



Digital Strategy - 2017

Why do we need a Digital Strategy?

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, the Borough Council continues to face unprecedented financial pressure while delivering quality and valued services.

Digital technologies have the potential to transform and enhance the way services are delivered to residents while at the same time generating efficiencies and reducing pressure on Council Taxpayers.

Research from the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) suggests a face-to-face interaction with a customer can cost a council £10.53; a basic phone query can cost £3 and a customer interacting online or carrying out a transaction just 8p!

Within the complex and shifting world of local government, the Council is committed to preserving face-to-face and telephone contact channels for those customers who don't find it easy for a number of reasons to fully engage with the digital world.

However, for those who have access and a desire to use our services digitally – whether that is via a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone – we are committed to making this as easy, efficient and effective as we possibly can so they don't have to come and see us in person or ring us up.

The Government's Digital Strategy of 2012 set the scene for digital change and has since been the catalyst for digital transformation across central and local government.

The Government Digital Service estimates savings of between £1.7 and £1.8 billion per year from moving services from offline, face-to-face or phone, to digital channels.

A key part of this saving is attributed to transactional services such as online payments, saving both customers' time and the public sector money.

In the Council's budget for 2016/17, it made the first direct link between modernising the way we do business and the potential to achieve savings.

The launch of Citizen Access - which allows residents to manage their own Council Tax accounts - and also the introduction of a Landlord's Portal (which enables local landlords to access key information for themselves rather than calling the Council) has directly resulted in a significant reduction in the number of calls being taken by Revenues and Benefits staff.

This in turn has enabled staff savings of £100,000 for the current financial year and this figure was included in the savings identified at Full Council for the 2016/17 Budget meeting.

Our goal now is to develop this work and generate further savings for the Council.

Although the primary focus will be on key, volume areas of our business, all service areas will be encouraged to follow the processes outlined in the section later in this strategy which refers to actions we intend to take.

For example:-

- Reviewing all existing website content.
- Detailed examination of our Google web analytics.
- Looking at data from our customer service centres and our contact centres.
- Business process re-engineering and so on.

Importantly, in line with our Customer Service and Access Strategy, we will continue to deliver traditional methods of contact for our residents who need it.

By moving as much of our contact online and through digital methods, our customer services staff will be freed up to deal with customers who really need to deal with the Council using face-to-face contact.

Customer Service and Access Strategy

In November 2014, Cabinet agreed a Customer Service and Access Strategy for the Council.

This Website Strategy incorporates – and aims to support - the website elements of that strategy.

The Customer Service and Access Strategy said - *Increasingly, customers expect to do business with the Council via electronic means at times that suit them, 24/7, whether this is by web or e-mail and it is anticipated that face-to-face and telephony services will reduce as a result. The Council's website has a crucial role in providing up-to-date, accurate, robust information to customers and the public generally across a wide range of Council services.*

Core principles of the strategy relating to the website include:-

- Encourage customers who visit our customer service centres to use “self-service” facilities on site and to look to extend these facilities.

- Increase the take up of digital services, such as web and e-mail, to reduce cost and focus more expensive access channels, such as face-to-face, to resolving complex service needs.
- Revise and continue a programme to update the content and technical functionality of the Council's website to ensure it reflects customer needs and priorities; is easy to navigate and is expanded to further incorporate end-to-end transaction delivery.
- Introduce solutions that improve the customer experience such as enabling customers to directly interact with front line Council employees via the web, introducing smartphone apps, providing enhanced telephony and social media facilities.
- Adopt a consistent approach to web delivery that will ensure its efficiency and usage as the primary means of access to Council and partner services

Online Services

Online services will be vital in the delivery of efficiencies for the Council. Equally, if not more importantly, customer focussed online services will also be key in improving the way website users do business with the Council.

Significant progress has been made in getting services online since the e-Government agenda and through our expansion of the use of the Council's CRM system for providing public service information.

During the life of this strategy the aim is to increase the availability of online services which will allow customers the opportunity for end-to-end transactions with the Council 24/7.

When an online version of a service is to be created there should be a review of the process undertaken and change management documentation completed. Services should not expect to be provided online without any changes to the process undertaken.

