

# Customer Experience and Digital Strategy – Summary of Engagement

## Introduction

Westminster City Council have embarked on a programme of improvements around Customer Experience and Digital. The need for a strategy was identified early on, in order to have a clear document which sets out the council's ambitions. The strategy will be an overarching document for the programme, and a core council document, with the associated work an enabler for delivering not only the Customer Experience and Digital (CED) programme but also the City for All priorities.

To develop the Customer Experience and Digital strategy it was important we understood the needs of our customers – our residents, partners, businesses and staff. This report is a summary of the findings from both a desktop review of existing surveys and information, as well as additional engagement which took place.

The findings from the engagement have fed into the creation of the strategy, as well as the developing Customer Experience and Digital programme.

## Summary of findings

- Most of our customers are happy to engage with us digitally, but need to have a good experience which meets their needs and helps them achieve the outcome they need
- We have to better understand our customers' needs and the outcomes they're looking to achieve in order to design digital services which are so good they choose to use them
- One size does not fit all, we need to retain non-digital options for those customers who will not access our services digitally
- There is a need to support residents to build their digital skills and confidence, and to support our staff with their development around the use of technology too
- We need to find additional ways to engage with residents, to ensure they are involved in discussions around how services are designed and how the council works for them

## Sources

A range of existing sources were used, such as the 2019 Our Voice staff survey; the 2018 City Survey (2019 City Survey results will be analysed to identify any changes); Media Consumption survey; output from engagement in Adult Social Care with the Local Account Group; and outputs from the Housing Listening Exercise which took place earlier this year.

We also carried out direct engagement with residents at the October Open Forum; the 'Make It Happen' Parents Participation Group; the Youth Council; at a focus group for non-native English speakers and in Libraries – both at specific digital events and with general library users. We spoke to partners such as the Westminster Community Network meeting in October; Central London Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. For businesses, we attended the Victoria BID business breakfast and the Pop-Up business school event.

We also spoke to staff from across the business, to make sure their voice was also heard.

A full list of the sources used and groups we engaged with is included in Appendix 1.

## Findings

We have set out the findings in line with the customer groups listed in the strategy.

### Residents

Westminster's residents tend to be internet users, familiar with accessing services and information online and happy to transact with us in this way. There are a couple of sources used to ascertain information about internet use - our Media Consumption survey reported that 88% of residents surveyed used the internet, this was reported as higher at 93% in the Campaigns Tracker.

There is a desire and willingness to use digital channels to engage with the council, however residents were very clear that the experience needs to be good, with simple information and easy to follow processes to help them achieve their desired outcome. Where this is not the case, people give up and call our Contact Centres – which is not the experience they want and doesn't meet our ambitions for residents to be able to self-serve.

We heard from residents (and in what our staff and partners told us about the residents they work with) that most have some form of digital device – laptop, tablet, Smartphone etc. However, there were a number of comments about people not always have the skills or confidence to use them to their fullest extent. There is a lot of positive work going on in our Libraries, sometimes in partnership with organisations such as Age UK, to support people to build their digital skills and confidence, and residents are also accessing support in places like the Cardinal Hume Centre where they receive digital support for seeking employment, or for the EU settlement scheme. There is a need for digital skills support in the community, and a role for our services and staff, as well as partners in maintaining this access for people.

We also heard in some cases about people not having WiFi at home so needing to rely on data or free WiFi. One staff member told us they used WhatsApp to communicate with the families they work with, the families may not have mobile credit but do have access to WiFi to pick up messages about appointments etc. Work is underway to increase full-fibre broadband connectivity to our social housing estates, and ensure connectivity is in place to our new affordable housing stock which will enable an increase in access to digital services at home.

