Digital Strategy 2016-2019

Context

The Gedling Plan 2016-19 sets out our aims to improve the lives of residents, support local business and provide high quality and excellent value services. A strong forward thinking digital strategy will be vital in making these aims a reality.

Digital technology has the potential to enable us and our partners to deliver services in a more efficient, productive and cost-effective way. All of our services are supported by a core IT infrastructure, however, to be better, digital technology needs to be fully embraced by services across the council and utilised effectively for our residents.

We want to be digital by choice. Residents that contact and interact with us online will do so easily. However, our traditional channels for example telephone and face to face will always be available contact options.

Whilst being mindful of the risk of cyber-crime we must not see this as a barrier to putting in place our digital plans. We will continue to improve and monitor our security measures and processes to protect customer and council data.

Why do we need a digital strategy?

We are already working with digital technology and encourage a digital approach where possible. However, to fully realise the benefits, we need to dramatically increase the scope and pace of our work. The strategy will support our strategic priorities and will have a central role in supporting the provision of high quality services on a tight budget.

The digital strategy sets out our aims. These are to:

- Provide services and information online in a user-friendly and inclusive way.

- Use technology to change the way traditional face-to-face services are delivered, enabling us to deliver effective and efficient services for our residents

- Create a digital council which is agile, mobile and using the most appropriate technologies to support service delivery

- Support the community to use digital technology and enable access to technology for those that do not have it

- Support our businesses to compete in the digital economy

- Use digital technologies to work with our partners to deliver mutually beneficial priority outcomes.

Priority areas

Our digital strategy focuses on four priority areas: Customer, Council, Community and Collaboration.

1. Customer - digital will be the channel of choice:

Where are we now?

Calls made to the contact centre are reducing and were just short of 200,000 for 2015/16. That compares with 240,000 for 2013/14 and 233k for 2014/15. Face to face activity is also steadily reducing and stands at 19,000 for 2015/16, compared to 22,500 for 2013/14 and 21,000 for 2014/15.

More people are paying online than ever before, 62,000 payment transactions were processed during 2015/16 of which 30% were online. Payments by cash and cheque are reducing significantly.

Use of the website continues to increase, with overall visits at 780,000 during 2015/16. Current website usage is evenly split between new and returning visitors. Just over half of the hits to the website originate from the Nottingham area.

Three quarters of hits to the website originate from search engines and referrals from other websites (for example Nottinghamshire County Council) as opposed to direct navigation from the home page. High level analysis of the most popular page views (representing 63% of all page views) shows Leisure pages at 40%, the Home Page at 16% Council Tax at 1%, Planning, Waste and Vacancies at 2%. There were 2.8 million page views during 2015/16.

The current website is a mixture of information and services. The site is ready for a complete change of design, concept and content. Whilst there are a number of really useful and well-used service features they are let down by the navigation of site. Some content is dated and not written in plain English. Not every part of the site is mobile friendly and, the site is designed for accessing content through a search engine like google, making it difficult to navigate.

The Keep Me Posted email subscription service has over 22,200 subscribers. This contributes to the overall channel shift by pro-actively delivering topic information chosen by subscribers, reducing avoidable contact with us.

Text messaging is a channel we are developing, using it to contact Council Tax customers whose payment is due. This has so far seen a reduction in the number of reminders issued by the courts and stopped some people from incurring fines.

Social media channels are actively used. Our Facebook and Twitter feed are corporately managed and there are separate feeds to support Leisure Services which are managed by that service area.

Socitm (the Society of Information Technology Management) conduct an annual survey of Local Authority websites. 44% of all council websites - 182 of 416 across the UK - provide a good or very good user experience based on navigation, searches and accessibility.

Our website was awarded an overall 3 star rating out of a maximum of 4. The average council rating of the same type is 2.1 stars. This is an improvement on the previous two years where our overall website rating was 1 star.

Our website was highly rated (3 or 4 Star) for its provision covering Waste and Recycling, Council Tax and for the tools for accessing content (navigation, search, and A-Z) and scored lower (1 or 2 Star) for Planning and Business.

The website was not considered to be totally responsive (mobile friendly) but was adequately accessible for people with disabilities.

What is our vision?

Interacting with us online is so easy, that it is our customers' channel of choice.

Customers are able to access our services at any time, from any location and from any device. Services are designed with a customer first approach and in line with central government's digital principles to ensure that they are easy to use, save time, save money and are continually adapted as things change.

Social media channels are used as customer services channels including webchats and improved online handling of queries.

The full potential of social media and webchat are exploited to interact instantaneously with customers.

Our traditional channels, for example, telephone and face to face are still available contact options.

What we need to do:

- A re-design of our website using data, Government guidelines and best practice to add more features, ensure that it is:
  - Easy to use
  - Accessible
  - Simple
  - Fully responsive (Mobile Friendly)
  - Fully transactional

- All social media channels are capable of dealing with customer services enquiries quickly and effectively.

- Expand the range of interactions that can be conducted online such as webchat.

2. Council – we will have the digital tools and skills required to deliver services effectively and efficiently:

Where are we now?

There is access to desktop office products and a variety of business solutions that are used to deliver functions. There are both front and back office systems that streamline the service processes. Online document management is in place in some areas. Remote and mobile working services are available. In summary, the day-to-day technology used by staff is good but much of the potential remains unrealised.

Revenues Services, which has been paperless for ten years, is a good example of where technology has been used in support of back office functions. Their use of electronic document management and workflow facilities has both improved processes and reduced cost.

What is our vision?

