Transforming local public services

using technology and digital tools and approaches

Contents

Foreword

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The decade since the formal closure of the Local Government Online programme has seen enormous developments in the range of technologies and digital tools and approaches available to both citizens and organisations.

Smart phones and tablet computers are now everywhere; town centres and public buildings routinely offer wireless access; data and systems are increasingly stored in the 'cloud'. These advances have enabled citizens, businesses and public bodies to change the ways in which they interact, gain access to information and services, and organise their work.

Councils have been quick to recognise the opportunities offered by technology and digital tools and approaches to target and deliver services better and save money. They have explored different methods of improving local people's access to services including tele-care, online applications for school places, cashless parking payments and 'apps' to inform or alert service users.

At the same time, they have made their workforces more productive by introducing mobile technologies, route planning tools and video-conferencing. At a national level, councils have worked closely with central government to invest jointly in essential infrastructure such as reliable and fast broadband connections and the Public Services Network.

In 2014, the need to take advantage of such digital innovations has never been greater. Over the current spending review period, local government has suffered 40 per cent cuts to its budgets. At the same time, demand on local services has been increasing inexorably as a result of the recession, an ageing population and increasing numbers of 0-5 year-olds. Councils must also cope with welfare reform, new public health responsibilities and the planned integration of health and social care under the Care Bill.

I'm delighted therefore to introduce this new report, commissioned by the LGA, which has captured details of projects already delivered where councils have used technology and digital tools and

approaches to improve and develop services in major ways and to generate efficiencies.

Our aim is to produce an overview of 'good practice' which shows the approaches different councils have taken, the lessons they have learnt and the benefits – including savings – that have been generated, both for service users and the councils themselves. The report is accompanied by 'vox pop' videos and more detailed case studies that other organisations can use.

We will be using the report and its supporting material to promote greater awareness of the good work already being done in local government and the savings being generated by the sector. The report will be launched at the LGA Conference in July and a range of the exemplar projects will showcase their work in the conference's Innovation Zone, as well as at other sector events. We look forward to seeing you there.

Councillor Peter Fleming
Chair, Local Government Association Improvement and Innovation Board

Summary

From typewriters to smart phones, technology has always played a vital role in the way local government manages its business. As councils face the twin challenges of decreasing funding and increasing demand, they have found new ways of utilising technology to deliver services more effectively and enable their staff work in new ways, increasing productivity and reducing costs.

By 2015, central government funding for councils will have been cut by 40 per cent over the period of this Parliament. The Institute for Fiscal Studies anticipates that the spending cuts will continue until 2020. This comes at a time when the impact of the economic downturn, demographic change, major government initiatives including Universal Credit and Troubled Families, new public health responsibilities, and fundamental changes to the local government finance system are compounding the pressures on councils.

Councils deliver an estimated 80 per cent of local public services, and are located in and form part of the communities they serve. They are rising to the challenges they face and transforming the way they deliver services by redesigning, reorganising and reforming. An important part of this process is bringing their deep understanding of local needs together with technological innovations to offer better management of demand, more reliable and efficient handling of routine transactions, and greater use of shared data.

This report seeks to highlight examples where councils have used technology and digital tools and approaches in ways that clearly demonstrate an impact both in terms of improved outcomes for citizens and financial savings. There are nearly 50 such examples in this report, where 'digital' or technological innovation has been successfully combined with the intelligent use of customer insight and other complementary approaches such as demand management, lean and systems thinking and collaborative procurement. A selection of more detailed case studies is available on the LGA website.

In the back office, councils are effectively utilising procurement frameworks to secure the technology and digital resources they require in new ways. This includes cloud-based services, from email and applications ('apps') to the government's G-Cloud procurement service – among many others, the London Borough of Hillingdon saved £750,000 a year through moving to Google Apps. The potential of 'open source' systems is also being exploited – Shropshire Council's Project WIP open source website service saved £204,000 over an initial five-year period.

In the face of budget cuts, increased tax burdens for landfill, and challenging targets to improve recycling, councils are exploiting GPS mapping technology to improve the quality and cost of waste collection, achieve better procurement, and develop more efficient service partnerships. Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council saved £300,000 annually and improved services, the District of East Northamptonshire Council saved £200,000 annually, and Middlesbrough Borough Council saved £150,000 a year, all using similar technologies.

The development of transactional services online and on mobile devices is flourishing. Hammersmith and Fulham's online self-service portal has saved £1.15 million annually, with 70 per cent of households registered. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has achieved a 100 per

cent digital shift for benefit claims, reducing processing time by 30 days and saving £617,000 annually, while the London Borough of Harrow has saved £1.55 million over four years through a wide range of online services. Spelthorne Borough Council used the Engage mobile app to meet customer expectations for online access, encourage channel shift and improve service delivery. The app was developed and implemented in less than five months and saved the council approximately £43,800 last year.

Councils have demonstrated their creativity and ability in adapting this technology to manage demand. East Riding of Yorkshire Council takes payments through self-service thanks to their mobile-accessible website and self-service kiosks. This has generated savings of £91,500 over a three-year period.

Bristol City Council used mobile technology in a different way. By providing its neighbourhood-based staff with tablet devices with appropriate software and apps, the council enabled them to report issues while out in the community. As a result it has reduced the hours staff spend in the office and increased reporting of local issues, as well as supporting digital take-up in the community.

Technology has also improved access to services. The London Borough of Lewisham's web and mobile application LoveLewisham enables residents to report environmental issues, leading to a 73 per cent reduction in graffiti, and a 33 per cent drop in call-centre activity, saving £500,000 over the past five years. Telford and Wrekin Council, in rural Shropshire, set up the Everyday app in less than four months. The app, which is able to work offline when a mobile signal is not available, has saved £5,000 in contact costs.

The most vulnerable can be supported to gain access to appropriate services. The Universal Credit local authority pilots introduced a whole range of approaches, supported by technology, to work with those claiming benefits. Birmingham City Council reduced rent arrears by £134,000 year-on-year through a new triage process and personalised 'digital log books'. Rushcliffe Borough Council, North Dorset District Council and Melton Borough Council focused on digital inclusion through organising training in literacy and ICT skills.

Making joined-up services accessible in one place has been highly successful in the London Borough of Croydon, where the 'family-focused' website, Family Space, enables easier access to information on local children's services. Similarly, the national Tell Us Once project, which enables people to report a birth or death just once and has been implemented in over 90 per cent of councils, is delivering total benefits of £22 million annually.

Councils have also saved significant amounts through the use of telecare and assistive technologies, which help to manage the significantly increased demand on health and care services by supporting the growing elderly and physically disabled population to live independently. Councils that have implemented telecare successfully across the country include Blackburn with Darwen, which has saved £10 million in the last four years, and the London Borough of Hillingdon, which has saved £4.597 million to date by integrating telecare and reablement.

Technology can also help to bring people together. The Casserole Club in Barnet uses a sophisticated website to match volunteer cooks with people who would benefit from a home-cooked meal. The project is saving money on home delivery and strengthening neighbourhoods. Cheshire East Council, working with Age UK, has developed an online social media and information site for people living with dementia, helping users to continue living independently and enjoy an improved quality of life. Central Bedfordshire Council with Cambridgeshire County Council ran a pilot offering elderly residents the Mindings app on tablet devices in free trials. The app allows people to keep in touch with family members living alone, and the trial showed significant improvements in quality of life.

Joining up around the client is also supported by technology. In Suffolk County Council, customer insight tools were used to better understand the needs of troubled families, saving more than £450,000 over four years in cost avoidance. Staffordshire County Council has co-developed Patchwork, an online tool which allows front-line staff to quickly log in and see which other agencies are supporting their clients. There are 64 agencies, supporting almost 2,350 clients, signed up to Patchwork.

And technology can support cross-organisation and collaborative working. Lewes District Council is using 'pam' collaboration software to enable staff across all partner agencies to work in a more joined-up way. Suffolk Coastal Port Health Authority developed a dedicated ICT system to better manage the process of checking imported produce at Felixstowe. This has now generated savings of £200,000 a year since it went live in 2009 and has been licensed to other Port Health Authorities.

Technology can also be used for continual improvement, as in Leeds City Council, where live web chat provides support to website users. As well as web chat being cheaper than a phone call, the council learns from the problems identified, and to date over 400 changes to the website have been made as a result in just eight months.

Councils are continuing to lead in using technology and digital tools and approaches to improve citizen service and overcome the challenges they face. As local government's roles and responsibilities continue to develop, with increased emphasis on community facilitation and support, commissioning and market making, communications, branding and quality assurance, such tools are likely to become ever more important.

The LGA will continue to work with partner bodies both in local and central government, and in the wider public sector, to promote the good practice already evident in what councils are doing, and to address barriers to progress. Work is already underway to set out a vision of future local government service delivery, taking full advantage of the potential of technology and digital tools and approaches to improve services and save money.

Chapter 1 – introduction

1.1 Local government's vital and unique role

Located in and forming part of their communities, councils are ideally placed to find the best approaches to meeting local needs. Responsible for delivering an estimated 80 per cent of public sector transactions in their areas, they also have a particular obligation to design their services in the most accessible, economic and 'user-friendly' way, and a vital role to work closely with other public, private and voluntary sector partners to ensure that local services are built around the citizen rather than the needs of service deliverers.

At a time when public services face fundamental challenges, technology and digital tools and approaches are central to achieving all of this. For councils and their partners, these tools can enable:

- a deeper understanding of local patterns of need and interaction with government, allowing resources to be managed, planned and directed to where they will have the greatest impact

- more effective management of demand – for example, enabling user self-service and supporting peer-to-peer advice-giving and assistance via social media

- more reliable, speedy, and precise handling of routine, repetitive tasks – allowing costly and scarce professional expertise to be targeted at cases which need judgement or at new and unexpected situations

- faster access to, and sharing of, data between councils, customers, and partner organisations, avoiding the need to collect the same information many times over and saving time on research and information collation

- new ways of working that potentially reconcile the goals of providing a better quality of customer experience while cutting costs.

