

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 4 – DIGITAL SERVICES**

### **MINUTES**

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Joanna Camadoo (Chair), Munir Ahmed, Paul Conlan, Joanna Dabrowska, Tariq Mahmood, Gary Malcolm (Vice-Chair), Rajinder Mann, Lynne Murray, Kamaljit Nagpal, Swaran Padda, Roz Reece, and Chris Summers.

#### **Ealing Officers Present:**

Harjeet Bains	Scrutiny Review Officer
Louisa McDonald	Project manager Customer Services
Paula Portas	Democratic Services Officer
Kieran Read	Director of Strategy and Engagement
Alison Reynolds	Director Customer Services
Lucy Taylor	Director of Regeneration and Planning
Keith Townsend	Executive Director Environment & Customer Services

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

(Agenda Item 1)

Councillor Ian Proud was substituted at the meeting by Councillor Roz Reece.

Cllr Natasha Ahmed-Shaikh sent her apologies.

#### **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.**

(Agenda Item 5)

The Panel considered the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel which had taken place on 13 October 2016.

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 13 October 2016 be agreed as a true and correct record.

## **6. Digital Place Presentation.** (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair invited Lucy Taylor (Director of Regeneration and Planning) to make a presentation to the Panel on the state of development of the Digital Place theme in Ealing's Digital Strategy.

Lucy Taylor addressed the Panel and briefly summarised how digital technology (from laptops to smartphones) was changing how people lived their lives and the impact those changes had on geography and space. A digital place agenda responded, she said, to harnessing people's capacity to go anywhere, communicate from anywhere without being tied to a specific place. Digital 'place' was about the geography and demography of the Borough, about the businesses based here and about visitors.

Lucy Taylor acknowledged that there were groups of residents who did not have access to digital technology. These were identified as being mainly the over 65s, the over 75s, and disabled people. But whilst these groups had been identified the need remained to look further into the motives of some people not to use the internet, as these varied.

Lucy Taylor spelled out Ealing Council's vision of a digital place in one sentence: "People living, working and visiting Ealing will have access to the benefits of a digitally enabled society and digital will facilitate greater community participation and decision making". This meant, she said, that Ealing should improve physical access to digital services, provide greater choice, financial services, better services, increased access to local news and events and, generally an increase in participation in the life and decision-making of the Borough.

This vision was underpinned by the Digital Strategy Principles and tied to three strategic objectives:

1. To use the Council's powers to provide fast and effective digital infrastructure.
2. To exploit digital technology to make the Borough a better place.
3. To eliminate digital exclusion by providing necessary skills and access to services.

The first objective could be translated into initiatives such as creating a 'fast-track' planning approach for providers bringing digital innovation, using the planning system to require developers to provide a minimum of digital provision, mapping the coverage of the area, etc.

The second objective could bring digital technology to do things for residents such as monitoring the workings of lampposts or, in some areas, traffic.

The third objective could look at using digital technology to eliminate exclusion via providing free Wi-Fi and upskilling.

Keith Townsend said that one of the things they were examining as part of the Digital Place theme was to develop a trusted brand for the Council, in order to allow the

Council to negotiate effectively good offers for residents, even partnering up with providers as an option to be able to provide digital access to those excluded.

The Chair thanked Lucy Taylor for her presentation and invited Panel Members to comment and ask questions.

Cllr Tariq Mahmood asked Lucy Taylor about the impact that the digital place agenda would have on how Ealing council thought of itself as an organisation. Lucy Taylor replied that two key changes would be the enabling of staff to work more flexibly and also a more general cultural shift to support the digitalisation of service provision. However, she said, this was related to the digital strategy as a whole more than to a 'digital place' in particular.

Councillors asked officers a series of questions about the delivery of Objective three, 'to eliminate digital exclusion'. They enquired about what was being done about some groups such as the disabled or those with mental health problems and what help would be offered to those residents whose first language was not English. Officers replied that they were considering modes to bring such groups into digital use, exploring in-depth their specific challenges and motives to not use digital. A variety of ways, such as voice activation, could be used to help some excluded groups take up digital technology. Another way, officers said, was to ensure broadband provision in council housing. Alternatively, provision to self-serve and upload documents via smartphone devices which was being introduced saved residents from having to travel physically to the Council buildings to access services.

Cllr Munir Ahmed asked officers whether the Council's web page offered 'Live Chat' services. Officers advised that they were looking into the possibility of providing Live Chat, and considered that by the end of the financial year it would be introduced for some services.

Cllr Rajinder Mann asked Officers to elaborate on the disparity between men and women's access to the internet as presented in the figures provided. Kieran Read replied that the specific survey provided in the Digital Place presentation was not broken down to the local level and therefore it was not specific to Ealing. He said that there were other surveys offering data on social class and gender specific to the Borough that officers could circulate.

Cllr Roz Reece asked Officers what measures had been taken in order to train digitally the staff who would demonstrate these tools to residents. Officers replied that there were a range of problems in that which were part of the digital customer theme. A solution to some of those issues was a combination of factors, officers said, among them making sure that good telephony services were a part of digital strategy.

Cllr Tariq Mahmood said that Ealing was becoming a very well connected Borough in terms of transport and considered that it ought to be possible for it to become the capital of the West also digitally. He asked whether the possibility of providing free Wi-Fi in the streets, as other European cities do, had been considered and whether Section 106 monies could be ring-fenced for the digital place theme of the Strategy.

Officers replied that the possibility of offering free Wi-Fi had been brought up for consideration and that they did not yet have all the answers. One of the issues to take into account was costs and priorities. Officers said that the role for the Council

could be one of influencing providers (i.e. of broadband) and working in partnership with them.

