

# Housing, Finance and Corporate Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	Monday 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2017
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Update on Digital Service Delivery and Future Plans
<b>Report of:</b>	John Quinn- Director of Corporate Services
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Corporate Services- Councillor Tim Mitchell
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	World Class City
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## 1. Executive Summary

This report updates Committee on the current level of digital service delivery available to residents and others. It focuses primarily on the website and apps through which residents can engage with the Council and access our services or report issues to us. The report also informs committee of the direction of travel of our emerging Digital Strategy and asks members for feedback on this. This is put in context with the provision of some benchmarking information and best practice.

## 2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

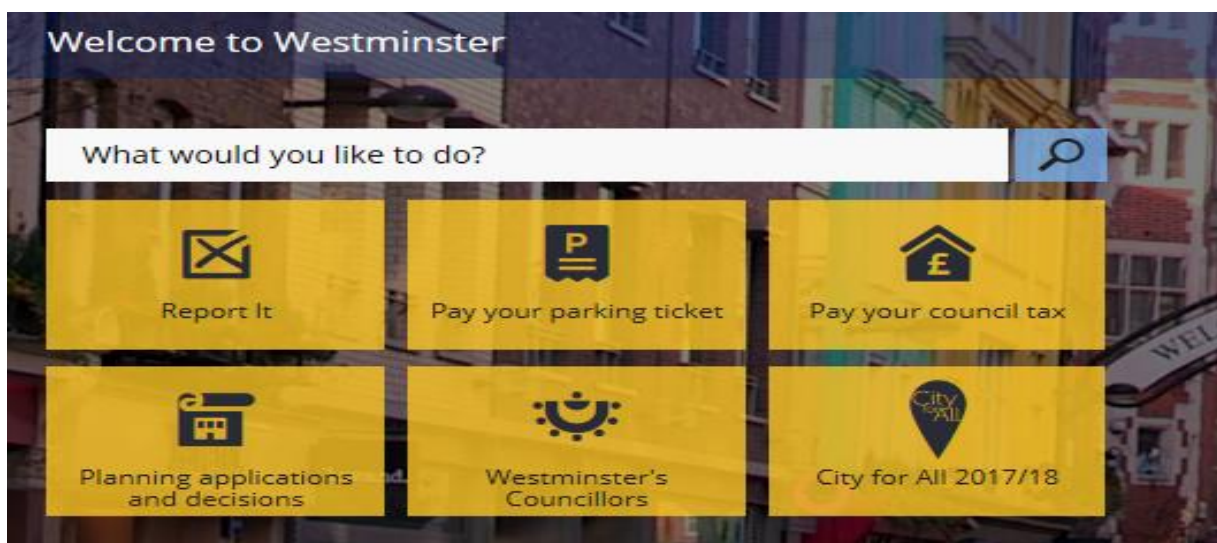
Committee is asked to:

1. Note and comment on current service delivery
2. Note the direction of travel for the Council's emerging Digital Strategy and consider ways to engage during the feasibility phase of the programme to

help further develop the recommendations supporting the outline business case detailing the digital transformation solutions..

### 3. Current Digital Service Delivery

- 3.1 All council directorates are providing services online, either directly through the council's website or through microsites. The current main website design was established in order for citizens and customers to more easily navigate their way to the most common pages.
- 3.2 The core enabler of digital services is the Westminster Council website. The home page invites users to enter a search term for the council service they would like to access. A new internal search engine was introduced in October 2016 to improve the search functionality and the optimisation work for [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk) is complete. The next step is to optimise the 75 microsites to ensure a consistent customer experience
- 3.3 As well as the search box, there are five buttons on the home page that users of the site see first, comprising the following services:
- A report it tool
  - Pay parking tickets online
  - Pay council tax online
  - Access information and submit views about planning applications and decisions
  - Information about Westminster's councillors
- 3.4 An additional button allows the council to promote priority information. Currently, it is set to promote information relating to the General Election.



- 3.5 The Report It tool offers users opportunities to report online relating to 15 key issues, including dumped rubbish, noise, street lighting, graffiti and street

works. This enables residents, visitors and businesses to report issues they see on the streets of Westminster. However, there is scope for greater efficiencies by better integration with back office systems.