Fewer older people use the internet than residents of all groups, however the figures from the Media Consumption survey show that 56% of people aged over 60 are using the internet, and the Campaigns Tracker showed that 71% of those aged over 60 were internet users. While accessing the internet isn't something all older people choose to/can do, work carried out with the Local Account Group by Adult Social Care identified that older people are interested in finding information about services, local events and groups online, and also using online tools such as video calling to stay connected with family and improve outcomes related to social isolation.

Many residents were happy with the service they received from the council *"I think Westminster are the most amazing council!"* (resident, Central London CCG AGM), and many were very happy with the service they received on the phone – particularly those for whom this is the channel of their choice *"I didn't use the internet because I found the people on the phone so helpful and so constructive and pleasant that is why I ring"* (Agilysis Contact Centre customer).

For others, there were frustrations with accessing our services. Some customers told us they struggled to find the right information online as our website was not user friendly, others that they didn't feel they knew what they needed to do *“what is difficult about contacting the council is asking for help and understanding the process you should follow properly...I am asking for information about the full process to organise my situation but nobody seems to know”* (resident, non-native English speakers focus group).

Accessibility and language were key areas raised in a number of forums. In the recent discovery work to inform the relaunch of the council's website the team who carried out this were told by one user *“I am disabled and dyslexic, I find the website very difficult to access. I find it easier to talk to people on the phone”* (resident, speaking to Nudge Digital). Language also came up in our focus group for non-native English speakers and with the 'Make It Happen' group of parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), with it being raised as a challenge when engaging with the council both online and on the phone. Many people turned to family or community members for support and would like us to *“simplify the language”* (resident, non-native English speakers focus group).

The young people we engaged with at the Youth Council were really positive about the use of technology and we had a lot of discussion around how they expected it to be used in the future – things like electric vehicles, renewable energy, robots for groceries delivery, artificial intelligence etc. Whilst they were very tech-savvy they recognised that not everyone had access to technology and felt that those young people who didn't were disadvantaged. They also had some interesting views on data and were very aware of the risks around data not being shared or used properly.

When it comes to engaging with the council, many of the people we spoke to were really pleased to have been asked to contribute to this work and said how good they find it when council staff come out to speak to them for their views. There was a lot of positivity at the Open Forum for the event, with people saying it was a great way to find out about what's going on at the council, however also recognition that not everyone is able to attend a face to face evening group and so there is interest (supported by the community engagement team) in looking at alternative methods to engage with residents. Groups such as the 'Make It Happen' group talked about face to face surgeries they'd started to arrange with SEN services and are looking to expand to other areas of the council – these had been beneficial for both staff and parents in terms of answering queries and resolving issues early. The Youth Council told us they felt there needed to be other ways of getting young people's views and thought the council should do more to engage with them through social media channels.

## **Businesses**

Similarly to residents, businesses are keen to engage with the council online and make sure they have the connectivity and skills to do this, achieve the outcome they're looking for and run their business effectively. Businesses carry out a significant volume of transactions with the council and are a big customer group. They need clear access to information, the work by Nudge Digital on the website relaunch identified that there was a demand from businesses for support, but recommended we needed to understand more about what the need was and the outcome they're looking for before we started designing services around it. They stated that at the moment there is a disconnect between where we present information for businesses, and the applications and transactions they may want to complete. This was also raised through surveys the CED team undertook at the Pop-Up Business School event and Victoria BID business breakfast, with one business commenting

*“[on the] website [it’s] hard to find information for businesses, it’s set up for residents”  
(Business, CED survey).*

Some businesses raised in a survey ran by Economic Development, and the CED survey, that they sometimes had difficulty attracting staff with the right skills, and that digital skills were part of this challenge in a world where technology is evolving so quickly. Local business training events like the Pop-Up business school event are a good place for people to build their skills, and the digital and social media elements of this training were highlighted as being particularly useful by participants. Digital skills training is also provided by the employment coaches, who work to support local people to access jobs in Westminster.

