

Tewkesbury Borough Council

GOING DIGITAL

April 2016



Transform
Tewkesbury Borough



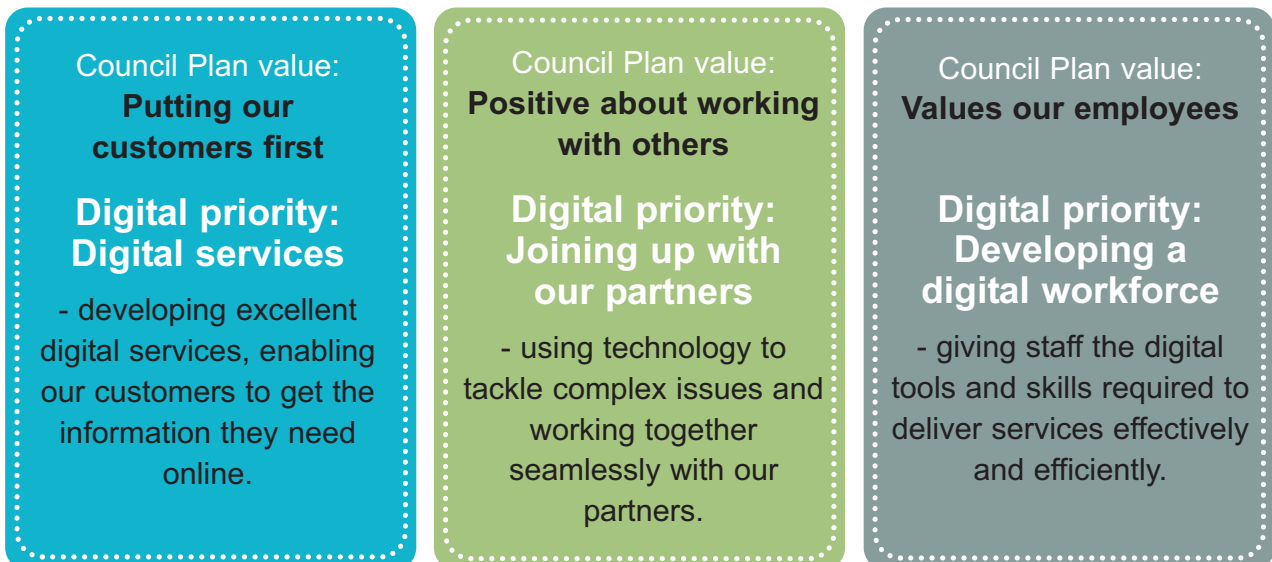
Tewkesbury
Borough Council

BACKGROUND

Digital technology is changing our customers' expectations. Nowadays, people want services that are instant, available 24/7 and accessible no matter where they are. At the same time, we continue to face unprecedented financial pressure while delivering quality front line services.

To reflect these new demands and expectations, we have developed a strategy, which outlines our vision for making our services digital and sets out our approach for making this happen.

Our strategy has three priorities based around our Council Plan values:



OUR DIGITAL VISION

“ We want our customers to be able to access our services when and where they need it, we want to join up with our partners to make access to our services easier and we want our staff to be equipped with the technology and skills to be able to work effectively in a digital environment. ”

Our Digital Strategy outlines our aims for each priority area including where we are now and what we want to achieve.

WHY DO WE NEED A DIGITAL STRATEGY?

The world around information technology as we have experienced it in public services for the last 20/30 years is facing unprecedented change.

Digital technology has the potential to transform our council services, and the lives of our residents while also generating efficiencies and reducing pressure on council tax payers. For example, a web transaction is far cheaper than a face-to-face visit or even a phone call. Within this complex and shifting environment, we are clear that preserving quality face-to-face services for our most vulnerable customers is a priority. However, for those who have access and a desire to utilise our services digitally, we are committed to making this as easy and effective as possible.

The opening up of the internet has broken the monopoly of the large system providers and opened up access to new technology to support our services. The speed of this change makes keeping up with what is possible very difficult, and in an era of significant financial constraint and a level of access to digital skills within organisations, many public services are missing the opportunities that are opening up.

Councils that can grasp these opportunities will be at a major advantage around their sustainability for the future – and we want to be one of those. This strategy sets the

direction that we want to take in terms of delivering digital services and supporting our customers to go online.

WHAT DOES THIS DIGITAL STRATEGY COVER?