Our staff have skills and awareness to think and work digitally.

Our staff have access to the technology needed to deliver high quality and excellent value for money services.

Our Members work in a mobile and efficient way and have improved digital skills.

Technological solutions we invest in are used to their full potential.

Service areas actively identify opportunities and implement digital technology to improve the service planning process.

A corporate wide paperless approach is the norm.

Our staff engage in digital meetings and use technology to deal with administrative tasks.

While data protection will remain a vital pillar of our work, where possible, the data we store will be used more efficiently to improve our services.

What we need to do:

- A corporate digital team will be established to oversee the delivery of our digital programme.

- Create a digital first culture. The workforce must have the right motivation, skills and awareness to think digitally; put the customer at the centre of everything we do and, be able to be collaboratively and commercially responsive.

- Staff and Members must have the technology and the skills to use them. A review of the current hardware allocations is required and, service managers will need to continually review their line of business solutions and contribute to the digital agenda. When considering solutions, make sure that both front and back office requirements have been taken account of.

- All new digitally related purchases must be supported and deliver pre-defined digital outcomes.

- A baseline assessment of opportunities yet to be exploited from existing investments will be conducted.

- Our digital team will work with services to identify and deliver the digital strategy. Staff must have a pivotal role in this process.

- A corporate wide paperless approach will be encouraged with the move to an electronic document management including records management and document disposal.

3. Community - residents and businesses will have the digital skills and technology they need to enhance their lives and businesses:

Where are we now?

Without basic digital skills, residents are missing out on the opportunity to improve their lives. Not only are they unable to access our services in the easiest way possible, they risk isolation and exclusion from many things, from socialising to work and training opportunities.

Without basic digital skills businesses are missing out on their share of website sales and risk losing potential business. This might be because they can't be found online or are missing the opportunity to deliver a better, more efficient service to their customers.

The digital skills charity Go on UK has compiled a national picture of the level of digital exclusion. Their most recent assessment of the likelihood of digital exclusion in the Borough is assessed as medium, based on 4 metrics:-

- **Broadband performance** - 9.5% of households did not receive broadband speeds of at least 2 megabits per second
- **Internet access** - 10.8% of adults (over 16 year olds) had never been online, slightly lower than the national average of 11%

    o Nationally the groups that are most likely never to have ever used the internet are
      ▪ Over 65 year olds (24% 65-74 year olds; 59.6% 75+ year olds)
      ▪ Women (12.9%)
      ▪ People with disabilities (28.4%)

- **Basic digital skills** - 77% of adults in the borough had all five basic digital skills compared to 77% nationally. Basic skills are divided into

    o Managing information – find, manage and store digital information and content
    o Communicating – Communicate, interact, collaborate, share and connect with others
    o Transacting – purchase and sell goods and services, organise finances, register for and use digital government services
    o Problem solving – increase independence and confidence by solving problems using digital tools and finding solutions
    o Creating – engage with communities and create basic digital content

- **Basic digital skills used** - 41% of adults had used all five basic skills

We are already supporting a programme to provide superfast broadband coverage to 95% of the population by December 2017. This initiative includes options to provide superfast coverage to the hardest to reach parts of the UK, the encouragement of take up of superfast broadband by SMEs and the improvement of mobile coverage in remote areas.

Wi-Fi access is provided at the civic centre and the leisure centres. Self-serve internet access PC's are available for use at the civic centre. If required, staff are on hand to assist people with using the internet and accessing council services digitally.

Our website incorporates facilities for businesses to use but not in a joined up way. That makes it difficult and frustrating for businesses to interact with us. There are facilities provided through gov.uk for certain types of online licence applications. It is possible for businesses to make payments using our website.

What is our vision?

All of our residents and businesses are able to quickly and easily access digital technology and the internet throughout the borough. They are equipped with the digital skills required to improve their lives. We are perceived as a digital authority, gaining a reputation for the council and the borough as being a hub of digital technology.

Businesses have speedy and efficient access to business related activity, for example, economic development, trading licences and permits, food hygiene and safety and business rates.

What we need to do:

- Use social media to raise the awareness of the facilities available on our website for the community generally. Consider how social media and the Keep Me Posted email newsletter can help when interacting with businesses.

- In conjunction with our partners, engage with customers and business to help them to improve their digital skills.

- Consider the viability and need for more Wi-Fi coverage across the borough.

- In partnership if possible, increase the number of self-serve internet access points with appropriate staff support and guidance.

- Create a dedicated area of the website that will give businesses efficient access to services and information.

4. Collaboration - using technology as a means of engagement when dealing with complex issues:

Where are we now?

Consultation and collaboration takes place using traditional methods.

Established partnerships are in place with other public bodies including: the Police, Job Centre Plus and the NHS.

Some data sharing protocols are in place.

What is our vision?

Residents and local business are at the heart of decision making and are consulted with online.

Where there is a crossover of service, tools are in place for a single contact that residents can use.

We facilitate conversations online. This approach was recently demonstrated by comms2.0 (https://storify.com/NeilKnighton/local-govt-social-media) which held a twitter talk, to discuss 'good social media'. They provided a platform for users from across the country to share ideas and build relationships.

What we need to do:

- Continue to use social media to inform, consult, involve and collaborate. Partner's respective individual social media presence will complement each other's leading to the potential of an online hub to bring communities together and supporting each other to widen the reach.

- Recognising data protection and IT security requirements, we will review data sharing processes to facilitate simple and secure data sharing with our partners where agreed and appropriate, allowing for a far better picture of multi-disciplinary issues.

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