Our services are working to improve the way they offer support to businesses and our engagement with teams such as Public Protection and Licensing show there is a desire to digitise processes and make transacting with the council simpler. They’re keen to improve the experience businesses have when contacting the council by making every touchpoint a positive one, ensuring businesses know about support, events and information that is available.

Digital connectivity is key for businesses, and there’s been a positive take-up of Gigabit business broadband vouchers which has been promoted by the council’s Economic Development team. This provides opportunity for businesses to connect to superfast full-fibre broadband and ensure they have internet connectivity which meets their needs and is future-proofed.

In terms of engaging with the council about any changes, email was the most popular channel for businesses, and they made the same comment residents had about finding it helpful when other council services attended events they were at.

## Partners

The Westminster Community Network is for voluntary and community sector organisations who work with a range of different residents. There were 22 voluntary and community sector organisations present at the meeting we attended in October. Two of the key messages from this group were *“one size does not fit all”* and *“do not lose human interaction”*. They shared that the people they support use many channels to access the council, and that this mix needs to be retained in order to enable people to achieve their outcome of accessing information and services. A similar theme to other engagement events around the need for clear information, accessibility of information and suitable language was also raised.

As customers of the council themselves, partners shared that it can be *“unclear who’s who”* and they often do not know who to contact. One of the attendees did comment that the *“provider experience is very good in contacting adult social care and IT support”* which is encouraging.

The important areas raised were around digital skills and inclusion, retaining face to face in some cases and in relation to the phone-based services *“first phone contact needs to be trained to listen and be more of an ‘open minded gate keeper’ – can feel passed from pillar to post”*.

The CCG are also doing a lot of work around digital, and how their customers’ experience can be improved. Central London CCG released an online self-service appointment booking service and this has had a strong take-up – saving 17,400 hours per year. The take-up has been good across all patient age groups, not showing any significant difference in usage in the older population. They are also innovating around the use of apps and interested in the

use of voice assistants and so there are opportunities to join up to use technology to improve the customer experience.

The Chelsea and Westminster Hospital are interested in looking at how we can better work together to improve people's outcomes and experience when they are discharged from hospital into the community, considering how appropriate data sharing and use of technology can help. There's also interest, shared by staff in discussions with adult social care, about having clear accessible information online about available local services and support groups.

The Cardinal Hume Centre are a voluntary organisation based in Westminster focused on helping families and young people overcome homelessness and poverty. Part of their offer is digital skills training, with a focus on support into employment and being able to do things like access housing support services and apply for/manage their universal credit. They commented that access to digital facilities in the borough is a challenge, and this is one of the biggest issues for the people they support – a significant number of whom don't own a Smartphone or have access to WiFi.

## Staff

Our staff are key in the delivery of the Customer Experience and Digital Strategy and have been explicitly highlighted as a customer themselves because it is important that the strategy and accompanying programme of work delivers what they need, as well as for our residents, businesses and partners.

Across all the staff groups we engaged with, the need to make the most of the Microsoft suite of technology and other systems we use was flagged as a major opportunity. The council has invested in getting the right IT for staff and our teams want to be supported to make the most of it, build their skills and confidence and use it to improve the outcomes and experience they offer to customers – eg Teams video meetings so they can spend more time out and about with customers; direct inputting into systems rather than paper based notes etc. This fits with IT's aims around technology adoption, and desire to support staff to use the systems we have in place.

There is also an opportunity from having more digitally confident staff, which could result in more digitally interested or confident customers. By having staff who understand technology and the different ways it can be used, this can be shared with the customers they support and digital begins to be part of the conversation, with the benefits it can bring for residents.

Our library service has a key role to play in digital inclusion for the community, with an offer of access to IT facilities and skills training. The digital sessions we went along to were well attended, and there were also always people using the library computers for a range of things. In discussions with library staff as part of the CED work and also follow up from the Libraries Independent Review staff raised that there is a need for updated IT technology, which needs to be future proofed, and accompanied by an increase in computer literacy among staff. The teams working in libraries are almost expected by customers to be able to provide support with any device that is brought in, and so there is support needed here to build skills and confidence.