As digital technologies become ever more pervasive and increasingly form part of people's daily lives, it is essential that councils continue to exploit their potential. At the same time, 'digital' – often a catch-all for any use of digital, technological, and online services – is not a panacea for all ills, and should complement other approaches such as demand management, lean and systems thinking, and collaborative procurement.[1] The needs of local citizens who are unable or unwilling to use this technology must also be addressed.

In practice, local government has a long history of applying technology in innovative ways and of leading public service change. This report therefore aims to provide up-to-date evidence of the impact and benefits that technology and digital tools and approaches are delivering in local government – including the difference they are making to the lives of citizens and the financial savings generated by councils.

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1   See, for example, NESTA's report on innovation in general in local government – Small is beautiful, innovation from the frontline of local government, July 2010

In particular, by highlighting a range of practical examples, we hope to share the good practice already present in the sector and to encourage its adoption by a wider range of councils.

1.2 A challenging context

The context for the report is a difficult one, particularly given the pressures on local government finances. Funding was reduced by 33 per cent in real terms over the course of the 2010 Spending Review, followed by confirmation of a further 10 per cent cut for 2015/16. By next year, central government funding for councils will have been cut by 40 per cent over the period of this Parliament. In June 2013, the Institute for Fiscal Studies anticipated that government spending cuts would continue until 2020.[2]
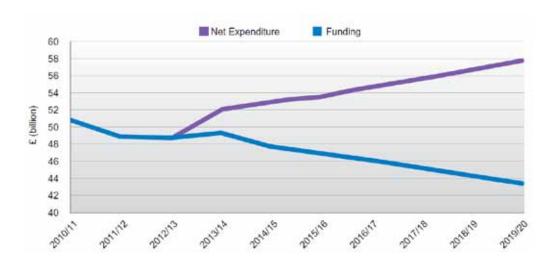
The economic downturn has had a direct impact on local residents and users of council services. Redundancy, a reduction in working hours, and increasing levels of housing rent arrears and other debts all add to the pressures on services as citizens turn to their council for help and advice. Migration too has placed new demands on many councils, as they seek to accommodate new residents.

Meanwhile, the implications of demographic change are becoming evident. The population is growing, and more of us live longer, resulting in a greater strain upon public services to provide care and support in later life, making closer integration of health and social care an imperative. Increases in birth levels and the number of under-fives are creating an additional set of needs and demands.

At the same time, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has made fundamental changes to the local government finance system, with reforms to business rates and council tax benefits.[3] Universal Credit and Welfare Reform are being introduced, and councils are playing a central role in national programmes such as Troubled Families and the work of the Public Service Transformation Network, while new public health responsibilities place further demands on councils' resources.

The Local Government Association (LGA)'s Future funding outlook report illustrates the overall picture in stark terms:

Income against expenditure 2010/11 to 2019/20

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2   Local Government Association, Future funding outlook for councils from 2010/11 to 2019/20, July 2013

3   Comptroller & Auditor General's Report, Financial sustainability of local authorities, Session 2012-13, HC 888

Consequently, 'business as usual' is surely no longer an option. As the LGA's report notes: ". . . a sustainable future for local government in the face of funding cuts and spending pressures is dependent upon changes in the way we think about funding local government, and how we manage the system". This sentiment is reflected in the fundamental re-appraisal of their role that many councils are undertaking.

Fortunately, there is rich evidence councils are rising to the challenge and using a wide range of approaches both to save money and improve service quality.

For example the LGA's national shared services compendium and map highlights 387 examples of successful shared service arrangements resulting in £357 million of efficiency savings across at least 90 per cent of English councils.[4] Similarly, the Capital and Assets Pathfinder programme has estimated projected savings of £4 billion across a total council asset base of over £20 billion and has supported strong outcomes from economic growth to service redesign.[5]

In 2013, the LGA's publication Rewiring Public Services: Rejuvenating Democracy[6] set out proposals for even more far-reaching changes in governance, funding structures, and service delivery, while the original four pioneering Whole Place Community Budget pilots have already shown that integrated services can both better meet local people's needs and yield considerable efficiencies.[7]

In this respect, the rapidly changing technological and digital landscape, while doubtless a challenge, also offers many opportunities to implement innovative customer-focused approaches that deliver both improvement and efficiency. This report seeks to offer practical examples of how this might be done.

1.3 The structure of the report

Chapter 2 provides a brief history of local government's involvement with technology and digital initiatives, concluding with some remarks on the current digital landscape. It will become clear that councils have much to be proud of and, in many cases, have provided the basis for national government initiatives.

Chapter 3 then examines the major challenges set out above – financial and demand pressures, demographic and policy changes – in the context of the fast-changing technology landscape to highlight the practical ways in which leading councils are exploiting the potential of technological and digital tools and approaches in order to deliver more effective, joined-up and efficient services.

A final chapter then draws out some overall themes from current initiatives and offers some pointers as to how technology might be used in the future. An appendix gives a brief bibliography of relevant publications, including the LGA's own work on customer-led transformation.

Threaded through the report are examples and brief case studies drawn from current local government practice and based on a series of interviews and visits carried out in April and May 2014. Fuller versions of the case studies and a range of short video interviews from the participating councils are available as a supplement to the main report on the LGA website.

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4   http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/3511353/ARTICLE

5   http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510701/ARTICLE

6   Local Government Association, Rewiring Public Services: Rejuvenating Democracy, June 2013

7   West Cheshire, Essex, Greater Manchester, and in London the Tri-borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster

Chapter 2 - Technology, digital programmes and initiatives in local government

2.0 Local government

The use of technology and digital tools in the public sector is far from new. Local government in particular has shown a consistent desire to exploit information and communications technology (ICT) in its day-to-day operations.

We outline here four broad eras of technology and e-government spanning recent decades, and highlight key milestones in the journey councils have taken to harness new technology and use it to achieve both efficiency savings and better outcomes for service users.

2.1 The 1970s to 1990s

It was in this era that councils for the first time made extensive and routine use of technology. However, its application was largely internal, focused on running individual back-office systems such as finance and housing repairs. Use of ICT for external customer service provision was relatively limited until towards the end of the period since the general population did not have access to the kinds of sophisticated technology we increasingly take for granted today.

Even so, this period demonstrates local government's early interest in understanding and exploiting the potential of information technology. The Foundation for Information Technology in Local Government (FITLOG) was established as an independent research organisation with a brief to engage councillors and senior managers on the use of ICT for service improvement in local government. Meanwhile, in 1986, the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) was formed, with a membership primarily drawn from council IT managers. The first of its influential reports on IT Trends appeared in the following year.

Both organisations played an important role in identifying and sharing best practice across the sector and in fostering the innovative use of technology, a role that Socitm and representative bodies such as the LGA continue to fulfil today.

2.2 The late 1990s onwards

The late 1990s saw a step change in the growth of the internet, the rise of personal computing in the home and major advances in areas such as telephony and call centre technology. Again, local government took an early interest in the potential of these developments to improve customer service and, in particular, how contact was managed. In 1998, FITLOG published its influential Calling Local Government report, about council call handling, while Socitm's Better Connected series of reports on local government websites also began during this period.

By 2004, **Newport City Council** had won the prestigious Customer Service Contact Centre of the Year prize for centres under 100 seats, beating off competition from a variety of major private sector organisations.

It was against this background that the Cabinet Office's Office of the e-Envoy was established in 1999 by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair.[8] Its goal was "to improve the delivery of public services and achieve long term cost savings by joining up online government services around the needs of customers",[9] and its stated ambition was to ensure that 100 per cent of government services – including those provided by councils – were available electronically by 2005, as set out in the UK Online Strategy.

Although the 100 per cent target can be judged as naïve in retrospect, and was later modified, this era heralded a significant change of focus by the public sector in response to wider developments in technology and the ways in which people were now using it in their everyday lives – for instance, carrying out online transactions via the internet, or making use of smart cards.

A positive outcome from this new direction was the delivery of the most comprehensive national technology programme to date in local government which enabled major investment in councils' ICT infrastructures. The Local Government Online programme (LGOL), which ran between 2000 and 2005 and was backed by a central government investment of £670 million, helped councils to exploit technology to make significant improvements to the experiences of both customers and staff and realise quantifiable savings.[10] This was a period of considerable innovation, in which many subsequent initiatives had their origins.

As part of the **LGOL programme**, individual councils were supported to take advantage of the latest advances in:

- customer contact centres, including the use of customer relationship management systems

- websites, in particular to provide transactional capabilities for citizens to self-serve

- other emerging technologies, such as smart cards, mobile devices and digital TV that offered new ways for councils and citizens to interact.

All of this activity was set within the context of developing integrated customer service and customer contact strategies at local level, and laid the foundations for the increasingly sophisticated analyses of customer segments, contact channels, services and customer insight approaches which have been used more recently.

In parallel, 22 national projects focused on a range of council 'priority services', including e-procurement, online schools admissions (see case study), planning and regulatory services online and e-benefits, as well as on major e-government building blocks such as information sharing, knowledge management, e-standards and workflow. Their aim was to ensure that all councils had access to key electronic services and strategic enablers, without having to build them from scratch.

The main LGOL programme concluded in December 2005, but ownership of the programme outputs was retained by local government and remains to date the most comprehensive collation

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8   Superseded by the E-Government Unit in 2004

9   http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100807034701/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-envoy/index-content.htm

10 http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/
    http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/efficiencybetter/localegovernment/products/

of local e-government case studies and reports. Many of the individual projects, such as online school admissions, continued to be developed and implemented after the formal end of the LGOL programme.