The Council will ensure that this process will not simply be a case of creating an online form to replace an existing paper one.

The review of the service being provided to customers will investigate:-

- i) What steps can be automated?
- ii) What steps are duplicated and can be removed?
- iii) Can the service be delivered from the Corporate Call Centre as well as online?
- iv) How much time is saved by completing the service online / electronically?
- v) What improvements can be made for the customer?

This is not an exhaustive list but these are the kinds of questions that services should be asking themselves as they move forward and review online content, transactions and how they deliver their service.

It is expected there will be more requests than there are resources to develop and because of this, actions will be prioritised according to how they support the corporate priorities and also by the savings that can be potentially delivered.

Summary

- All services will be expected to identify processes which can be delivered fully online for the benefit of customers.
- All services will be responsible for identifying how savings and efficiencies can be generated by encouraging digital take-up of services.
- All services will retain a focus on all customers so that suitable arrangements are in place for those least able to access digital services.
- All services are responsible for providing authentic, accurate and up-to-date information for the Council's website.
- All services will identify transactions which can be completed end-to-end for the benefit of customers.
- The Communications Service is responsible for all content management, design and development procedures for the Council's online presence.
- The ICT Service will be responsible for the structure, framework and technical aspects required to ensure the Council's online presence.
- The Council supports the ethos of "digital by design" and where possible will focus service delivery primarily around its website.
- The Council supports the notion of one council website for all of its services.
- The Council's website and the transactions and information available will be promoted at every opportunity by all services to ensure the maximum benefit for the Council.

What do we do at the moment?

We aren't starting from scratch.

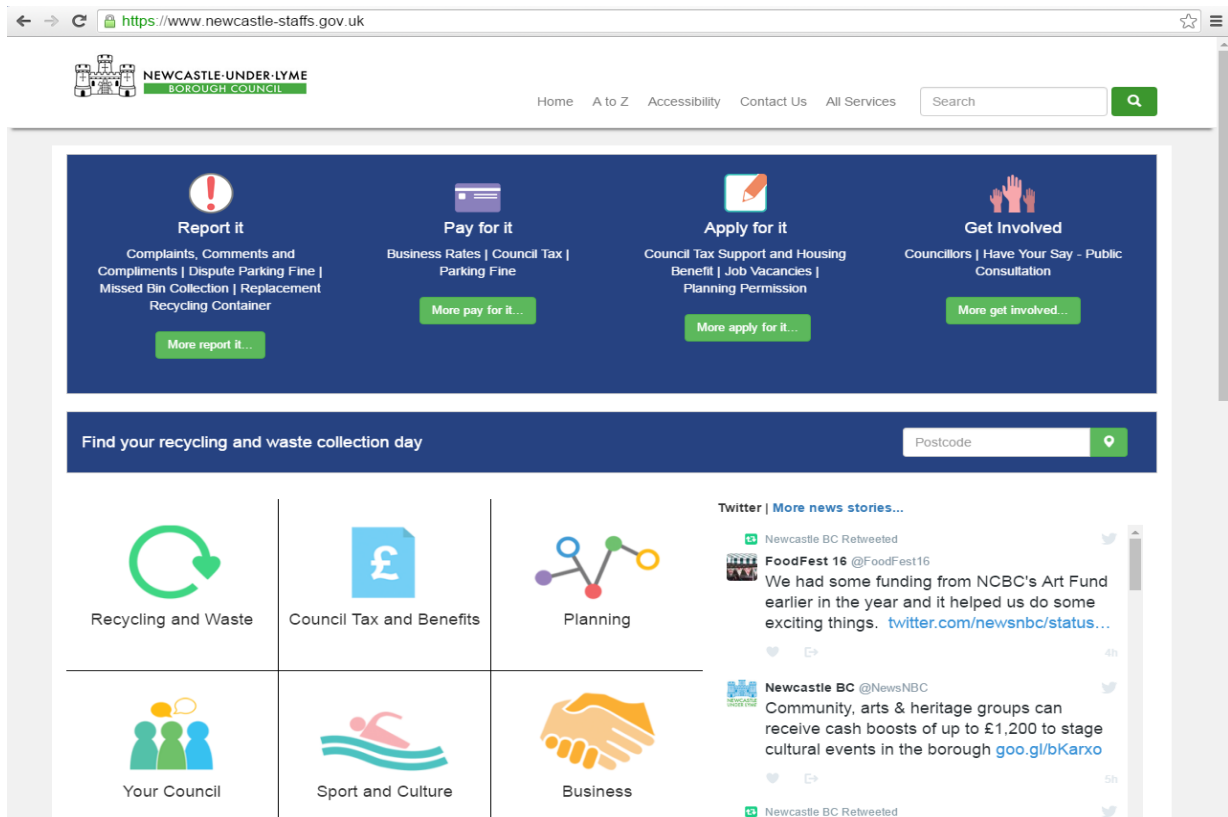
The Council changed its website in September 2015 and the in-house team who designed, built and launched the new site had a clear focus on several goals.