We aren't starting our digital journey from scratch – we have already implemented a number of transformational digital projects, which have changed the way we provide our transactional services and information online, including:

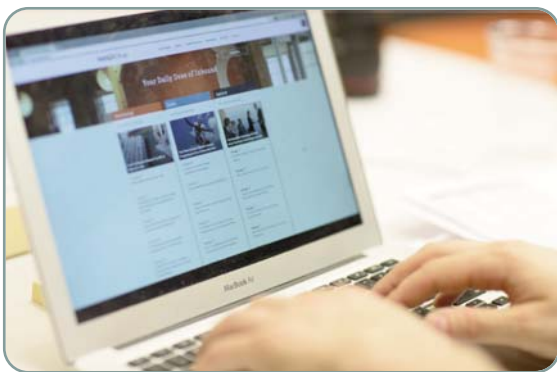
- Report it
- Pay for it
- Garden waste
- FOI process
- Complaints process
- Management of our playgrounds and trees

However, we still have some way to go to make as many of our services and their processes as digital as possible (and that's from both the customers' experience as well as the teams running the services).

The complexities in achieving this in way which is joined-up and worthwhile should not be underestimated. Indeed, while there are a vast range of digital opportunities available, the implementation may not always be an easy or comfortable process – introducing digital technology forces change across all levels of an organisation.

This strategy sets out the direction for our digital journey, and makes it clear that before we embark on making big changes to the way we do things, we need to map out our digital requirements. We need to engage with services and encourage them to think differently about how they might deliver their services in a way which would suit our customers, make access easier and cut down the demand on staff.

Our corporate services team will help to drive forward this agenda.



OUR DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

To ensure our digital approach is inclusive, effective and puts us ahead of the game, we have developed five clear principles, which underpin our three priorities, which are:

- We will provide transactional services and information online in a user-friendly and inclusive way.
- We will use technology to change the way traditional face-to-face services are delivered, enabling us to deliver effective and efficient services for our residents.

- We will create a digital workforce, which is agile, mobile and using the most appropriate technologies to support service delivery.
- With partners, we will support our residents to use digital technology and enable access to technology for those that do not have it.
- We will use digital technology to work and collaborate with our partners seamlessly, including the effective sharing and use of data.

Importantly, in line with our Customer Care Strategy, we will continue to deliver traditional contact methods for our residents who need it. By moving as much of our contact online and through digital methods, our front line customer services staff will be freed up to deal with the customers who really need the face-to-face contact.

This strategy sets the scene for our digital journey and guides us by setting out priorities and key actions. This strategy will be complemented by an IT strategy, which will provide the technical support to help deliver these actions. The IT strategy will be developed following the approval of our digital strategy to ensure our technological solutions reflect our digital requirements.



PRIORITY 1: DIGITAL SERVICES

Where are we now?

Currently, residents can sign up to our online self-serve portal and create an account to handle their council service requests. This provides some really good opportunities to self-serve online, including:

Pay for it

- Council tax
- Garden waste renewal
- Housing benefit debt
- Planning application
- Business rates
- Bulky waste collection

Report it

- Missed bin
- Anti-social behaviour
- Abandoned vehicle
- Noise complaint
- Fly tipping

Apply for it

- Council tax single person discount
- Temporary event notification
- Registration of food business

Last year, 19,300 transactions took place through our self-serve portal and over the next few years, we want this figure to increase significantly.

CASE STUDY - Garden waste renewals

How we used to do things

Our garden waste service is popular, with approximately 15,000 customers opting to use the service.

Until recently, while customers could pay for the service online, the process was unreliable and involved significant officer time reconciling payments manually. There was not automation in the process, subscription reminders were sent out by post (even if the customer had paid online) and customers had to make sure they had all of their subscription information to hand before renewing.

What did we want to change?

We wanted to make the process of renewing garden waste subscriptions easier - both for the customer and for the members of staff involved in the back office processes.

How do we do things now?

Renewals for our popular garden waste service was one of the first areas to use self-service to deliver an end-to-end digital service to our customers.

Now, when a customer is reaching the end of their annual subscription, they automatically receive an email to let them know it's time to pay for next year's subscription.

In the email is a unique link that takes the customer directly to our online garden waste renewal form – with their garden waste reference number already filled in so they don't have to faff around trying to find it.

All the customer has to do is enter their debit or credit card details, and the system automatically updates our garden waste databases and ensures that the UBICO collection crews are kept up-to-date.

If the customer doesn't have an email address then a letter would be sent out instead containing a web address to go to in order to pay.

Garden waste renewals are processed from three different sources - online, phone and cheques. Since the introduction of the self-service portal, there has been a significant downward trend in phone and cheque transactions and an upward trend in self-service transactions.

Garden waste renewals

01/02/14 - 31/12/14			01/01/15 - 31/12/15			01/01/16 - 15/03/16		
Transaction type	No of renewals	%	Transaction type	No of renewals	%	Transaction type	No of renewals	%
Cheque	1903	16.79	Cheque	1455	11.1	Cheque	79	8.48
Phone	4950	43.60	Phone	4638	35.39	Phone	235	25.21
Self	4478	39.52	Self	7013	53.51	Self	618	66.31
Total	11331	100	Total	13106	100	Total	932	100

Applying the SOCTIM channel costs (online - £0.15, telephone – £2.83 and cheque - £5.66) to these different channels year on year, the total cost of garden waste renewals in 2014 was £26,155 and in 2015 was £21,133, creating us a a saving of £5,022 for this service alone.