Hertfordshire County Council Connect Digitally – online free school meals and online schools admissions

The award-winning Connect Digitally programme was a central/local government partnership funded by the Department for Education and led by Hertfordshire County Council. Its focus was the national digital transformation of two educational services – applications for secondary school admissions and free school meals – delivering significant customer benefits as well as providing evidence of cashable savings for both local authorities and central government departments. The programme realised initial returns on investment within 18 months of its inception in April 2009. Realised and projected savings totalled £76 million overall, against a £5.6 million investment.

The programme's core approach was to transform transactional services by:

• moving towards digital as the default channel

• driving down service delivery costs

• realising benefits and cashable savings

• reducing bureaucracy, and

• improving service quality for parents and carers.

Connect Digitally had its origins in the e-Admissions project, one of 22 e-government projects that formed part of the Local Government Online (LGOL) programme. It sought to use customer insight and technology to transform the traditional paper-based application process associated with applying for a school place into a streamlined process that was quick, convenient and accessible for parents and carers and which delivered financial savings for councils.

Following the outstanding success of e-Admissions, the Department for Education requested a follow-on programme. The new programme's objectives were to continue to drive change for school admissions and increase online take-up, while also transforming the application process for free school meals. In addition, Connect Digitally led work on transforming online payments for educational services and cashless catering. Individual councils also achieved significant savings. As a specific example, Hertfordshire County Council made savings through online school admissions in the following areas (figures calculated by comparing 2008/09 financial year costs with reduced 2014/15 costs):

• secondary school brochures and leaflets – reduced printing costs of £15,400 per year

• primary school brochures and leaflets – saving £10,000 per year

• junior and middle school brochures and leaflets – saving £7,000 per year

• allocation letter – saving £25,250 per year

• manual entry of paper application – saving £20,000 per year

This represents a total saving in 2014/15 of £77,650. Smaller savings were made in previous years, so the cumulative saving since 2008/09 has been £169,050.

2.3 2005/2006 onwards

The LGOL programme laid the groundwork for a period of very active customer-focused innovation in the use of technology at local level. Councils recognised that:

- People often have complex, inter-related needs that should be addressed in the round by public service partners working in a joined-up way.

- Contact via the internet, by phone, or face-to-face are all options that customers may choose to use at different times and should be part of an integrated multi-channel contact strategy.

- There is a constant need to drive efficiencies through the sharing of information and resources, including technology.

E-government was only a first step – transformation was the real goal. This shift of emphasis from putting services online and investing in infrastructure to the transformation and design of services around the needs of citizens was mirrored at a national level by the publication in November 2005 of the new Cabinet Office e-Government Unit's report Transformational Government, Enabled by Technology.[11] The six-year strategy "set out how effective use of technology to deliver services designed around the needs of citizens and businesses can make a real difference to people's lives".

Sir David Varney's December 2006 report, Service Transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer, which examined how public services could be made "more responsive to the needs of citizens and businesses", further underlined the new perspective. Sir David deliberately sought out examples of good practice from the front line and his research team visited a number of the best local government customer service operations, recognising that much of the ground-breaking work in the use of technology was already evident in local government.

Following the **Varney Report**, the Cabinet Office established a number of cross-department groups to drive transformational change in public services. Local government mirrored these by establishing: the Local Government Delivery Council (LGDC), the Local Government Contact Council (LGCC), and the Local Government Customer Insight Forum (LGCIF). These bodies remain effective forums for championing both customer focus and the use of technology and digital tools and approaches across the sector.

The transformational potential of technology and digital tools and approaches was a constant theme during the remaining years of the Labour government. Programmes such as the Digital Challenge (DC10) championed the potential of ICT to meet the needs of local communities and individual citizens, including socially excluded groups, while the Smarter Government White Paper of December 2009 had as a key action the acceleration of "the move to digitalised public services that are personalised, flexible, cost-efficient and save people time" and led to initiatives such as 'Tell Us Once' in which local government played a leading role.

Sunderland City Council was a successful Digital Challenge authority. One of its schemes utilised the data network available on 3G mobile phones to link carers and the people they cared for to a 24-hour contact centre. The centre could track and monitor the cared-for person to allow the carer some time off. Another scheme put a desktop video conferencing system in the hands of local voluntary groups and refugees to talk to each other for free over the internet.

"We were particularly praised for the way we looked at what our communities needed. This isn't about a monolithic council telling people what they need. We didn't start with the technology," said Steve Williams, Head of ICT at Sunderland City Council.

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11 http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20060213215315/cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/strategy/index.asp

Meanwhile, the continuing work led by councils at a local level to use technology to join up services around the citizen and to drive cost savings was captured in a series of reports and case studies produced between 2007 and 2010 under the direction of the Local Government Delivery Council as part of the Front Office Shared Services (FOSS) programme.[12]

As the foreword to the final report stated, "the wide-ranging FOSS projects we have studied over the past four years . . . have demonstrated how a locally-led approach, based on understanding citizens, working effectively with them and other partners and thinking creatively about delivery mechanisms really can deliver practical benefits to local people". The outputs of the programme remain very relevant today.

Tell Us Once (TUO) is a cross-government initiative developed by a partnership of local government, DWP, HMRC, DVLA and Passport Services to provide a service where people can inform government just once of a birth or a death.

DWP leads the service which is delivered through face-to-face contact in councils, via telephone or online service and reduces the number of contacts an individual has to have with Government when reporting a change of circumstance (currently a birth or a death). The service is faster and cheaper than the traditional methods of telling government about such events. Other benefits include easier verification of birth/death registration details, and reductions in fraud, error and processing times leading to savings for councils, government and the citizen.

The service began to be rolled out in 2011 with councils opting to offer Tell Us Once based on locally approved business cases. It is not mandatory for councils to offer Tell Us Once, nor is it mandatory for citizens to use it. However, the current 90 per cent coverage in the UK and customer take-up of approximately 75 per cent is testament to the value of this service experienced by both councils and citizens alike. Tell Us Once was developed following the cross-government approval of an evidence-based business case which showed that around two thirds of all benefits would be realised in the local government sector. Latest estimates are that Tell Us Once is delivering total benefits of £22 million annually.

The service achieved a 98 per cent customer satisfaction rating in the Tell Us Once customer survey 2013, and councils are also benefiting from the efficiencies in back-office processing that the service enables.

Kirklees Council has offered Tell Us Once for two years and almost 90 per cent of all people registering births and deaths in Kirklees use the service. As a direct result of the use of the service, the following benefits have been achieved:

- 809 housing issues have been resolved
- 1,610 Blue Badges have been safely returned following the death of the older person
- 2,579 adjustments have been made to Housing Benefit
- 3,534 new parents have been contacted by Family Information Services
- 3,754 new library members have been enrolled
- 4,740 changes have been made to the Electoral Register.

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12 http://www.local.gov.uk/home/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510980/ARTICLE

2.4 2010 – an age of austerity

The unprecedented cuts to local government funding introduced by the Coalition Government after the 2010 general election in response to the pressures on public finances have accelerated the drive in councils towards using technology and digital tools and approaches in ever more innovative ways.

At a national level, the Government, like its predecessor, recognised the financial efficiencies to be gained by the shift to online and digital channels (with estimated potential savings of £1.7 to £1.8 billion each year).[13] Following the March 2012 Budget, which contained a commitment to making central government services 'digital by default', the Government published its Digital Strategy in December of the same year, setting out how it would "re-design its digital services to make them so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them prefer to do so".[14]

The term 'digital by default' has a clear transactional focus and is the goal for services with over 100,000 transactions per year. Although not mandated for local government, the approach builds in many ways on the work that councils have been doing for years – a combination of appropriate channel choice and good design that not only reduces cost by 'shifting' services on to cheaper channels, but also improves the customer experience by allowing swifter and more convenient self-service interactions at any time and from any place.

Councils are well aware that this approach needs to be implemented differentially and with care – there will always be more complex customer needs and service requests that can only be resolved using specialist expertise or customised approaches. For example, someone wanting to find out about adoption may carry out some initial research via the website and then register their interest online – but the interviewing process needs to be in-depth, face-to-face and with an expert. Poorly designed digital services can also drive up costs as a result of failure demand. Another consideration is the support that some citizens require to go online and carry out their business successfully. This has been recognised by the Digital by Default programme which rightly includes activity to support greater access to digital channels through 'assisted digital' provision and the fostering of greater digital inclusion.

With these caveats, public services, and councils in particular, continue to make the journey from developing infrastructure and building blocks, through providing digital access and subsequently using technology to transform specific services, to an emerging 'holistic' design approach that focuses not just on technology but also upon organisational culture, operations, and communications, as well as customer abilities, needs and outcomes.

2.5 The online landscape today

The period since 2010 has seen enormous changes both in technology and the way in which it is used. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures published in February 2014, for instance, suggested that 44.3 million adults in the UK (87 per cent of the total), including 99 per cent of all 16 to 24-year-olds, had used the internet in Q4 2013, an increase of 1.2 million over the same quarter in 2012.[15] From online banking to downloading music to ordering groceries on-the-go, digital tools are increasingly allowing people to conduct everyday tasks how, when and where they like.