The first was to try to focus on end-to-end transactions.

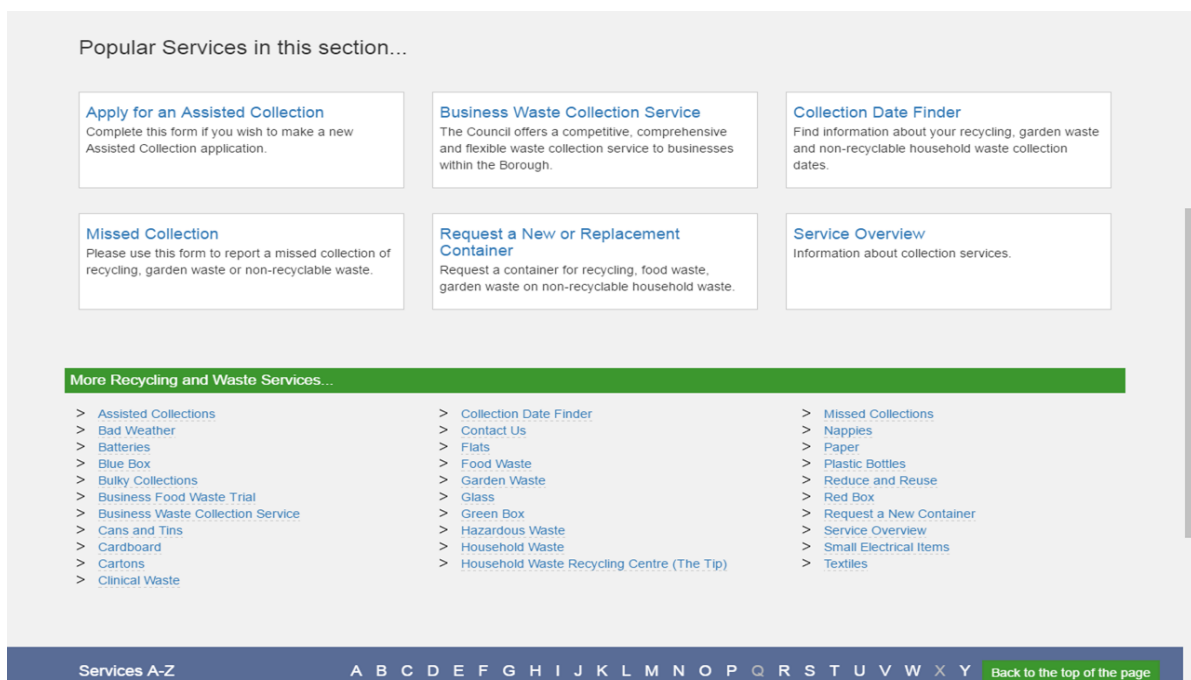
The second was to improve navigation so users enjoyed a "three clicks and done" experience.

The third was to make the website a tool for the volume parts of our business so we could reduce the number of telephone calls received by the Council and the number of personal visits made.

As you can see below, the new website already encourages some volume elements of our business to be conducted online – report it, pay it, apply for it and consultation/have your say – all prominent on the home page.



This theme is followed through on main landing pages which users connect to via quicklinks on the home page. The example below is from recycling and waste.



Digital inclusion and exclusion

Access to the Internet is increasing both locally and nationally.

More and more people are gaining access to the internet and for many it is an automatic reaction to go online, either by smart phone, tablet or computer, rather than make contact face-to-face.