- 3.6 The website indexing is quite shallow (three levels of navigation maximum) which should make it easy to search. The current top 20 search terms on the website are as follows:

Search term	Number	% of the top 20 searches
Parking	2,076	9.82%
PCN	1,402	6.63%
Housing	1,394	6.59%
Jobs	1,366	6.46%
Login/Log in	1,362	6.44%
council tax	1,342	6.35%
Contact	1,287	6.09%
Planning	1,280	6.05%
Bidding	1,068	5.05%
CCTV	1,026	4.85%
collection times	982	4.64%
housing benefit	970	4.59%
business rates	950	4.49%
parking suspension	904	4.28%
CCTV footage	842	3.98%
moving out	766	3.62%
Licensing	744	3.52%
land charges	714	3.38%
Bid	670	3.17%

- 3.7 The website home page offers the following range of council services and information, within the *All You Need to Know About* section:

- Parking
- Council Tax
- Planning
- Licensing
- Libraries
- Jobs and careers
- Young Westminster
- City for All 2017/18

- 3.8 Within these pages, there is a mix of information and opportunities to engage with the council online. Some examples of this include, the libraries page offers locations of libraries as well as options to log in and renew books, search the library catalogue and book a PC. Within the licensing section, people can look up relevant information, such as fee levels, as well as apply

for a premises licence on line. Business owners can register for business rates or notify the council of any changes through the website. They can also access commercial waste services, hosted on a microsite. Citizens can register to vote online, through being directed to the gov.uk site. As the largest planning authority in the UK, details of planning applications dating back to 1990 can be accessed online. Supporting documents are available online for planning applications decided after May 2000.

3.9 The *Our Services* section of the website has information relating to the following areas:

- Recycling and rubbish
- Births, deaths, marriages and citizenship
- Social care
- Services and support for businesses and start ups
- Moving into Westminster
- Electoral Services

Again, these sections are a mix of information and opportunities to submit information to the council online, for example applying for a resident parking permit via the Moving into Westminster section, which takes the citizen to the Parkright microsite.

4.0 Digital innovation within the Parking Service was recognised last year when the council picked up the “Innovation in Technology” prize at the Corporate IT Forum’s “Real IT Awards” for its unique use of radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology to help disabled residents in Westminster find a place to park.

4.1 The council’s web presence is also being utilised to improve engagement with local people. An Open Forum microsite was launched on 2016 in order to host major council consultations, promote the public Open Forum meetings with the Leader and Cabinet and to provide a way for people to get involved in local decision making at a time and a place that suits them. The council also has a strong social media presence on Twitter, Instagram and You Tube. A Young Westminster site was designed in conjunction with young people and launched in order to give advice and support to those residents aged 16 to 24.

4.2 Studies show that digital channels are clearly an important tool in reaching and engaging with younger audiences. Working in collaboration with young people on appropriate content has played a key role in shaping communications work. For example, in 2015 a consultation with young people found that 61 per cent of them had personal experience of violence against women and girls. That included 25 per cent who were survivors themselves. The consultation also revealed that the internet was the top place that people would go to look for relationship information.

4.3 As a result, we worked with younger people to develop our #SpeakSense campaign. We created a mobile-first website with up-to-date facts on relationship abuse, expert advice on what to do if a friend is being abused or is

abusive, and contact details for support services. We also created a short film to challenge the myths surrounding relationship abuse, which was produced and edited by the young people we worked with. The film starred local actors and YouTube star and social media influencer Hannah Whitton, who is famous for her positive videos on relationships, gender and sexuality. The final aspect of the campaign was a social media element. We ran website infographics and edits from the videos across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram throughout May and September 2016 (to coincide with the campaign launch and start of the 2016/17 school year).

- 4.4 It should be noted that partners and contractors own websites play an important role in delivering online services on behalf of the Council. For example, whilst the council website will give people information about their local leisure centre, it is the Everyone Active website where people can see details about activities and book them.

## 5.0 Website usage

- 5.1 There has been a steady growth of Westminster website usage recorded each year with an overall growth of sessions by 14% since 2014. Sixty three per cent of the website traffic comes from external web search engines; the vast majority from Google.