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13 Full findings set out in https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-efficiency-report

14 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-strategy

15 http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_353031.pdf

> **Ofcom's Communications Market Report** of August 2013 painted the following picture:
>
> - "Huge growth in take-up of smart phones and tablets is creating a nation of media multi-taskers, transforming the traditional living room of our parents and grandparents into a digital media hub.
>
> - People are still coming together to watch TV in the living room – 91 per cent of UK adults view TV on the main set each week, up from 88 per cent in 2002. But, an increasing array of digital media is now vying for their attention. People are streaming videos, firing off instant messages and updating their social media status – all while watching more TV than before.
>
> - These activities are mostly carried out using smart phones, with over half of adults (51 per cent) now owning these devices, almost double the proportion two years ago (27 per cent).
>
> - At the same time, tablet ownership has more than doubled in the past year, rising from 11 per cent of homes to 24 per cent. The average household now owns more than three types of internet-enabled device, with one in five owning six or more." [16]

Other important developments are also underway. They include:

- an increasing focus on how large volumes of information might be mined to spot trends and unusual connections (Big Data)

- new integrated and standardised pan-public sector connections that should allow different public services to work more closely together and to share information securely (the Public Services Network)

- radically different methods of storing data and gaining access to software services that potentially allow for very significant cost reductions (cloud computing)

- the roll-out of the infrastructure required to support massively greater access to services we now take for granted but which were not seriously considered thirty years ago – superfast mobile broadband, satellite location technology and Wi-Fi across urban environments, as well as improved battery life and access to power for personal technology.

> **Route planning tool**
>
> In the face of budget cuts, increased tax burdens for landfill, and challenging targets to improve recycling, councils are increasingly exploiting mapping technology to improve the quality and cost of waste collection, achieve better procurement, and develop more efficient service partnerships. Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council saved £300,000 annually and improved services through using better geographical data to optimise the routes for refuse collection and cleaning; the District of East Northamptonshire Council saved £200,000 annually using Ordnance Survey technology; and Middlesbrough Borough Council saved £150,000 a year using a similar technology supplied by provider web asp.
>
> Case study available on LGA website.
>
> In another innovative use of technology, Surrey County Council has piloted the early stages of a technology developed by the City of Boston in the USA to track potholes using motion sensors on mobile devices. This technology needs to be refined further, but demonstrates the unexpected ways in which suddenly pervasive technology can be adapted or used to support public services.

- concerted efforts, supported by a co-funded central and local government programme managed locally, to extend superfast broadband coverage to as many citizens and businesses as possible. [17]

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16 http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr13/uk/
    OFCOM is the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries

17 https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/transforming-uk-broadband

The UK Broadband Programme (UKBD)

Despite the UK having the highest take-up and coverage of superfast broadband among leading European economies,[18] lack of adequate broadband coverage continues to pose real problems especially in rural parts of the country and is a significant contributory factor to both digital exclusion and people's failure to access government services through digital channels. Therefore in 2013, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) announced the investment of £530 million to bring high-speed broadband to rural communities, reaching 90 per cent of homes and businesses, £250 million to extend superfast broadband to 95 per cent of the UK, and a further £150 million in 'super-connected cities'.[19] These investments were match-funded by councils, who worked closely with suppliers to implement broadband initiatives locally. However, progress remains slow[20] and it is clear that the 'digital divide' is still an issue in areas of the country despite the overall progress on broadband coverage that is being made nationally.

The importance of these initiatives cannot be overstated. As one council chief executive recently remarked, "Broadband now sits alongside electricity in its importance to rural areas."

The current online landscape is complex, therefore, but also full of opportunities.

2.6 Some final reflections

While there continues to be great progress in applying technology and digital approaches in public services, much remains to be done. We should also remember that there is still a significant minority of people who cannot or do not wish to embrace technology and digital access to services, but whom councils and other public bodies cannot afford to neglect. A broad range of approaches is required including 'assisted digital' for those for whom self-service is not an option.

An **ONS survey**, published in February 2014, found that 6.7 million adults (13 per cent of the UK total), over half of whom were disabled, had never used the internet.[21]

Nonetheless, a clear message emerges from the brief and simplified history set out in this chapter – that local government has been consistently in the vanguard of using technology to improve and join up services and drive down costs, typically ahead of national policy and often of central government practice, while sector representative bodies such as the LGA, Socitm, the LGDC, LGCC and LGCIF have provided effective mechanisms for sharing this practice.[21]

This innovation continues today, as evidenced by the projects highlighted in the recent Customer-Led Transformation Programme run under the direction of the LGA (see box) – perhaps not surprising, given that councils carry out the vast majority of transactional services in government and are at the 'front line' of customer interactions.

Meanwhile, there is already a great deal of practical experience and evidence of how public services can harness technology and digital tools and approaches to meet the enormous challenges they face, as the next chapter will demonstrate. Much of the infrastructure, and many of the standards and protocols, for instance for sharing information, are also in existence.

Perhaps, then, the greatest challenge ahead is a cultural and organisational one – ensuring that local government's potential contribution to developing radically new public service models is recognised

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18 See Ofcom's European Broadband Scorecard, March 2014
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/broadband-research/scorecard/European_Broadband_Scorecard_2014.pdf

19 https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/transforming-uk-broadband3

20 See National Audit Office, The rural broadband programme, July 2013 http://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-rural-broadband-programme/

21 http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_353031.pdf

and mainstreamed, and that there is effective collaboration with, and support from, central government departments and agencies to join up services around our shared customers.

Between 2009 and 2011, the **Customer-Led Transformation programme**, under the direction of the LGDC and LGA, invested £7 million to support local government embed the use of customer insight and social media tools and techniques in the way it worked. Across the four phases of the programme, the 63 projects involved delivered, or supported the delivery of, over £331 million of financial benefit to the public and public services, including £61.5 million of savings directly from the projects.[22]

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22 Full details of the programme and its outputs can be found at
    http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510959/ARTICLE

Chapter 3 – the challenges and opportunities currently faced by councils

3.0 How new technology and digital tools and approaches can help

In Chapter 1 we touched briefly on the pressing issues facing councils today. In Chapter 2 we then highlighted local government's long history of exploiting technology and digital tools and approaches in order to improve services and reduce costs.

This chapter examines a range of key challenges in more detail, using case studies to illustrate how leading councils, working with partners, are once again applying technology and digital tools in innovative ways to reshape how local services are designed and delivered.

3.1 Meeting the financial imperative

The need to reduce costs remains a given. However, finding efficiency savings, although vital, will not be sufficient – local government and the wider public services must also focus on reducing, avoiding or diverting demand, as the LGA's recent work on demand management has made clear.[23]

Important strands of activity include:

3.1.1 Bringing down the cost of ICT

Councils are exploring a number of ways to reduce their costs for ICT, for instance through shared service arrangements, collaborative procurement and better management of contracts, as well as by permitting staff to use their own devices.

Meanwhile, advances in high-speed broadband and in data storage now offer councils the opportunity to buy ICT services as and when required, rather than having to invest in a fixed infrastructure of hardware and software that is both expensive to buy and costly to maintain.

These advances in 'cloud computing' bring their own challenges – over data security for instance – but are now a recognised part of the business world. Central government too has established a G-Cloud framework where suppliers offer their services to the public sector via CloudStore.

The London Borough of Hillingdon became the first English council to move to Google Apps, saving £750,000 a year, and Norfolk County Council undertook the largest roll-out of Google Apps for Education, in terms of user numbers, deploying it to 148,000 registered users – school staff and children – in 2012. Wiltshire Council is using the cloud-based Microsoft Office 365 suite of apps and cloud-based Exchange Online email (a competing cloud-based email and document service) across over 4,000 employees, and the London Borough of Lambeth has also moved to Microsoft Office 365.

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23   http://www.thersa.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1540126/RSA_Managing-Demand_Revision4.pdf

A further emerging trend is for public bodies to invest in 'open source' systems that allow the organisation itself to make changes to the software, rather than having to rely on the original developers. This approach in principle should enable faster, more flexible and cheaper systems development and maintenance, although issues such as who is responsible when things go wrong need to be carefully considered.

Local government has made extensive use of **G-Cloud and open source**. Both Westminster City Council and the London Borough of Hounslow have procured a range of Salesforce services – in the case of Hounslow, saving £600,000. Wiltshire Council procured, implemented, and trained staff in a new legal case management system in six months end-to-end; Shropshire Council's Project WIP website service saved £204,000 over an initial five-year period; and Solihull MBC, using Red Hat Linux for over a decade, have saved more than £1 million since 1999.

3.1.2 Reducing the costs of customer contact

Ever since technology became widely and publicly available, and from the very beginning of e-government, significant efforts have gone into reducing the processing costs of managing customer contact in the so-called 'front office', where the public first make contact with a council. Savings figures are often based on the kinds of figures set out below.

Source Channel	Socitm Insight May 2012	Socitm Insight Dec 2009	NWeGG 2006	Consultant study for council partnership April 2009
Face-to-face	£8.62 per transaction	£8.23 per visit	£7.81	£5.51
Phone	£2.83 per transaction	£3.21 per call	£4.00	£2.53
Web	£0.15 per transaction	£0.39 per visitor	£0.17	£0.17

As noted in section 2.4 above, there is significant risk in the assumption that these figures tell the whole story of the cost of delivering the service, or even the cost of dealing with the customer in order to initiate the service. It is only when services can be fully automated end-to-end, with no additional work required, and can be designed sufficiently well that they are completed in a single transaction, that this simplistic view of 'front office' costs will paint an accurate picture of the real cost to councils. Nevertheless, with two-thirds of the 600 million plus customer contacts received by English councils each year now coming through online and digital channels (Socitm, 2012), and 24 per cent of web visits being to carry out transactions, for example paying parking fines or reporting a missed bin, significant changes and savings have been delivered.

Thus, while the main focus of this report is on innovative approaches to technology that go beyond simple 'channel shift', it is important to acknowledge that truly significant work has been undertaken, delivering real savings and improvements across local government, to enable and encourage online transactional customer contact that works for the customer and the council.