Whereas nationally in 2006, 35 per cent of adults used the internet on a daily basis, the estimated figure is now 82 per cent.

Social Media

Communication by social media is clearly more important than it has ever been, in particular when trying to communicate with young adults, with 63 per cent of adults aged 16 to 24 now using it, compared to 45 per cent in 2011.

More than two-thirds of these users access social media on a daily basis, many using it several times a day, and the most common reason cited is to find out what's happening in their local area.

Nationally, the following social media methods are popular with various age groups:-

Facebook is most popular with users aged 25 to 44, and more popular with those aged 45 to 64 than those aged 16 to 24. There is very limited usage by pensioners. More females use it than males.

YouTube is most popular with users aged 25 to 44, with similar levels of usage for those aged 16 to 24 and aged 45 to 64, again with very limited usage by pensioners. More males than females use it.

Twitter is most popular with users aged 25 to 44 but also popular with users aged 16 to 24, less popular with those aged 45 to 64 and with very limited usage by pensioners. More males than females use it.

Instagram is most popular with users aged 16 to 24, with high usage from users aged 25 to 44 and very low usage for anyone older than 45. More females than males use it.

LinkedIn is most popular with users aged 25 to 64, with low usage for any other age groups. More males than females use it.

Spotify is most popular with users aged 25 to 44, with high usage amongst those aged 16 to 24 and low usage with other age groups. More males than females use it.

Recent use of the internet

An estimated 83 per cent of adults in Staffordshire used the internet in the past three months, compared to 79 per cent in 2011, so the proportion of users is clearly increasing.

The rate of increase has been slower than across the UK however, which has increased from 79 per cent to 88 per cent.

However, it is important to recognise that this means, across Staffordshire, an estimated 17 per cent of residents have not used the internet in the past three months. This is a higher rate than across the UK as a whole (12 per cent), whereas in 2011 the local rate was the same as the national rate (20 per cent).

(ONS Statistical bulletin: internet users in the UK: 2016, published 20 May 2016).

Non-users of the internet

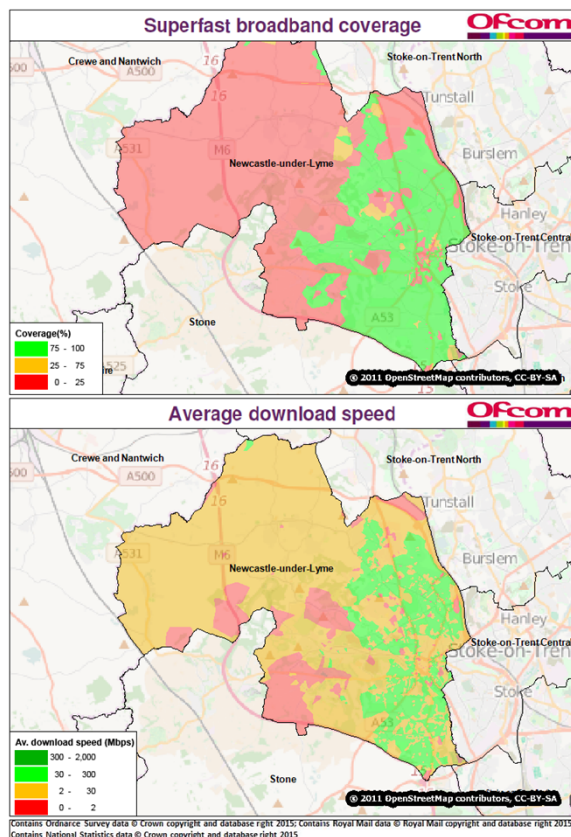
It will be of no surprise that it is older people who are far more likely to be non-users of the internet.

Nationwide, an estimated 21 per cent of residents aged 65-74 and an estimated 56 per cent of residents aged 75 and above do not use it at all. Bearing in mind that the overall rate of pensioners is higher in Newcastle-under-Lyme than across the UK, it might be that there is an even higher rate of elderly non-users locally.

Access to faster broadband

It should also be recognised that it is not just the elderly who can suffer from digital exclusion. Residents living in rural areas can often experience very slow broadband (and mobile phone) speeds and this can restrict their ability to engage online.