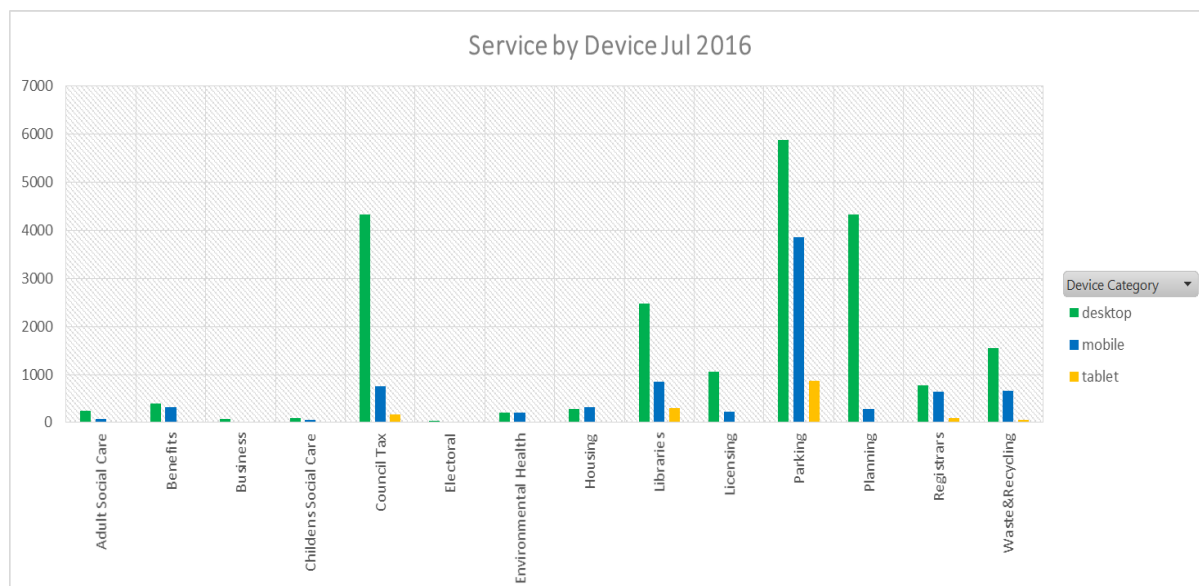
Year	Total nr of sessions	Increase per year	Yearly growth
2014	3,676,457		
2015	3,800,075	123,618	3%
2016	4,194,433	394,358	9%

- 5.2 Westminster's website does not currently provide an account driven environment for users, compared with other public or private sector websites. It provides a small range of transaction services and some of these are promoted by microsites and third party applications. The main transactional microsites in order of volume are:

- Parking
- Council tax
- Planning
- Registrars
- Waste service
- Licensing

- 5.3 The site is mobile responsive in its design which ensures the best content can be delivered to users no matter how they choose to access it. The homepage colour scheme conforms to best design practices for visibility and accessibility. It includes a Twitter widget and social media bookmarks to ensure that the council promotes its solid social media presence as a crucial way of engaging with residents, businesses and visitors.

5.4 There is a clear distinction of web usage by device with desktop/laptop being the most prominent followed by mobile and then tablet. For more complex matters such as council tax and planning, the use of desktops/laptops is significantly higher. Mobile devices seem to be typically used for more simple and on the move transactions.



5.5 The Council has circa 75 microsites / 3<sup>rd</sup> party platforms. Some of those microsites provide online functionality that does not exist within the current web product, such as online booking forms or online forms with payment integration. Some services such as parking or council tax are outsourced, hence why transactional functionality is provided and hosted externally to Westminster main website.

5.6 However, there are still a significant number of microsites linked to the main website which do not have a consistent look and feel that matches the council's branding. In addition, some microsites do not have proper support arrangements in place therefore it makes it very difficult to resolve issues once they arise. As a result, any service requests for a microsite must now be approved by the council's Digital Transformation Programme Board to ensure adequate governance.

5.7 Click through rates are used as a way of measuring the effectiveness of customer journeys. A high click through rate reflects greater effectiveness in search engines surfacing relevant content to customers. On average, 22% of searches on our website lead to clicks. While this could be improved it is higher than the industry standard for external search engine referrals. The average click through rate for local government is 10%, but Westminster's rate is lower than the other two tri-borough councils.

## 6.0 Website usage benchmarking and other data

6.1 Residents have been asked how frequently they use the internet, the survey responses have articulated the following:

- Every day 75% (58% in 2015)
- Several times a week 23% (11% in 2015)
- At least once a week 10% (2% 2015)
- At least once a month 1% (0% 2015)
- Never 4% (0% 2015)
- SUMMARY - USE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK 91% (2015 89%)

6.2 Residents who had visited the council website were asked about its usefulness

- Useful 95% (2015 97%)
- Not useful 5% (3% 2015)

6.3 The Society for IT practitioners in the public sector (SOCITM) reviews all local authority websites annually and publishes the results in their publicly available Better Connected report. Their most recent review of Westminster Council has seen them give the council a two star rating out of four. This is a decline from the three stars rating awarded in the previous two years.