The London Borough of Lewisham created LoveLewisham – a web application and set of mobile apps for reporting and managing a range of environmental issues, such as graffiti and fly-tipping. Established in 2004, LoveLewisham allows residents to report issues and monitor progress on a public web site (www.lovelewisham.org). LoveLewisham has been integrated into back-office systems, and is used by significant numbers of the front-line workforce. It receives and assigns reports for council services, contractors and other agencies, and makes it easy for residents, visitors and councillors to report environmental issues and reduce time and money spent on administering casework and complaints. The approach has been rooted in getting the front-line workforce to embrace mobile technology and report issues beyond their job role. This has required a cultural shift and an emphasis on technology as a transformational tool. It has also required operational services taking ownership of the technology and app specification. The app has significantly supported the achievement of:

• a 73 per cent reduction in graffiti (since 2006) and improved graffiti removal times from 2.78 days in 2003 to less than 0.5 days now

• a 53 per cent reduction in fly-tipping

• a 22 per cent reduction in casework in related services

• a 33 per cent reduction in call-centre activity, saving £500,000 over the past five years.

The app has also supported improved operational efficiency (reduced need to pre-inspect reports), and has eliminated the use of overtime to collect missed bins (refuse workers now post reports showing collection problems), saving an additional £300,000.

"You highlight the problem, you see it get done (via LoveLewisham) with photographic evidence. Can't see much of a problem with that. Unless someone at Lewisham is exceptionally handy on Photoshop."

East Riding of Yorkshire Council has been a leader in combining technology with effective customer insight and service redesign to deliver tangible savings while improving the customer experience. As part of the development of the corporate website to be completely mobile-accessible, their next generation face-to-face Community Hubs use self-service kiosks (with support where required) to deal with customer demand and free staff to focus on complex requirements. The council has delivered a nationally acclaimed face-to-face customer service network for many years. The Community Hubs provide integrated customer service, library, and leisure facilities. The council worked directly with its supplier to develop and deploy multi-functional, responsive, self-service kiosks – a unique concept within both the public and private sector as while a number of payment machines can be bought off the shelf, a kiosk offering the required combination of payment and web-based self-service facilities simply did not exist.

• Customer contact data was used to identify the priority services required by the local communities in which the kiosks would be placed. These needs were then mapped against the digital services currently available online which were in turn re-purposed for deployment via a touch screen kiosk incorporating responsive design. These touch screen kiosks use the same responsive design approach to provide a seamless transition from one device to another while maintaining the East Riding identity and customer trust across devices.

• Self-service kiosks have been successfully installed in the recently opened Community Hubs in Withernsea and Hessle. Geo-mapping technology helps users to easily report enquiries and customers are using the kiosks to self-serve for a range of council services, such as reporting a missed bin, booking a bulky waste collection, reporting a housing repair and making payments of council tax. As more customers self-serve, fewer staff are required to work within the

Community Hubs with the remaining staff freed up to deal with more complex enquiries centred on the council's most vulnerable users. The savings over a three-year period are £91,500, which is a reduction in 5.14 full time equivalent staff. All payments in the Community Hubs are now being made through self- service. One self-service kiosk took £250,000 of payments in the first six months of operation.

- Thirty per cent of all traffic to eastriding.gov.uk now comes from a mobile device, a growing proportion. During a recent tidal surge, this proportion peaked at 50 per cent of all access. Using customer insight, customer testing, and a responsive design approach, 2.1 million visits have now been received through the responsive mobile site.

"Very easy to use mobile web site, a delight to use, your web team can be congratulated" (payments)

"Web site easy to use, I found what I wanted and more" (senior railcards)

Case study available on LGA website.

Spelthorne Borough Council identified the need to deliver a mobile app to meet customer expectations, encourage channel shift and improve service delivery. The app allows the council to provide customers with access to services, news, transactional tasks and updates via their smart phones, wherever and whenever it is convenient. The council has benefited from the app which has resulted in:

- an 18 per cent increase in internet payments compared with 2012/13 for Council Tax

- a 42 per cent increase in internet payments compared with 2012/13 on sundry debt, which includes garden waste, and a 3 per cent increase in sundry debt recovery in the same period

- a 10 per cent reduction to calls into customer services since the introduction of the app. Customer contact savings have been delivered in the region of £33,000 for 2013/14 with a reduction of 1.4 FTEs in the call centre for 2014/15. It is expected that these savings will continue.

During the flood emergency in February 2014, the volume of work the app absorbed would have cost approximately £10,800 for three extra staff to handle the additional calls during the month.

Case study available on LGA website.

Bristol City Council used mobile technology in a different way – to increase the efficiency of its mobile neighbourhood based staff, reducing office-based hours and increasing reporting of local issues. Sixty mobile officers were identified to receive iPhone and Android tablet devices, pre-loaded with Looking Local's MyCouncil app and a range of other standard software solutions enabling each officer to complete their daily tasks without having to visit an office. The range of staff had their roles modified to include mobile reporting of local issues such as fly tipping, and were provided with a short training session on their device and the app. Between June 2013 and May 2014, 565 reports were submitted, resulting in a cost saving of £2,356 and an increased level of reporting from staff. Office hours were reduced for a quarter of the staff, part of a larger programme of facilities reduction which is due to save the council an estimated £10 million over three years.

At the same time, local champions were identified by neighbourhood-based staff, and training was given to these champions to enhance digital take-up in the community. This contributed to an increase in targeted online transactions of 22,000 over the same time period – an estimated saving of £91,700 compared to telephone reporting.

The company behind the app, Looking Local, is wholly owned and managed by Kirklees Council

and is a not-for-profit organisation, with all subscription fees going into the management, maintenance and development of the overall technical solution. Their interactive solutions allow content, transactions and services via interactive television, (Sky and Virgin Media), on mobile, Facebook, via specially designed browsers for internet-enabled games consoles, and via a variety of sector-specific smart phone apps. Their main Looking Local app was used 1.36 million times in 2013, nearly 60 per cent of which were for transactional services. Around 45 per cent of usage occurred outside traditional business hours, and around 25 per cent occurred at the weekend. This indicates a saving from self-service as opposed to telephone reporting in the region of £0.8 million. They also provide and manage around 55 dedicated smart phone apps for local public service partners.

Case study available on LGA website.

A significant number of councils have implemented online 'platforms' – integrated websites, transactional forms, and customer accounts that link to back-office systems to allow customers to complete requests, notifications and transactions. Socitm Insight measures the progress of councils nationally each year in its Better connected good practice survey and report, currently in its 15th year. Councils with relatively developed online or digital platforms include the following:

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham developed an integrated, secure, online customer self-service portal (the Agilisys Digital Platform), with a single sign-on for five high-usage services: council tax, benefits, resident and business permits, visitor permits and environmental reporting. An additional eight council services, and mobile and interactive voice recognition access, were included in the second phase. The portal has achieved £1.15 million net savings per annum, with 70 per cent of parking permit renewals completed online and 70 per cent of all households registered.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has achieved a 100 per cent digital shift for benefit claims. Initially claims took 42 days to process but now only take 12 days, with 70 per cent of claims resolved within a day. There has been a 75 per cent reduction in avoidable contact at the contact centre, and net cashable savings £617,000 per annum through implementing a digital platform.

The London Borough of Harrow, whose customer services team handles close to two million enquiries each year, resolves 92 per cent at the first point of contact. Their MyHarrow account provides secure transactions over the web to both residents and businesses, with a scalable authentication that means the user only has to provide proof of identity appropriate for the transaction they want to complete. Since the system is designed for mobile devices, with forms included, 30 per cent of transactions are now carried out in this way. Meanwhile Harrow's decision to fully integrate its customer relationship management system with a web chat 'pop up' to support customers having difficulty navigating the system or struggling with complex forms has helped the council to save £1.55 million in contact costs over four years.

Case study available on LGA website.

Telford and Wrekin Council, one of the councils in the UK with the fastest growing population, has introduced 'Everyday', a cross-mobile application from Bronze Labs. The app allows residents to report problems in their streets directly to the council. This information is passed seamlessly to the council's systems and linked to the customers' accounts. The app works offline (critical in rural Shropshire) and was set up in just fifteen weeks in order to introduce a new 'channel' for the winter. Through organic growth only and without direct advertising, 2,311 reports of street scene and anti-social behaviour were received in the first quarter of 2013/14, saving £5,000 in contact costs.[24]

Case study available on LGA website.

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24 See http://www.telford.gov.uk/info/200129/customer_services/1748/everyday_telford/5 and http://www.bronzelabs.co.uk/portfolio_page/everyday-telford-council-smartphone-reporting-app/

3.1.3 Sharing resources across public bodies

The aim of the Public Services Network (PSN), which builds on the previous Government Secure Intranet (GSi), is to reduce costs across UK government and, by allowing different parts of government to share information securely, to enable new, joined-up and shared public services for the benefit of citizens. This is essential for many local services and for key national programmes such as Universal Credit and Troubled Families.

In principle, therefore, the PSN should help to address the duplication of information and resources that has long bedevilled the UK public services, saving time and money for both public bodies and citizens. Clearly, the network cannot achieve this on its own – greater trust between different parts of the public sector will also be required, based on substantial cultural and behavioural change, particularly in certain government departments and agencies.

In the meantime, public bodies continue to develop and share other systems and capabilities.

Suffolk Coastal Port Health Authority – Felixstowe container port system

Felixstowe is one of the UK's busiest ports, receiving 41 per cent of food imported to the UK. Suffolk Coastal Port Health Authority (SCPHA) is responsible for checking the products. In 2008 it was using a 15-year-old IT system that was already inhibiting the effectiveness of the organisation. Port Health replaced this outdated system with a new information management service (IMS) that was developed in-house and which significantly improved effectiveness and generated savings.