The images below show a) the limited access to superfast broadband and b) the areas where average download speed is slowest, but note that this map is for the constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme rather than the whole borough.



Factors towards digital exclusion

Data from Ofgem has been used to classify each borough depending on their overall likelihood to experience digital exclusion, by using the factors outlined below. This analysis suggests that in some areas, the borough is fairly similar to the UK as a whole but in other areas it has a higher risk of residents experiencing digital exclusion.

Again, note that for the below, some data is only released at county level.

Title	Data used to make Digital Exclusion Risk	Digital Exclusion Risk
Infrastructure	Made up of household broadband speeds and household availability of 4G mobile data.	Medium
Offline	Percentage of people in Staffordshire who have never used the internet.	Higher than average
Infrastructure – 4G	Percentage of people in Staffordshire who cannot access 4G mobile data.	Higher than average
Infrastructure – Broadband	Percentage of people in Staffordshire who cannot access >=10MB on their home broadband.	Higher than average
Basic Digital Skills	Percentage of adults in Newcastle-under-Lyme who do not have all five basic digital skills.	Higher than average (worse than most of Staffordshire)
Basic Digital Skills used	Percentage of adults in Newcastle-under-Lyme who have not used all five basic digital skills in the past three months.	Medium (worse than the Staffordshire average)
Age	Percentage of adults in Newcastle-under-Lyme aged 65+.	Medium (close to Staffordshire average)
Education	Percentage of adults with no / level one qualifications.	High (close to Staffordshire average)
Income	Average income per Newcastle-under-Lyme taxpayer – note that lower income means higher risk.	High (higher than Staffordshire average)
Health	Percentage of adults in Newcastle-under-Lyme with long-term illness or disability.	High (higher than the Staffordshire average)

Mosaic and location of residents at risk of digital exclusion

Mosaic data, produced by Experian, breaks down the population of the borough and UK into ten distinct groups dependent on their Internet habits, enabling us to see where residents are most likely to be experiencing digital exclusion.

Around 13,900 of the borough's households are in the two groups seen to be most at risk of digital exclusion, and are located across the borough, though particularly in Loggerheads and Whitmore as the following table shows:-

Ward	Households
Audley and Bignall End	677
Bradwell	683
Butt Lane	672
Chesterton	474
Clayton	696
Cross Heath	631
Halmer End	609
Holditch	421
Keele	78
Kidsgrove	639
Knutton and Silverdale	396
Loggerheads and Whitmore	1,067
Madeley	714
May Bank	732
Newchapel	445
Porthill	537
Ravenscliffe	591
Seabridge	522
Silverdale and Parksite	472
Talke	619
Thistleberry	816
Town	571
Westlands	262
Wolstanton	587

While online self-serve transactions can undoubtedly boost the customer experience for the vast majority of “web savvy” residents – as well as save significant sums for local government - all of the information outlined above clearly shows that in Newcastle-under-Lyme we will need to pay particular regard to digital exclusion.

Digital volunteers

So, while we will commit to the principles and actions outlined in this strategy, we also acknowledge actions need to be taken to ensure digital exclusion is kept to a minimum.

The problems we will need to focus on as a council are:-

- How to stop people being left behind by the fast-moving shift to online communications and transactions.
- Support the empowerment of individuals and communities to develop digital skills.
- Enable the Council to modernise approaches without making life difficult for people with minimal or no digital skills.

To help solve these problems, the Council will work to establish a network of volunteer Digital Champions based in, and from, local communities who are able to train other residents to learn basic digital skills and to develop confidence in using the internet to access council services.

Our goal will be to establish local Digital Inclusion Hubs with trained and supported volunteer Digital Champions who will work to support new learners to develop digital skills.

This network of digital champions will be the responsibility of the Digital Delivery Board.

What we will do

During the last year the number of unique users who log on to the Council’s website each month has doubled to around 40,000.

The Council’s new website - with its focus on volume parts of our business, end-to-end transactions and “three clicks and done” navigation – is obviously striking a chord with the very large number of residents who choose to either get their information online or do business with us digitally.

However, we still have significant numbers of residents who access our information and services either by telephone or face-to-face.

