduced sickness absences and improved work-life balance. Avoiding isolation was the reason why home workers were required to come to the office periodically.

The Chair brought the Panel's attention to the points in the email sent by Councillor Theo Blackwell (Cabinet member for Finance, technology and Growth at the London Borough of Camden), specifically those on open data and changes in ways of working. Officers advised that Ealing's Digital Strategy was closely connected to workforce plans in the organisation and that there was an awareness that it would need to be built into the organisational culture. As regards open data use, officers

remarked that open data was important and that there was a need to find the right degree of openness for Ealing Council.

The Chair thanked Officers for their contribution and drew the item to a close.

Resolved: That the presentation on the state of development of the Digital Council theme in Ealing's Digital Strategy be received by the Panel.

7. Digital Customer Presentation

The Chair invited Alison Reynolds, Director of Customer Services, to give a presentation on the Digital Customer strategic direction and principles as part of Ealing's Digital Strategy.

The key aims of the Digital Customer theme were for Ealing customers to be able to easily connect with Ealing Council at a time and place convenient for them. Its principles were that digital services ought to be accessible to all; that digital solutions would get things right for customers the first time; to put customers at the heart of service design; and that those digital services should be easy to use – so that residents choose to use them. In the future this latter principle might involve a reduction in the provision of non-digital services.

The Panel were given the statistics representing customer contacts and interactions with Ealing Council during the year 2015-2016. For example:

- On the phone: 1.3 million calls received, 49% successfully dealt with by auto agent.
- Face to face: 66,829 visits, a reduction of 46% compared to previous years. Face to face contact has decreased by 78% since 2012.
- Digital channels: over half of all customer contacts.

The starting point of the Digital Customer strategy was the 'My Account' customer portal in Ealing Council's webpage. It has, so far, 46,000 registered users and a high volume of transactions. It has meant a 20% reduction in contacts over the phone for Council Tax and Benefits as well as a reduction of 5.5 full time equivalent posts in the Services.

Other Figures in Customer E-Activity

- 120,000 Council Tax account views
- 31,000 payments processed
- 4,500 direct debits
- 750 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) applications
- 10,700 customers registered for E-billing
- 85,000 Housing Benefit account views

The next steps for 'My Account' services involved incorporating the 'Love Clean Streets' digital service that would allow residents, via an app on their mobile phone, to select a location on a map, take a picture, upload it and this way report

environmental issues such as graffiti, fly-tipping or fly-posting, potholes and many other to the Council.

Another step was to introduce a single sign on for e-forms that would simplify and reduce the wide array of forms (81) currently online.

In terms of customer satisfaction and feedback on digital services available to them, a survey was conducted by Ealing Council that obtained 1,097 responses. The evaluation of the portal and My Account was overall positive, with 75% of respondents saying they found it easy to sign up for the portal, 68% easily found what they were looking for in the portal and 53% saying that using My Account allowed them to find information or carry out a transaction without need for other contact.

Overall, the digital customer theme was working towards cutting unnecessary processes, providing a uniform look and feel to the customer experience and standardising the different online platforms existing in the Council.

The Chair thanked Alison Reynolds for her presentation and invited Panel members to comment and ask questions.

Members made enquiries relating to the 'getting it right first time' principle of the digital customer theme. The queries dealt with the existing mechanisms to check the quality of phone services offered to customers, the reference number used for transactions, the dropout rate when using e-forms and whether there was data measuring how well Ealing Council performed in this regard.

Officers stated that, whilst the Council did not have the capacity to record phone calls to monitor the quality of service, it will be able to record them from January 2017. The quality of services has, nevertheless, been monitored by team leaders, the use of mystery shoppers and customer satisfaction surveys. Officers said they were aware of the issue of customers being given different reference numbers for the same transaction after making repeated contacts. That was partly due to a spike in phone calls. They stated that the issue was being sorted. As regards dropout rates in e-forms, officers stated that data was collated and they were looking closely at the forms with highest dropout rates to understand why dropout happened and to improve the forms. Finally, officers noted that there was available data measuring performance for a number of council services as well as specific targets for improvement. However, data was not yet available for all services.

Councillor Proud asked if the switch to digital would mean going paperless in delivering services as, in his view, it was helpful to have written letters when helping residents in Councillors' surgeries. Officers replied that, whilst paper letters were still available the push was towards encouraging residents to switch to e-notification, which could be printed out by the resident or read on a device.

Councillor Dabrowska asked if there were plans to increase the number of staff helping people to self-serve. It was advised that customer services staff were being trained to help customers move to digital services.

Councillor Mohan asked whether critical feedback from residents had been received. It was advised that there had been critical feedback, not yet presented at the session

as most had come from recent focus groups and their results were being analysed. This critical feedback would be made available to Councillors at a later meeting.

The Chair asked, in regards to the feedback received, how the Council was going to drive up residents' confidence in digital services and awareness of the services available digitally. Officers replied that confidence was about the fulfilment of the service; therefore Ealing needed to make sure that services dealt with digitally were delivered efficiently. As regards awareness, it was advised that there was a publicity campaign planned for some digital services. This would be implemented after the Council was confident that digital services were working efficiently.