SCPHA now has the Port Health Interactive Live Information System (PHILIS) that requires less paperwork, both for staff and for food importers themselves. Thanks to the developers working closely with the users, PHILIS is still evolving so that increased legislative and external audit requirements have been met without expanding the staff base. PHILIS has generated productivity gains of up to 22 per cent or annual savings of around 17,000 working hours. The project has been subjected to an OGC Gateway Review by audit (with a copy passed to the Audit Commission), with the benefit realisation analysis showing double-digit savings in staff time. Total savings have amounted to £200,000 a year since it went live in 2009.

Suffolk Coastal Port Health has also started to license the system to other Port Health Authorities, including Mersey and London, generating total extra income of £80,000 a year.

Case study available on LGA website.

3.1.4 Reshaping services

Advances in a range of technologies and approaches, including mobile devices, digital cameras, CCTV and data analytics, combined with changes in working methods, are already allowing some local services to be radically reshaped in ways that reduce costs and provide a more streamlined and transparent service for users.

Westminster City Council – Cashless payment for parking

Westminster City Council experiences significant pressures on its parking throughout the year. To help meet this challenge, the council has been leading the way in using innovative technology to reduce congestion and improve parking convenience for its customers. This is part of a long stream of digital innovation which has transformed the way parking has been managed across the country – from ticket printers and increasingly sophisticated hand-held devices that can store and record audio and visual evidence and locations, to the new wave of technology that includes smart sensors in parking bays to sense occupancy and increase effective use parking space (and maximise income), and number plate recognition technology which will make physical parking permits redundant.

Westminster's initial focus on making traditional parking enforcement and charging processes more robust and efficient led over time to using technology to radically redesign its approach. Cashless parking payments were introduced across the council, saving over £6 million a year by preventing theft and £1.5m per year through reducing the costs of servicing and maintaining meters and of collecting and processing cash. This has enabled the next steps to be taken in transforming the service from 'negative' enforcement to using parking bay sensor technology to improve customer service, make better use of under-utilised spaces and transform parking wardens into 'Marshalls' whose role involves using real-time data to help people find a parking place.

Case study available on LGA website.

3.1.5 Managing demand

As work by the LGA has suggested, only by addressing the demand for public services, as well as their supply, will councils and their partners be able continue delivering local public services in any sustainable way. Technology can help in a number of respects:

• by enabling greater self-service, for instance by making a wider range of both information and opportunities to transact available via council websites

Leeds City Council – Enabling and developing self-service through live web chat in Leeds

Leeds' live chat is about providing support to website users to help them complete their business with the council online. It encourages customers to change their behaviour and stay connected, even when they reach a point where they are not clear as to how to proceed. Advisors can chat with customers while they are online, helping to guide them through the process and preventing the need for the customer to telephone the council or visit in person, either of which costs the council more money. Customer advisors can deal with three enquiries simultaneously, making live chat much more efficient. The council has so far saved £18,360 over eight months from August 2013 to March 2014.

The savings figures, however, miss the real benefits that come from both the reduction in further calls that would have been made had the improvements to the website inspired by feedback from the chats – resulting in 400 changes to the website in eight months – not been made, and the 'conversion' of web users to true self-servers. Post-chat surveys show consistently that 70 per cent of customers say they would have telephoned had they not used web chat, and a further 20 per cent would have emailed.

Dorset County Council is another example of the successful use of web chat. The council introduced a web chat strategy with a pilot project covering free school meals and the Dorset Waste Partnership. These areas were chosen to enable targeted, results-driven analysis of demand for web chat where customers could not readily access information or successfully complete an online transaction. By analysing specific questions asked in web chats and associated customer journeys online, Dorset has been able to change website pages to include additional information, reducing customers' need to contact the council for basic content. The pilot use of web chat shows efficiency savings are possible for Dorset — leading to the conclusion that web chat will have paid for itself through savings within the first year of operation.

Case study available on LGA website.

- by helping people to resolve their own queries and issues without direct council intervention, for example by encouraging local people to use social media to ask questions and to receive answers from their peers

There are many innovative examples of self-help facilitated by local government through technology and digital innovation:

Fylde Forum, set up thanks to the LGA's Customer-Led Transformation Programme,[25] provides a combination of forum and live chat which remains innovative four years after inception. The site is available at http://getsatisfaction.com/fylde. As well as providing local people with the opportunity to have their say on service issues, figures from the project show a reduction in calls over four years, producing savings of about £10,000.

Cornwall Together is a team effort, conceived by the Eden Project and backed by Cornwall Council, Community Energy Plus, Age UK, Citizens Advice Bureau, uSwitch, energyshare, Unison, St Austell Brewery, and the NHS. This coalition successfully used a dedicated website for social marketing, and created a viral campaign that encouraged households to switch energy provider within a critical time window. In the first round, more than 1,000 people saved an average of £133 on their annual energy bills – with some households saving over £700. This simple approach and the support of the community in a short timescale enabled more than £150,000 to go back into the pockets of Cornish households. Fuel poverty is a major issue in the area, so this was a significant economic and social intervention. The second round increased the total savings to over £280,000.[26]

Derby City Council has developed self-service online forms and provides access via dedicated computers for those residents seeking financial assistance. The approach supports self-service and assisted self-service for those in the greatest need and makes applying for crisis loans and community care grants simpler and more convenient. The crisis elements of the Social Fund, designed to help people meet the cost of immediate expenses including energy bills, funerals and maternity costs, became local government responsibilities in April 2013 as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Derby's approach targets a client group which would perhaps have been considered among the least likely to use digital services, and provides a way to reduce the cost of this service.

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25 Individual case studies from the Customer-Led Transformation Programme are at http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510959/ARTICLE and the evaluation of the overall programme is at http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/5681477/ARTICLE

26 http://www.cornwalltogether.com/

During the floods of February 2014, a 'hack day' was organised across central, local and voluntary sectors that engaged developers from all kinds of organisations and successfully built a series of useful and effective websites and apps which enabled citizens to help themselves in finding, using, and contributing real information about the floods.[27]

• by providing an approved and well-publicised platform where other public bodies, private and third sector organisations or even local volunteers, can offer their services on a paid or unpaid basis to people requiring them.

The London Borough of Barnet – Casserole Club

Casserole Club is primarily about reducing demand for existing services. It is a local volunteer scheme supported by a web platform that helps people share extra portions of home-cooked food with others in their area who might not always be able to cook for themselves. The specially-designed online platform allows residents in selected postcode areas to register as a cook. Volunteer cooks are able to create a basic profile on the site with information about what they might like to cook and how often. Once they are registered and have gone through a Disclosure and Barring Service check and have completed the food hygiene quiz online, they can search for diners they would like to cook for. On average, it would cost a council £4.90 to provide a meal. Over the eight-month period since it was set up by the London Borough of Barnet, 100 diners have received an average two meals a week from a neighbour, which equates to savings of at least £50,960. During the cook's visit, he or she may also spot problems, for example, where the diner is poorly or potentially at risk. For example, one Casserole Club cook noticed a gas leak at the house of one of club's older diners. This not only prevented a serious incident which could have led to hospitalisation or indeed a death, it also avoided a possible serious case review which can cost up to £100,000. The other benefits are in terms of social isolation, mental health and malnutrition, complex and linked issues which cannot easily be quantified in financial terms. We know that loneliness and isolation can lead to a lower quality of life. By matching people in need of meals with cooks in their area, not only does the Club provide a home-cooked meal, but by sharing food, club members are also beginning to strengthen neighbourhoods. For Casserole Club, sharing food is a means to build local relationships, and because the service lets local communities share easily, it has the ability to adapt and develop anywhere in the UK and beyond.

Case study available on LGA website.

Clearly, such approaches do not absolve councils and their partners of their responsibility to intervene directly where people require the type or level of support that only local government can provide. And it remains important that citizens who are not confident in the digital world can still gain access to services. But technology should help to focus resources where they are most urgently needed.

3.2 Planning for the impact of demographic change

Figures released by the Office for National Statistics in November 2013 showed a projected UK population increase of 9.6 million over the next 25 years from an estimated 63.7 million in mid-2012 to 73.3 million in mid-2037, with 5.4 million more births than deaths (57 per cent of the rise) and 4.2 million in net migration into the country (43 per cent).

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27 http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/feb/17/uk-flood-relief-apps-hack-day

The rising UK birth rate is a cause for concern as well as celebration. Annual mid-year population estimates for 2011 and 2012, published by the ONS in August 2013, showed that there were more babies were born in the UK in 2011/12 than any year since 1972.[28] In all, 813,200 UK births were recorded in the year, contributing to population growth that was, in absolute terms, the highest in the EU.

These figures have clear implications for demand for housing, school places, health and other public services, as well as for the advice and support the public sector will need to offer parents and families. There are already examples of where technology and digital approaches can help.

The London Borough of Croydon – Family Space

The London Borough of Croydon has developed a 'family-focused' website, Family Space, for parents and professionals, which enables easier access to a range of different sources of information about children's services locally, for example details of schools and child-minding.

By managing demand that would otherwise have to be met on the phone (an estimated £32 more expensive per inquiry) the council saved £136,000 in handling customer enquiries in the first seven months of the website's operation. Following the same model and based on increased uptake, this means that a £450,000 saving was made in the 2013/14 financial year.

Case study available on LGA website.

The ONS figures released in November 2013 also projected an increasingly ageing population with the average age increasing from 39.7 years old in 2012 to 42.8 by mid-2037. The number of people aged 80 or older was projected to more than double over the same period to 6.2 million, with a parallel 31 per cent growth in the number of people of state pension age, reaching 16.1 million by 2037.