Face-to-face

A total of 49,548 chose to interact with the Council at one of our Customer Service Centres – the Guildhall, Kidsgrove town hall, the Madeley Centre.

Their enquiries/visits were categorised as follows:-

Revenues and Benefits – 29,903

Waste management – 9,419

Streetscene – 4,367

Bus passes – 1,881

Planning – 1,167

Environmental services – 959

Blue badge – 867

All other services – 736

Land charges - 249

Phone calls

A total of 110,368 phone calls were made to our corporate contact centre during 2015/16.

Their calls were categorised as follows (in no particular order):-

Waste management

Planning and regeneration general enquiries

Environmental health

Licensing

Leisure services

Streetscene

Corporate complaints

Operator

Anti-social behaviour

In addition to the corporate contact centre, the Council's Revenues and Benefits service runs its own call-handling operation.

In the first part of this year the monthly total averaged around 8,000 calls per month which over the course of a year would equate to 96,000 calls.

Actions required

As we move services online, we need to completely redesign how services are delivered from the customer's perspective, to become truly digital rather than an online simulation of existing paper and manual processes.

Many of the services we provide are physical products such as recycling collections or clean streets and open spaces.

These may not be digital products but the processes that enable someone to receive these services can become digital to the fullest possible extent.

These can include online booking of appointments, digital payments, online application forms and access to customer profile information.

We will enable the digital by default approach by:-

- Making services accessible online 24-hours a day on any device including smartphones and tablets, so that applications and payments can be made at anytime, anywhere, in a way that suits our customers. This is keeping pace with other modern businesses and therefore with our customers' expectations of accessing services and products.
- Providing pertinent advice and information that is clear, concise and accurate. We will continually review website content and use customer insight tools to constantly improve the information displayed which should empower customers to easily find what they need on the website to carry out a transaction. This will reduce the need to phone, e-mail or visit the Council.
- Divert callers away from the contact centres and face-to-face interactions at the service points with easy to use digital services, saving money, time and officer expertise.

To make this happen, we need to act as a Digital Council, and in embracing this challenge we will:-

- Establish a standardised approach to digital service redesign.
- Utilise corporately endorsed digital tools: online application forms (e-forms), digital payments, CRM etc.
- Streamline internal, manual processes and scrutinise all back office systems.
- Make best use of IT infrastructure to enable sharing of non-sensitive data across departments
- Share our experiences and lessons learnt from engaging with customers and from enabling change.
- Encourage all services to develop smarter ways of working through business intelligence and analytics.
- Request that all service areas put forward annual efficiency savings to be achieved through a clear and sustained digital transformation programme and these figures will be included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- Introduce a Digital Delivery Board which will be responsible for implementation and monitoring of this Digital Strategy.
- Enhance digital skills across the organisation to ensure staff are best placed to use technology in a way which enables them to work in the most efficient and effective manner. This is an exciting period of change and we want everyone at all levels of the organisation to feel empowered and motivated by what we are looking to achieve. In creating this stimulated and supportive environment we will look to each service area to identify a Digital Champion, or more than one if there is interest. These Champions will be a key contact for colleagues to discuss digital projects and approaches with who may have an interest in technology, gadgets or data. By having an informal network of Digital Champions we will be able to gauge appetite for change across the organisation and potentially any opportunities for collaborating on projects and they will be a focus for interaction and action with the Digital Delivery Board.

Who will manage this transformation?

The Cabinet Member for Finance, IT and Customer will be responsible for leading the digital transformation at the Council and will monitor and evaluate the work of the Digital Delivery Board.

The Digital Delivery Board will be chaired by the Director of Resources and Support Services and will be supported principally by ICT, Communications and Customer Services. However, officers from other services will be asked to support the work of this group as required.

Principles we will adopt at the Council

This strategy is informed by the following principles:-

- Customer focus – rather than service focus.
- Self-service wherever possible – driving channel shift.
- Shape demand – redirect resources to where they are most needed.
- Resilience – delivering fit-for-purpose infrastructure for today and tomorrow.
- Value for money – delivering cost-effective services and efficiencies.
- Digital – embedded as business as usual.
- Engagement with communities and businesses.
- An annual refresh of this strategy, its achievements, goals and objectives.