6.4 According to SOCITM, Better Connected surveys explore the ability of websites to provide quick and easy ‘customer journeys’ and successful resolution of a series of top tasks. ‘Top tasks’ may be informational (Find out about keeping fit) or transactional (pay parking fine). Tasks are selected from service areas that have high web visitor numbers (based on data from Socitm’s Website Performance service) or which may be important for reasons of legislative or other change. Inclusion of purely informational tasks is based on the fact that data shows more than half of all visits to council websites to be for information only.

6.5 Reviewers conduct some tests on a smartphone (e.g. the rubbish & recycling tasks in *Better connected* 2015-16), reflecting the fact that nearly half of all visits to council websites are now made from mobile devices. As well as performance in tasks, the survey evaluates site navigation, search, and A to Z; the degree to which sites are purposed for access from mobile devices; and their accessibility to people with disabilities. Testing the latter is carried out for *Better connected* by the Digital Accessibility Centre.

6.6 SOCITM reviewers said that the Westminster site was responsive, mobile friendly and passed their accessibility criteria, but failed in relation to being ‘mobile standard’.

6.7 A full set of Better Connected results can be seen in the table on the following page, with comparisons to similar councils and all other local authorities:

<b><i>Better connected overall for WCC</i></b> (stars 1-4)	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Similar</b>	<b>All</b>
		<b>councils</b>	<b>councils</b>
	<b>2 star</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>
	4 star	2.7	2.5

Planning and Building Control			
Apply for building control (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) - Completed 28/11/16			
Parking			
Apply for resident parking permit - Completed 17/01/17	2 star	2.8	2.8
Social care			
Request social care assessment for older person - Completed 13/02/17	2 star	2.7	2.4
Social care			
Find local care support for an older person - Completed 06/03/17	4 star	2.9	2.6
Tools for accessing content			
Navigation, Search, A-Z - Completed 06/05/17	3 star	3	2.8
Mobile Test			
Assess website on a mobile - Completed 07/05/17	1 star	2.5	2.3
Accessibility stage one test			
Access for people with disabilities - completed December 2016	Passed	N/A	N/A
Accessibility stage two test (2 or 3 is a pass, 0 or 1 is a fail)			
Access for people with disabilities - completed February/March 2017	2	1.9	1.7

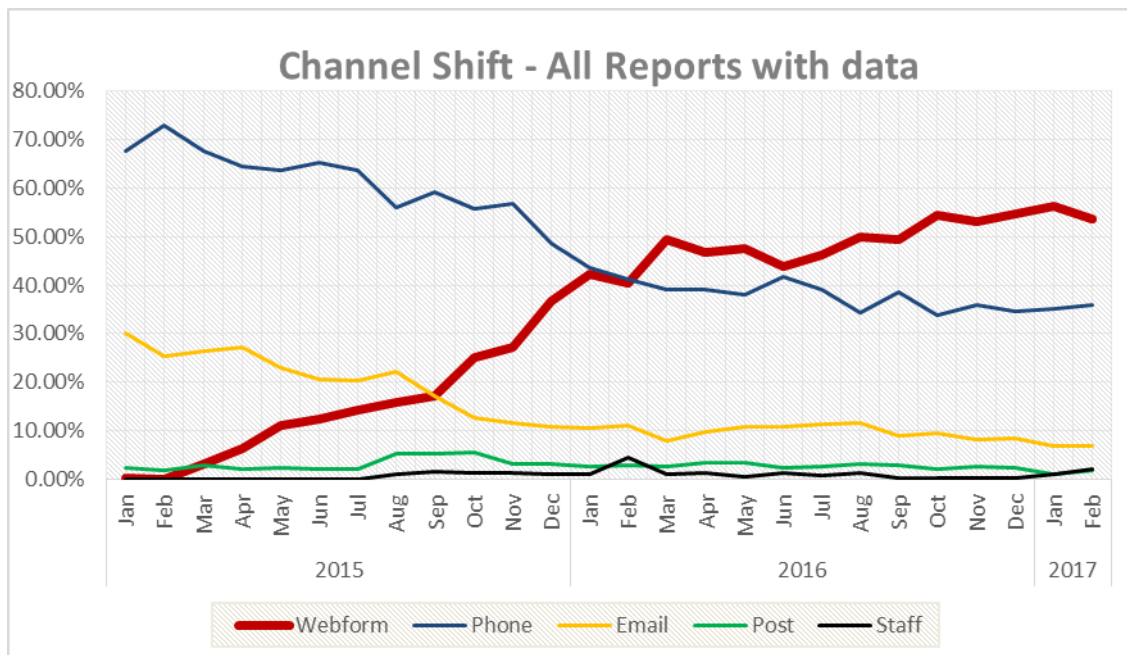
## **7 The Council's emerging Digital Transformation Strategy**