The House of Lords Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change warned in March 2013 in its report Ready for ageing? that the UK was "woefully underprepared" for the social and economic challenges presented by an ageing society.[29] For example, with the number of people living with long-term medical conditions set to rise sharply, a "radically different model" of care would be needed to support people in their homes and to prevent pressure on the NHS.

One legislative response by Government was the Care Bill, published in May 2013, which brings together existing legislation into a new set of laws to build the health and social care system around people's wellbeing, needs and goals, as well as introducing a range of other measures.[30] The Bill is part of a broader landscape of health care reform, aimed at addressing the fragmented delivery of services in some parts of the health and care system. The £3.8 billion Better Care Fund was announced by the Government in June 2013 to provide a single pooled budget to support health and social care services to work more closely together in local areas, with a particular emphasis on shifting resources from acute services into community and preventative settings.[31]

The issue of an ageing UK population is a particularly serious one for councils given the crucial role they play in providing often resource-intensive and costly services to this potentially vulnerable and

28 http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/pop-estimate/population-estimates-for-uk--england-and-wales--scotland-and-northern-ireland/mid-2011-and-mid-2012/stb---mid-2011---mid-2012-uk-population-estimates.html#tab-Key-Points

29 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldselect/ldpublic/140/14002.htm

30 The LGA has published detailed guidance for councils on preparing for the implementation of the Care Bill at http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/care-support-reform/-/journal_content/56/10180/5761087/ARTICLE

31 http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/health/-/journal_content/56/10180/4096799/ARTICLE#sthash.ENLf30TW.dpuf

needy customer group. It is therefore particularly pertinent that councils explore the opportunities afforded by technology and digital tools and approaches both to provide better support to older people and help reduce the rising cost of care. Technology can help in a number of ways:

- helping local government and its partners to identify those most in need of support, through the analysis of socio-demographic data, often on a collaborative basis across a number of public service agencies

- supporting the commissioning process and the development, design and management of care packages

- supporting new community-based ways of delivering care services, either directly by the public services or though arrangements with providers from the private or third sectors

- enabling greater integration of healthcare and social services systems and the secure sharing of sensitive data across different partners

- helping older make contact with their peers, giving them access to information about relevant services while at the same time potentially addressing issues of isolation and loneliness.[33]

Telecare and assistive technologies

As the number of elderly and physically disabled people is expected to rise in coming years, councils are looking to technology to manage the significantly increased demand on health and care services. Telecare and assistive technologies, which can allow elderly and physically disabled residents to continue to live independently in their own homes while receiving the care they need, can play a significant role in dealing with these challenges. Councils that have implemented telecare successfully include Blackburn with Darwen, which has saved £10 million in the last four years, while the London Borough of Hillingdon has saved £4,597,000 to date by integrating telecare and reablement.

Case study available on LGA website.

Cheshire East Council – DemenShare

Cheshire East Council, working with Age UK, has developed an online social media and information site for people living with dementia, from those diagnosed to their families and carers.[32] The site offers 24-hour access to information and enables users to share resources and build networks of support. This helps people living with dementia, including carers, to continue living independently and enjoy an improved quality of life. There are currently 580 registered users and the site has proved popular with carers and GPs. As well as peer support, better outcomes and a reduction in the need for hospital-based services, the site has provided GPs and commissioners with better insight and connection to their customers.

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32 http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=6e8633a3-17a5-4211-8cd5-7aead7bb8aaf&groupId=10180

33 http://www.supplymanagement.com/news/2012/nepo-meets-social-care-aims-with-national-framework
     http://www.iewm.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Ian-Taylor-Why-a-Social-Care-eMarketplace-Framework-.pdf
     http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-31451/ITEM7+-+Social+Care+Presentation.pdf
     http://www.pro5.org/assets/files/p/pro5awardsnationalframeworkfortheprovisionofsocial_589.pdf

     See also the Customer-Led Transformation Programme case studies

NEPO social care portal

Personal budgets were introduced by central government to allow customers to choose between public, private and third sector social care. However, in many cases customers appeared confused by the system and were unaware of many of the options available to them and take-up was low. In 2012, the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) launched a national framework that councils can use to set up social e-markets.[33] These e-markets enable customers to view and select social care services from a wide range of providers, including public sector, private sector and third sector organisations. The four-year framework is worth £6 million and can be used by councils across the country to create e-market platforms for their residents in need of social care. Thirteen suppliers were appointed to the network and then categorised into four 'lots' according to the extent of the service they provide. Councils can choose which lot to use, depending on the size and scale they desire for their e-markets. The framework was designed through collaboration between a variety of stakeholders, including voluntary and community sector organisations and local councils.

Scarborough Borough Council has utilised customer insight to create a multi-service delivery tool, which can provide all key services required by elderly people and vulnerable adults after just one interview/assessment.[34] The wellbeing service reduced the number of people who presented at hospital, as well as the number of excess bed days, improved the customer experience and the signposting of services, increased the appropriate use of services and reduced duplication and the number of interactions required to deliver services. Savings are calculated at £161,130 based on standard analysis of preventative interventions carried out by the Department of Health.

Kent County Council – Improved Blue Badge processing

The Blue Badge service provides a range of parking concessions for people with severe mobility issues who have difficulty using public transport. The badge gives priority parking to the holder which enables the holders to park close to where they need to go. The scheme operates throughout the UK and is administered by councils like Kent County Council, who are responsible for determining and implementing administrative, assessment and eligibility procedures in accordance with the statutory guidelines provided by the Department of Transport.

There are 77,000 Blue Badges in circulation in Kent and every year over 23,000 applications are processed. New security measures (introduced to reduce the incidence and cost of fraud, which was running nationally at £46 million per year) added to the expense and time taken to process applications, causing significant delays. The online national Blue Badge Improvement Service (BBIS) has provided direct digital access for the public to apply, as well as secure eligibility checking and processing for the council. Along with removing payments by cheque, Kent has saved over £300,000 and significantly speeded up the process of getting eligible people their badges.

Engagement of older, isolated people through technology and digital innovation

East Riding of Yorkshire Council and **Central Bedfordshire Council** with **Cambridgeshire County Council** undertook pilots on the use of technology to support elderly individuals suffering from loneliness and social isolation, which we know is damaging to their health. Individual participants were identified by GPs.

Cambridgeshire County Council and Central Bedfordshire, supported by the East England Local Government Association, offered socially isolated elderly residents a free trial of an iPad with the Mindings app installed (Mindings runs on Android tablets, PCs, Macs, laptops and iPads). Mindings has been described as "Facebook for the technologically shy". It allows people, for instance relatives, friends and carers, to send messages and captioned photos to an individual. Forty-three per cent of participants in the trial reported Mindings having an impact on their happiness and 38 per cent said it improved their quality of life. Overall 81 per cent felt happy at having technology made available to them and many expressed an interest in further exploring possibilities now that iPad had been 'demystified' for them.

This is part of the prevention/early intervention agenda, specifically aimed at helping clients create or maintain social and family links, engage with interesting sources of information and activities using apps and the web, and reduce reliance on mainstream public services. Improving the mental wellbeing of older people can assist them in living independently and reduce demand on public services.

These longer-term projects are not directly delivering savings (although individuals are accessing services online), but are trying to improve the lives of those with long term/chronic illnesses, enabling them to live longer in their own homes, combating loneliness and social isolation and reducing reliance on mainstream council and health public services, thereby saving money for the public purse. Supportive training and technology have been shown anecdotally to improve quality of life and encourage self-management among those aged over 55 (the average age of participants is over 70), with multiple on-going health conditions, and typically living alone.

The Arts Council conducted and evaluated a similar trial, using volunteers from Birmingham and Cornwall library services, to provide laptops and training to older people in their homes, which showed similarly positive results.[34]

3.3 Supporting the changing policy landscape

The Coalition Government has introduced major programmes of reform in areas such as social welfare where local government has traditionally played a very significant role. Their successful implementation will depend on the continuing active support of councils and effective use of digital tools and approaches. Indeed, the structure of a programme such as Universal Credit (see section 3.3.2) is based on the assumption that most users will go online, making it in many respects a 'digital' initiative.

3.3.1 Troubled Families

The Government's Troubled Families programme, worth over £452 million over three years and launched in 2011, set out to improve the lives and outcomes for those families experiencing multiple

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34 http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/OpeningUpANewWorldFullReport.pdf

difficulties by better co-ordinating the work of the different organisations working with these families. This built on the work started by councils who were piloting various approaches with their public sector partners in their local area. The Troubled Families programme identified 120,000 families in the UK with severe and multiple problems, with the objective to improve their life chances and significantly reduce the estimated £9 billion cost to the public sector. In order to do this the programme pays up to £4,000 per family on a payment-by-results basis.

Councils have welcomed this opportunity to help them address these issues as they had long recognised the barriers to the implementation of effective local solutions, such as the lack of integration between local service providers, the failure to deal with family problems holistically, and the need for a dedicated key worker to work closely with a family. The DCLG programme has reflected this, giving councils the lead role in coordinating services locally and enabling existing work to be built on and scaled up.

Technology is an important part of supporting troubled families. The possibilities include:

- using technology to identify the families most in need, for instance by enabling socio-economic data and information on existing interventions from a range of public service providers to be collated and analysed

- giving family support workers the tools and the information required to coordinate their interventions both with the family itself (for instance, through implementing a single assessment process) and with key professionals in relevant agencies

- providing vulnerable and less affluent families themselves with better access to information on available benefits and support, for instance on ways of addressing fuel poverty, or to other local services, such as libraries – see the examples on preceding pages for access to digital and online services for older people

- linking family members to peer or mentoring groups via mobile devices or social media.