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

**Resolved:** That

- (i) the presentation on the state of development of the Digital Place theme in Ealing's Digital Strategy be received by the Panel.
- (ii) Circulation of local survey data providing insight on internet use by social class and gender.

## **7. Digital Customer Scrutiny Report** (Agenda Item 7)

The Chair invited Louisa McDonald (Project Manager Customer Services) to provide an update on the Digital Customer Feedback obtained from customer consultation. The Customer Services department had undertaken a series of customer consultation exercises to gain feedback from service users about their experiences of interacting with the Council now and in the future.

Louisa McDonald explained that the consultation had consisted of 2 focus group sessions with 13 residents and Council customers, an online survey, a workshop with young council staff members (18 to 24 year old) and finally a third focus group session with local representatives from the voluntary sector.

In the two focus groups sessions with customers the findings were that, on the whole, customers preferred to conduct transactions online, and would normally begin a transaction online, but they valued having a telephone contact too and the possibility of switching channels. Concerns were expressed about unanswered enquiries sent to officers via email. A key theme in the discussion was the need to have confidence on the online transaction.

Participants in one of these two groups were unaware that the council offered a face to face service and generally this was seen as a last resort. On the whole participants expressed satisfaction with how the telephone services presently operated.

An online survey was also sent to My Account holders in September 2016. Results from the survey suggested that users found the portal useful and easy, yet they also suggested that not enough services were offered through the portal, and that it could be non-intuitive and not very user friendly.

The findings of the workshop with six younger employees were that they preferred access to services online rather than on the phone and that they expected the latest technologies to be incorporated into the Council's processes (i.e. GPS, instant notification, etc.).

The focus groups with local representatives of the voluntary sector –which several panel members had attended as observers— offered a very different perspective,

Louisa McDonald said. The main theme was that some users struggled with online service use and that some other users, whilst happy to use digital technology for recreational purposes were wary of using it for business due to privacy concerns.

The Chair thanked Louisa McDonald for her presentation and invited Councillors to ask questions.

Councillor Gary Malcolm asked whether a roadmap of MyAccount services and functions to be incorporated in the future could be provided. Alison Reynolds replied that such a roadmap was being revised at the moment to check the availability of the technology. She said they would have a good idea of which services could be incorporated within 3 to 6 months.

The Chair said that Camden Council used the services of the Post Office in order to provide accessible service delivery for residents who chose not to or could not interact digitally. She asked whether a solution like that was being considered by Ealing Council. Officers replied that they had not thought of the Post Office as a service deliverer, but that they worked closely with other organisations and were keen to encourage non users to use digital technology.

Cllr Lynne Murray asked whether the Council was using digital technology to track how far services were delivered. Alison Reynolds replied that Ealing Council could improve its use of data to track service delivery.

Cllr Dabrowska asked about the need for simplicity in online interactions, mainly forms, and stressed the issue of language (jargon) use as a problem. Officers replied that they were revising the content of all forms to check whether they were needed, useful and clear.

Cllr Paul Conlan raised the issue of the needs of dyslexic people in relation to Ealing Council's website and whether they had been taken into account in the design of the webpage. Officers replied that they had spoken to dyslexic customers and organisations that support them and they mentioned difficulties with getting online in the first place but not about the design of the web.

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

**Resolved:** That the report on the Digital Customer feedback from customer consultation be received by the Panel.

## **8. Digital Strategy Progress Report** (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair invited Kieran Read (Director of Strategy and Engagement) to provide an update on Ealing's Digital Strategy.

Kieran Read said that there had been two main developments since the last Scrutiny Panel meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016 which referred to being able to provide councillors with the draft vision, aims, principles and strategic objectives and with changes to the Digital Strategy timetable.

As regards the draft visions, aims, principles and strategic objectives, these had been presented by officers and appeared in the appendix to the report. The main vision was that of “a connected place and smarter public services for residents, visitors and businesses” establishing the overarching intent of the Digital Strategy. Its intention was to improve services for the residents of Ealing, people visiting the area and the local businesses.

The three key themes of Digital Council; Customer and Place in turn supported the vision. These established the main areas upon which the strategy will focus its energy with each theme supported by a set of principles. The strategic objectives describe the specific areas in which the council wishes to deliver change. The strategic objectives form the programme areas in which individual projects would be developed.

Kieran Read said that the Panel had previously reviewed the key themes and provided feedback and therefore that feedback was particularly welcomed on the strategic objectives.

As regards the updated timetable, the new proposal was for the Draft Digital Strategy to be brought to the Scrutiny panel in February 2017, for the panel to have the opportunity to revise it and provide feedback before it goes to Cabinet.

Cllr Lynne Murray asked whether there was a consultation or research planned on how to provide a smarter place for business. Officers replied that there were no plans yet to carry out research but it would be taken into account.

The Chair asked whether officers could offer assurances that the strategy would encompass strong and robust data and its use. Keith Townsend replied that having robust data was complex but that was the intention. For instance, he mentioned that the use of data to identify fraud was already within place in the Council.

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 bring the Draft Digital Strategy to the Panel 2017 be noted.

## **9. Updated Work Programme** (Agenda Item 9)

The Panel agreed the items for the next meeting and noted that the Useful Information on Digitalisation document provided by Cllr Peter Fleming will be considered. The Panel also noted that Alex Sewell (Principal Policy and Project Officer, Strategic Policy Group, London Councils) will be attending the next meeting.

The Panel decided not to undertake any more site visits.

**Resolved:** That

- (i) The Updated Work Programme be approved.
- (ii) No further visits to be undertaken.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

(Agenda Item 10)

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would take place on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

Councillor Joanna Camadoo, Chair.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.