- 7.1 Westminster City Council's current City for All vision outlines a Smart Council programme that sets out to deliver the following in 2017/18:
- "WCC wants to provide the best customer experience for our residents, making it as easy as possible to access local services. We will take responsibility for dealing with problems in full the first time and working with people and families to prevent more complex issues developing."
- 7.2 Westminster's ambition is that customers will 'choose digital' as the way they transact, the services they receive will be quicker, simpler and more cost effective, resulting in an effective and efficient customer experience comparable to other online services they use. In addition, and equally important, is that this transformation delivers a more effective and efficient organisation which in parallel supports our ambition to retain and attract great people.
- 7.3 Central government has defined digital by default as "digital services that are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them will choose to do so whilst those who can't are not excluded". The Government's Future of Public Service Communications report reflects, "The speed of technological change is unrelenting and will only quicken. This virtually unfettered and unprecedented sharing of knowledge and information is already causing significant and complex social change. The scale of this transformation will



continue to quicken. As we were told by Google: “Technology will never be as slow as it is today”.

- 7.4 In terms of communications and engagement, the report adds; “Evidence has conclusively shown that communication must be built around the citizen, delivering information to them in the way that they want, not broadcast at them in the traditional model. To quote one participant in our study: “Go to where the audience is, because the audience, not the government chooses the communication tools.” Unless we can meet this key challenge, public service communications will fall behind the curve and risk further decline in the public’s trust with government and its institutions. In this sense future communications will be about the application of science, not artistic interpretation.”
- 7.5 Whilst we have some considerable distance to make up against many other local and central public sector bodies, along with many private sector organisations, central to the aim of the refreshed digital transformation programme is to develop customer-centric models that put the citizen at the heart of service design and service delivery. The ‘customer promise’ is part of the inherent agenda of the public sector and will govern our ambitions, design principles and ways of working. It is this principle, not technology that should dominate the decision making.
- 7.6 A Smart Council should provide digital end-to-end services, processes and platforms designed to connect communities, enhance customer experience and reduce cost. Citizens, businesses and stakeholders, wherever they are and whatever the time, should be able to have their say on the issues that matter to them and do business with the council using the Internet. Whether it’s applying for a license or permit, paying for pest control or parking, reporting rubbish on the street, making a planning application, planning a marriage or civil partnership, it must be able to be done quickly and easily online.
- 7.7 Therefore, as part of the base case work is in progress to deliver a more online transactional experience for users (Citizens and Businesses), in line with best practice across sectors., As a result a new ‘My Westminster Account’ will be launched through a phased approach later this year. Every effort will be utilised to motivate users to adopt online services by creating and registering their new account. The benefit to the citizen will be an improved, consistent and enhanced experience , whilst the council will benefit from a reduction in inbound and outbound mail; a move towards to a ‘golden record’ for a more holistic customer service approach and a reduction in back office transactions enabling enhanced value for money solutions to be delivered.
- 7.8 In addition, an improved ‘Report It’ function and an enhanced use of automated web forms will support our customers, this should lead to an increased level of customer satisfaction which in turn should result in a decline in other forms of more costly contact. The following graph has identified the effect that providing on-line forms to a portfolio of council services can have on other forms of contact.



## 8. Digital Transformation benchmarking

To enable the delivery of the Leader's priorities against the backdrop of the current fiscal environment, it is recommended that a more transformational approach is considered enabled through Digital

8.1 The following are some of the key lessons learned across both private and public sector organisations, and their insights in to what is important.