However, we still have some way to go. We need to find out from our services what more we could be doing online and how we can use digital technology to streamline our processes. In addition, we need to find out what our customers want, and our website needs to be more user-friendly to make it easier for people to carry out their services online.

How will we get to where we want to be?

We need to:

- Map out our current IT ‘estate’ (which software and systems we are using) and work out where efficiencies could be made by using a single digital platform to benefit our service delivery.
- Review our legacy systems, such as our planning and environmental health systems, with the view that these should

only be changed if there is a real financial or efficiency benefits.

- Establish which elements of our services could benefit from being available online - for example, we know there is much more work that we can do with our Revenues and Benefits service online, such as enabling people on benefits to register their change in circumstances online.
- Make sure residents who visit us or contact us over the phone will, where appropriate, be supported to complete the process online in the future.
- Develop and introduce a new website which reflects our digital vision.
- Develop a database of our customers who wish to be contacted via email.
- Reduce the amount of cash and cheque payments made to the council.
- Develop a virtual customer feedback forum.

Key Actions	2016	2017	2018
Redesigned mobile responsive website	→		
Map of current IT estate	→	→	
Legacy system review	→	→	→
Develop action plan to introduce new online services e.g benefits-change of circumstances online	→		
Build database of customer email addresses	→	→	



PRIORITY 2: JOIN FORCES WITH OUR PARTNERS

Many people are already benefitting from the internet, digital TV and mobile communications. These offer opportunities to save money, keep in touch, pursue personal interests and help with learning. They bring services to those who live or work in remote areas or for people who find travelling in order to access services is difficult.

At the same time, some people are not able to take advantage of digital services or choose not to do so. This may be because of a lack of skills or no access to the internet at home - poor broadband speeds can put off even confident users of technology. For some, the cost of home computing is an obstacle. For others, a lack of knowledge of what the internet can offer or poorly designed services means they are not interested in getting connected.

If we want to be successful in providing effective digital services to our customers, then we will need to work more seamlessly and act as an advocate with our partners to share information and to equip residents and businesses with the digital skills and technology they need.

Where are we now?

We have excellent relationships with other public sector organisations, including the police, county council, NHS and Job Centre Plus – and these are fostered well through our Public Services Centre (PSC).

Through our PSC, we are joining up with partners to tackle multi-disciplinary issues. Tewkesbury Financial Inclusion Partnership, for example, sees many of the partners within the PSC - as well as other local organisations - join together to give residents a helping hand to improve their own financial well-being. The aim of the group is to make it easier for people to access financial and support services, such as free debt advice or improved access to affordable credit. The staff working at the front line in health, social care, housing community safety and other areas are regularly sharing information in order to develop joint solutions to issues raised by customers.

Despite these strong partnerships that exist, however, the potential to harness digital technologies to make them more effective is apparent.

Data and information sharing within the council and between partners can be difficult (partly to ensure compliance with data protection legislation) but there are opportunities around accessing data and transforming it into ways we can improve our services, which we are yet to consider.

In addition, there may be more opportunities to share or procure technology with our partners to save money and use established technology.

We can also work more closely with our partners to open up access to community groups within the borough. These groups offer excellent support for improving digital access and skills. We need to work with our

community development team to tap into this resource and ensure we support our communities where required.

More and more we are working alongside our communities to enable greater capacity and self-help in our localities. Digital methods of communicating and connecting people are an untapped resource to significantly bolster these endeavors and we are keen to explore the opportunities that exist.



CASE STUDY - Connecting Gloucestershire

We are a member of Connecting Gloucestershire - a project, which is currently in its very early stages, aimed at increasing the capacity of local councils in Gloucestershire. The project is led by Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC).

Connecting Gloucestershire aims to replicate the proven 'Leicestershire Model' which joins up websites and back end systems across the three tiers of local government to provide a county-wide:

- View of undecided planning applications
- Database of local council contacts
- A-Z of Services Directory (combines parish, county and district services)

As parish and town councils become more important as service providers, having an electronic service delivery infrastructure in place will contribute to joining-up the three tiers of local government in Gloucestershire.