The Chair thanked Officers for their contributions and drew the item to a close.

Resolved: That the presentation on the Digital Customer strategic direction and principles as part of Ealing's Digital Strategy be received by the Panel.

8. Digital Strategy Progress Report

The Panel considered a report by Kieran Reid, Director of Strategy and Engagement, which provided an update on Ealing's Digital Strategy.

The Chair invited Keith Townsend, Executive Director Environment and Customer Services, to update the Panel on the development of Ealing's proposed Digital Strategy.

Digital will be one of the key ways for the Council to improve outcomes for local people, meet their expectations and make savings so it can prioritise resources to where they are most needed. Ealing Council is developing a Digital Strategy for the first time.

The Panel were advised that a new timetable had been decided and the intention was to take the strategy to Cabinet in February 2017 and that the results of the call for evidence were now ready.

- A. Timeline - The Digital Strategy Board reflected on the original timetable and decided to take the strategy to Cabinet in February 2017 instead of November 2016. This postponement will allow further engagement with the Panel.

The updated timeline planned for specific actions and projects (to meet the strategic objectives) will be developed during October and November 2016. These objectives and actions will be tested with internal and external stakeholders until December 2016. A draft Digital Strategy will also be produced for consultation at this time. Between December 2016 and January 2017 a consultation will take place with key partners and stakeholders. The Strategy will be presented to Cabinet thereafter in February 2017.

- B. Call for evidence - Ealing's Digital Strategy Board had initiated a call for evidence in February 2016 to learn from other organisations' experiences and to seek evidence of best practice. This call for evidence has highlighted the following areas where there were opportunities for going digital:
 - Improving outcomes for residents by using digital data more efficiently.

- Responding better to customer expectations and preferences, interacting with them digitally at a time and place that suits them.
 - Delivering significant efficiency savings: of up to 13% of a council's budget (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts; Nesta).
- C. Society of Information Technology Management, (SOCITM) - In addition to the call for evidence the Council engaged SOCITM as an external consultant with extensive expertise in digital technology to act as a specialist advisor to support the development of the new strategy. SOCITM's findings and recommendations were the following:
- Ealing has a robust digital vision to address these new opportunities
 - Digital design principles ought to be built into any planned transformations.
 - Digital change must allow services and data to be connected from the point of view of customers.
 - Delivering a channel shift needs 'end-to-end' digitisation to work.
 - Ealing could be more ambitious in certain areas:
 - Digital Customer - by using automation and predictive analytics.
 - Digital Place - by embedding smart technology into Planning.
 - Digital Council - 'disruptive' redesign of services to happen at highest level (One Public Sector).

Based on these finding Officers developed recommendations around the opportunities that exist for Ealing, which were explained to the Panel in the Digital Council and Digital Customer presentations.

The Chair thanked Keith Townsend for his presentation of the updates to Ealing's Digital Strategy and invited Panel members to comment and ask questions.

Councillor Murray asked whether the newly revised timeline was still ambitious. Officers replied that it was ambitious. Yet the presentations brought to life the strategy in their principles and aims even when specific projects were still being designed.

Councillor Dabrowska asked what benchmarking had been done around the UK. Officers advised that several meetings had taken place with other Councils in the UK about digitisation, as well as meeting specifically with London-based councils, mainly in the context of the West London Alliance.

Councillor Malcolm asked how were residents encouraged to switch to digital channels and how was the security of the online transactions ensured. Officers advised that one of the key issues in achieving this switch was to make digital services easy to use. There was awareness also about potential hurdles in this switch for older residents and those who had not used the internet. Focus groups were being carried out to investigate how to address potential problems. As regards security, it was advised that the Council was assessing two online transaction security products in order to be compliant with the Payment Card Industry security standards and a decision would soon be made about using one of these.

Councillor Mohan asked what IT facilities Ealing Council was planning to offer to people identified as not using the internet. Officers advised that Smartphones were the most popular way to browse the internet. Therefore, the aim was to show

residents how to access services on smartphones. Besides, more staff was also trained to help customers digitally.

Councillor Ahmed-Shaikh asked what help would be received by those residents that do not have English as their first language. Officers advised that the Council was looking to introduce web chat facilities, which would be able to identify the residents who were struggling with the digital service, by sending them a pop up message offering help.

The Chair thanked Keith Townsend and all Officers for their contributions and drew the item to a close.

Resolved: That

- (i) the report on the update of the digital strategy be received by the Panel.
- (ii) the new timetable and intention to take the strategy to Cabinet in February 2017 be noted.
- (iii) the key findings of the call for evidence and SOCITM be noted.

9. Updated Work Programme

The Panel agreed the items for the next meeting and accepted Cllr Blackwell's invitation to visit Camden Council. The Chair requested that the Scrutiny Review Officer should arrange for this visit to take place on the same afternoon as the visit to Hackney Borough Council in early December 2016.

Resolved: That

- (i) the updated work programme be approved.
- (ii) the visits to Hackney Borough and to Camden Council be arranged as agreed.

10. Date of Next Meeting

(Agenda Item 8)

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would take place on 15th December 2016.

Councillor Joanna Camadoo, Chair.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.