- Strategy not technology drives digital transformation:** Unless the technology is proprietary to a company or organisation, it ultimately won't provide competitive advantage. The council does not operate within a competitive market environment, therefore standardising our technologies and most certainly the approach will provide capabilities we can rely upon. In parallel an ambitious organisation will also identify areas for opportunity where new and/or emerging technological solutions would be considered and implemented.
- The trap for WCC to avoid is focusing on technology as an end in itself. Instead, technology should be a means to enable strategic outcomes.*
- The digital agenda is led from the top:** Digital maturing organizations are highly confident in their leaders' digital fluency and the direction set by the organisation. Digital fluency, however, doesn't demand mastery of the technologies. Instead, it requires the ability to articulate the value of digital technologies to the organization's future.
- WCC can articulate our vision by identifying further key performance criteria and ambition in metrics that the services and people of WCC can focus on.*

- **Extract from MIT Sloan survey comparing views across organisations and sectors including the public sector.**

*While a lack of strategy hinders early and developing organisations, security issues become a greater concern for maturing digital companies.*

Respondents to MIT survey on how they rated their organisations digital maturity level & the barriers					
Early – 26%		Developing – 45%		Maturing – 29%	
Top Barrier by Maturity stage	1	Lack of strategy	Too many priorities	Too many priorities	Too many priorities
	2	Too many priorities	Lack of strategy	Security concerns	Security concerns
	3	Lack of management understanding	Insufficient tech skills	Insufficient tech skills	Insufficient tech skills

Table source: MIT Sloan Management review, 4800 respondents Autumn 2016

- **Maturing digital organisations build skills to realise the strategy:** Digitally maturing organisations are 4 times more likely to provide employees with needed skills than organisations at lower ends of the spectrum. The ability to conceptualise how digital technologies can impact the business is a skill lacking in many organisations at the early stages of digital maturity. Organisations that change mindsets and processes or build cultures that foster change are the most successful.
- *We will need to develop our own champions, engage the services and work within a collaborative framework to drive the best value and culture for change. We will also require external support during the short-term.*
- **Taking risks becomes a cultural norm:** Digitally maturing organizations are more comfortable taking risks than their less digitally mature peers. To make their organizations less risk averse, business leaders have to embrace failure as a prerequisite for success. They must also address the likelihood that employees may be just as risk averse as their managers and will need support to become bolder.
- *Changing how we operate will invoke mistakes, our ambition will also need provocation and support; acquiring the correct skill sets and applying appropriate controls and governance can reduce the exposure.*
- **Digital does not mean building it all:** Not all requirements for digital capability need to sit within the council, instead we can use our capabilities and our supply network to provide citizens, businesses and people with capabilities.
- *Using our digital skills and base infrastructure, we can work with our supply chain to ensure innovation and support to deliver our digital ambition. Provoking new operating and commercial models.*
- **Data – unlocking performance and action:** The digital shift has provided an un-paralleled use of data to drive transactions across social, mobile, transactional and line of business systems. However; in less digitally mature

organisations this data is often un-structured, siloed or not used to drive performance, intervention and action.

- *The evolution of our data strategy and the use of analytics will provide 'connectivity' across a portfolio of services that can provide useful insight and risk profiling to both performance and intervention services.*
- **Adoption of the new world:** Without encouraging take-up of the services and motivating users to move on from their historical behaviours, (e.g. manually driven call centres, application forms, letters, emails etc.) the technology and processes we invest in will not produce the desired outcome.
- To increase digital usage from those that can, policies, routes of access and decommissioning of legacy practices and systems will need to be enforced. Without adoption, nothing will change.

## 8.2 Perceived barriers to success

The obstacles that were foreseen do not seem insurmountable, as with any change programme the concerns were around: apathy, resistance to change, ability to deliver the supporting mechanisms to facilitate the change and so forth. All of which can be overcome with strong organisational leadership to enable the successful delivery of the leader's priorities along with a structured programme of work, the right level of skills and experience and critically collaboration and transparency across the Digital portfolio.

## 9 Next steps

Transitioning to the next step on the council's digital progression starts with classifying and mapping key journeys. Best practice and the consensus across industry and thought leaders is to target circa 15-20 of the top customer journeys. By focusing on the customer experience, it is expected that we will discover more opportunities to simplify, automate, rationalise or eliminate processes.

9.1. Following best practice, and to support the achievement of WCC's ambition, the following stages are being proposed:

- A feasibility study to run until the end of Q3, the output of which will be an outline business case, incorporating analysis completed through a blended team whilst ensuring that a cross-section of WCC's stakeholders are involved throughout the process. The blended team will support the upskilling and development of our people to ensure the future resilience of the organisation.
- Consultation and mobilisation at end of Q4, the output of which will be the evolving of the proposals identified during Q3, with an associated timeline.

- Implementation to run in 2018 and 2019

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact Robin Campbell x5386 [rcampbell@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:rcampbell@westminster.gov.uk) and Maria Benbow x 4473**