This project looks set to be a great example of how tiers of local government can look to utilise technology to open up access to residents across Gloucestershire. Benefits include:

- Greater community awareness of planning applications
- Greater public engagement in the planning process
- Better informed comments on planning applications
- Shared responsibility for publicising applications
- Increased cross-border awareness

Membership of the group includes:

- Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC)
- 2Commune (website developers)
- Tewkesbury Borough Council
- Stroud District Council
- Cheltenham Borough Council
- Forest of Dean District Council
- Cotswold District Council
- Gloucestershire County Council

An initial meeting with these members has taken place and there was a consensus that this project should be explored further, on the proviso that the project lead is GAPTC, and that there was a solution to the issue of only aligning the project to 2commune based websites.

How will we get to where we want to be?

- Open non-sensitive data up to our partners.
- Look at expanding our communication with our partners to encompass video conferencing, instant messaging and improved data sharing.
- Link up with existing partners who are already working with and have strong links with our communities to improve digital skills.
- Work with other public sector bodies to identify areas to share best practice and increase cross-borough sharing and procurement of technology solutions.
- Support the increase the availability of digital technology and internet access across the borough.
- Encourage third party platforms, including social media, for residents and groups to raise issues.
- Maintain secure systems of internal and external governance of data sharing and storage.
- Look at an integrated reception supported by digital technology e.g. self-serve options.

Key Actions	2016	2017	2018
As part of the reception redesign, work with Public Services Partners to develop and procure digital solutions	→		
Develop data sharing agreements/systems with our partners	→		
Identify links with partners to improve access to digital skills	→		



PRIORITY 3: DEVELOPING A DIGITAL WORKFORCE

For digital services to be effective, staff will need to have access to the devices and software they need to deliver a high level of service, and will be required to have the skills and training to use them. The same principle applies to our councillors – everyone working for the council should be equally enabled to work in a mobile and efficient way.

The council's corporate services team will work with all council services to actively identify opportunities to implement digital technology as part of any service review process, and we will ensure end-users will have a central role in reviewing any technological solutions before implantation.

An essential strand of our improvement journey is to ensure we create the right culture for all staff in the building to join together, share issues and problems, and work together on solutions that benefit our shared customers.

Our staff working at the front line within our communities have the best opportunity to redesign the way they work to reduce inefficient processes and utilise new technology. They are using digital methods in their daily lives and with the right encouragement and support, they are well placed to use their creativity to embrace better ways of working.

Data protection will remain an important element of our work but this will become less obvious to our customers. A large amount of the information and data we hold is neither personal or personally sensitive. Any data security concerns clearly need to be appropriately managed but should not be an excuse for technology solutions that offer our customers a poor user experience. Where possible, we should be using available data to help shape our service planning and policy development.

Where are we now?

Digital opportunities have been identified and implemented successfully in certain areas of the council but this has largely been on an ad-hoc basis rather than forming an integral part of our service planning or mapped out digital journey.

The day-to-day technology used by staff is primarily 'desk-based' with staff using e-mail, internal shared drives and making one-to-one phone calls. This limited use of available technology is reflected in our digital training offer, which primarily focuses on Microsoft Office.

CASE STUDY - Trees

How we used to do things

We have an obligation to inspect and assess all trees on land that is owned by the council, and depending on any identified risks an inspection schedule needs to be created.

Until recently, the process to inspect and assess trees was done by an officer visiting each tree and plotting via pen and paper. Once back in the office, the data would be inputted manually by the officer, taking up a considerable amount of time.

What did we want to change?

Using digital solutions, we wanted to improve the quality of the tree inspection service while reducing the amount of time officers spent on inputting data.

What do we do now?

The service now uses specialist software PSS to manage the location, risk and any actions that need to be taken on any of our trees.

The PSS system is a simple to use mobile app that officers can use out in the field, without the need for paperwork. Once back in the office or at home, the officer can use the system's back office software to see any identified risks so actions can be taken.

The mobile app uses GPS to very accurately map the location of the trees and allows information about the tree to be logged.

Once the inspection is complete, the mobile device then uploads the information to the cloud. This has removed any need for inspection paperwork or to update any systems after the inspection - saving significant officer time.

Using the system's back office software, the full history of inspections and actions about a tree can be viewed and any outstanding risks that need to be managed.

This software is also being used to inspect our parks and play equipment.

How will we get to where we want to be?

- Digital technology and the opportunities it provides will become a key consideration in service planning and policy development across the council.
- Strong governance will be required to review and lead on the delivery of digital technology, and any required training, across the council and councillors will be kept informed of digital developments on a regular basis.
- We will encourage piloting of new technologies at small cost and scale to test new ideas, working with our public sector partners, where appropriate.
- Our communication with colleagues and partners will extend beyond e-mail and telephone, encompassing tools such as video conferencing.
- Look at the potential to introduce a cloud-based email alternative for staff.



Key Actions	2016	2017	2018
Set up appropriate governance to review and lead on digital technology	→		
Digital training for staff	→	→	→
Testing and implementing of digital communications methods for staff e.g. video conferencing	→	→	

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