Service areas like Public Health and Parking are keen to better understand the needs of their customers and learn how to do this well so they can improve commissioned services. They recognise the need to use data in different ways to do this, and also resources such as

the Community Champions which Public Health work with who are connected into communities across the borough.

Teams across the council are keen to look at how services can be streamlined, and data can be better used to support the experience they offer their customers, understand the outcomes they're looking to achieve and help us understand where we should be targeting our resources.

Our staff have innovative ideas about how we can use technology to improve the customer experience (e.g. technology to support independent living; using artificial intelligence to identify road defects etc) and as an organisation we need to be ready to explore these and see how they can meet the needs of our customers.

## **Conclusion**

There is a lot of scope to continue to improve the experience our customers have when they interact with us, help them achieve the outcome they're looking for and for us to make the best use of technology in order to do this. The Customer Experience and Digital Strategy will set out the vision, ambitions and principles which we need to work to in order to better meet the needs of our residents. Delivering the supporting programme of projects will enable us to lead the way in how we engage with our communities, deliver the services they need and be the best digital local authority globally.

## Appendix 1

### Sources used

|  |   |
|--|---|
| City Survey 2018                                   | First Source review of Housing Contact Centre     |
| Media Consumption and Trust Survey 2019            | Housing Listening programme                       |
| Housing Service (previously CWH) Quarterly Tracker | Libraries Independent Review                      |
| Campaigns Tracker 2019 Survey                      | Review of homelessness 2019                       |
| WCC Our Voice Staff Survey (2019)                  | Homeless Strategy (draft for consultation)        |
| ComRes WCC Business Survey 2019                    | Economic Development Strategic Framework          |
| Complaints Customer Satisfaction Report            | Call and email feedback – Agilysis Contact Centre |
| Members enquiries                                  | Website analytics                                 |
| Social media analytics                             | Adult social care persona's                       |
| Shelter Channel Shift research 2015                | Housing Customer Journey mapping exercises        |
| Family Information Service (FIS) website feedback  | Library staff engagement                          |

### External engagement

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|--|--|
| Westminster Community Network (22 VCS organisations)   | Focus Group for non-native English speakers              |
| Make It Happen group for parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities | Church Street and St John's Wood Library users           |
| Marylebone Library Digital Skills session in conjunction with Age UK                         | Home Help Library Service Digital skills event attendees |
| Bessborough Family Centre parenting session  | Bessborough Family Centre children's play session        |
| Central London Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Annual General Meeting – stall             | Central London CCG Communications Officer                |
| Chelsea and Westminster Hospital Director of Nursing   | Open Forum - stall                                       |
| Nudge Digital – engagement with residents and businesses for website relaunch                | Active Westminster                                       |
| Youth Council  | Cardinal Hume Centre                                     |
| Microsoft  | Victoria BID Business breakfast                          |
| Pop-up Business School   |  |

### Internal engagement

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| Library staff @ St John's Wood, Church St and Marylebone Library | Libraries digital team                 |
| CMC management team  | Kerbside management team               |
| Parking contact centre   | Housing contact centre                 |
| Executive Leadership Team members                                | Public Protection and Licensing        |
| Waste and Parks  | Home Improvement Agency                |
| Community Services   | Registrars                             |
| Adult social care commissioning                                  | Adult social care performance and data |

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| Adult social care digital team        | Telecare and community equipment services                                 |
| Children's services IT workshop       | CED Programme Board   |
| Home Library Service staff            | Early Help service  |
| Economic Development team             | Employment and Skills team  |
| Community Engagement team             | Housing Service   |
| Public Health                         | Adult social care engagement team & Adult social care Community Navigator |
| Regeneration team                     | Housing Solutions Service Family Centre                                   |
| Physical Activity and Leisure Service | Highways  |
| Senior members of Adult Social Care   | Members   |