Suffolk County Council – High demand families[35]

Suffolk County Council introduced a programme in 2008 to improve the service provided to families whose dependence on public services was unusually high. This was one of the original Total Place pilots and a precursor to their later work on Troubled Families. The programme focused on using customer insight tools to better understand the needs of these families and help them to support themselves, thereby improving the living standards and opportunities for family members while alleviating strain on public funds. The project effectively combined use of modern technology, such as mapping socio-demographic data, with simple techniques, such as role play and observing customers using services. Over £450,000 was saved over four years in cost avoidance as the families' demand for public services was reduced. The customer insight approaches developed became a core part of Suffolk's Leadership Academy which has helped to drive their overall transformation programme. Since the work began, Suffolk's service for children and young people reduced costs by £7 million in 2010/11 and saved a further £2.5 million in 2011/12 and 2012/13 while simultaneously increasing the capacity of the system to focus effort on priority cases.

Staffordshire County Council – Patchwork tool for joining up around clients at the front line

Patchwork is a tool which allows front line staff to quickly log in and see which other agencies are supporting their client. It is not a case management tool but designed to mimic familiar social media sites and reduce the risks of different services working in disconnected ways around the same client. In theory, disparate professionals from various public and voluntary and community sector agencies supporting vulnerable families not only know of each other's shared involvement in the case, but also how best to get hold of each other. But the reality can be very different. Using Patchwork, front-line staff in Staffordshire County Council can immediately discover which other professionals are supporting the same client, and find out how to get in touch with them. There are 64 agencies signed up to Patchwork and 350 professionals supporting almost 2,350 clients in Staffordshire. Futuregov developed the tool and it has been taken up by councils across the UK, and now Australia. The product is still being implemented, developed, and improved, and because of this and its nature as a cross-organisation tool, savings levels are not yet possible to estimate accurately.

Lewes District Council – cloud-based collaboration tool

Lewes District Council needs to save 26 per cent in the next six years, and is using 'pam', cloud-based, secure collaboration software from Alliantist, to work across staff, partners, and public. The pam tool allows professionals from different organisations working on the same case to capture and share information in real time, in a highly secure cloud-based environment, for better collaborative case management. Widely used in probation and in secure applications across criminal justice and local government, pam has been used on several projects, including a food waste campaign. Staff and external partners use the system to share a holistic view of what is being delivered. This 'whole system' view enables all agencies to work in a more joined-up way.

3.3.2 Welfare Reform and Universal Credit

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 provided for the introduction of a 'Universal Credit' to replace a range of existing means-tested benefits and credits for people of working age. In order to prepare claimants for the introduction of the changes, 12 local government-led pilots, involving 13 councils,

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35 http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=b814a612-2f32-4b78-b54d-4530004298c9&groupId=10180

ran between September 2012 and December 2013. Subsequent guidance for councils was published by the Government in conjunction with UK local government associations in March 2014, focusing on four key areas of service delivery: digital inclusion, triage, partnership working, and financial inclusion.[36]

Digital access and inclusion are of fundamental importance to the successful roll-out of Universal Credit in that the Government expects the majority of applications to be made online. Eleven of the 13 pilot councils had a primary/secondary aim of increasing digital inclusion. Seven pilots sought to make digital the preferred method of claiming benefit while another adopted a 'digital by default' approach to housing applications. A number also sought to increase online take-up of council services.

The lessons emerging from the pilots are particularly valuable in highlighting the work involved in extending the opportunities offered by digital approaches to more vulnerable customer groups. The pilots found that:

• Promoting an online 'self-sufficiency' strategy takes time and mediated support. As a starting point, partners need to engage with customers to gather information on their skill levels, to publicise the channel shift strategy and to encourage online usage through mediated support and training.

• Mapping exercises need to be undertaken in partnerships to identify partner provision within each council area, including Wi-Fi and PC locations and the level of mediated support available, and to identify gaps and duplication.

• Carefully worded communications to customers outlining the benefits and advantages of online services, supported by initial help from staff where necessary, can help to move claimants to digital channels.

• The integration of services helps to provide better customer service and aids partnership working. Partners needed to take steps to fill gaps by increasing Wi-Fi access, improving the volume and positioning of internet-enabled devices while enhancing their customer service.

In summary, achieving digital inclusion is an incremental process which also requires the necessary training and skills development of staff supporting these customers. The issue of inclusion should underpin how councils design and deliver services and equip customers with the skills and infrastructure to access those services. Also, a cohesive channel shift policy can help to realise efficiencies while providing targeted assistance through the most appropriate methods.

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36 Local authority led pilots, preparing for universal credit implementation – Key questions and answers for local authorities.
    https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295504/la-led-pilots-preparing-for-universal-credit.pdf

Universal Credit local authority pilots

Between 2012 and 2013, twelve councils piloted the new universal credit scheme for benefits.[37] Universal Credit is a scheme whereby six different benefits currently provided are replaced with a single monthly payment. The approach is digital by default with customers applying online and support in ICT skills offered to those unused to working digitally. Councils who have been involved include the London Borough of Lewisham, Rushcliffe Borough Council, Birmingham City Council, North Dorset District Council and Melton Borough Council.

Councils combined face-to-face support with new technologies to encourage and support online application for benefits, and worked to identify the risks of the scheme and support customers in avoiding these problems.

London Borough of Lewisham has employed a wide range of technologies to improve their service, including:

- commissioning a 'better off in work' calculator to assist customers in tracking the benefit cap and universal credit

- conducting a cross-borough mapping exercise against the four quadrants to identify existing support provision. This data was used to develop joint-working opportunities.

- offering training in ICT skills to customers who were assessed as high-vulnerability in terms of their ability to access benefits online.

Birmingham City Council developed a new and more effective tenant 'triage' system. They looked at the whole customer journey and identified how to direct people appropriately and then nudge and support them in effective online service use. Tenants were provided with a personalised 'digital log book', an individual tenant portal owned by them. The triage process and digital log book helped to reduce rent arrears in the period to April 2013 by £134,000 in comparison with the previous year, with 97 per cent of tenants completing their forms electronically and 75 per cent of prospective tenants self-serving online and registering their details, which saves time and therefore money in tenancy interviews.

Rushcliffe Borough Council worked extensively with partners to provide the necessary support to their customers, which included collaborating with organisations that offered training in literacy and ICT skills. The council also launched a user-friendly website to assist customers in self-service for their universal credit. Channel shift was then further encouraged with a marketing campaign with the strapline "Don't stand in line, get on-line". The council has now removed the paper form.

North Dorset District Council improved digital inclusion for the scheme. Twenty-five per cent of claimants did not have broadband at home, especially in more rural areas, so the council offered computers in local libraries with access to broadband, with staff offering assistance. Organisations such as parish councils also provide help points. They redesigned the online form so that it could be completed in 35 minutes with reasonable ICT skills.

Many councils have taken the opportunity to provide assistance and support to customers. An unnamed divorced mother of three from Melton was supported in overcoming her drug addiction, debt and heavy drinking. She is now employed as a carer for the elderly. She says:

"The change has been massive and the support and help I've had is amazing!"

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37 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295504/la-led-pilots-preparing-for-universal-credit.pdf

Chapter 4 – findings from the evaluation

4.1 Emerging themes

The examples in the previous chapter highlight how councils are at the forefront of applying technology to make local services both more customer-centric and efficient. In particular, there is clear evidence from the case studies referenced that applying technology effectively can generate actual cost savings.

In addition, a number of wider messages are apparent:

• Emerging technologies are supporting the move in many councils from a focus on direct service delivery towards a greater emphasis on playing a community leadership and enabling role in their local areas. Social media for instance are increasingly allowing individuals and groups to get in touch with each other, share information and resolve each other's problems.

• Meanwhile developments in mobile and web technologies are providing ever-expanding opportunities for citizens to self-serve or to interact with public services electronically, potentially reducing demand or diverting it to cheaper channels. They are also enabling staff to work effectively while on the move, sharing information across agencies, reducing operational costs and eliminating duplication, and improving productivity.

• The perspective of councils is becoming increasingly customer-centric in ways which encourage both efficiency and access to services. The increasing availability of data and engagement with citizens allows the customer to be seen in the round, not just through their use of transactional services. Services, for example for older vulnerable adults or young mothers, are starting to be designed primarily around their needs, not in service 'silos'.

• The approach to the design of digital services is increasingly about designing for mobile first, with a responsive approach which flexes to the web – with the choice and balance of appropriate channels, including the web, informed by understanding gained through customer insight.

• Increasingly, councils are having the confidence, and facing the requirement, to 'switch off' some of the traditional face-to-face and telephone means of accessing services, where they have good evidence that supported self-service, ranging from assistance in libraries and community centres to web chat and voice recognition, does provide an effective solution. But there remains a need to make sure that the whole community are enabled to access the services they need, so a route for exceptions will always be required.

• Initiatives such as the PSN and UKBD are providing an essential infrastructure that will allow greater access to the public services online as well as enable councils and government as a whole (and potentially, at some stage, private and community sector partners) to connect efficiently with each other, to share information securely and to build services more closely around citizens' needs.

• The trend towards ease of use in technology – for instance, in tablet computers – is also making it easier for some potentially excluded groups, such as older people, to take advantage of digital

services. For example, the number of people aged 65 and over accessing the internet has risen by more than a quarter in the past year, driven by a three-fold increase in the use of tablet computers to go online.[38]

Overall, then, trends in technology and digital are supporting the localism agenda and the thrust of the 2011 Localism Act, the aim of which was to devolve more decision-making powers to communities and to give local government new freedoms and flexibilities. Councils can now choose from a growing array of technologies how best to meet the needs of their citizens, businesses and communities.

However, it remains vital that decisions about how to apply these technologies and digital tools are taken at local level. For instance, a council where there is a high percentage of households and businesses with access to superfast broadband may focus on developing its online channel as its main contact point, whereas another council with a high proportion of older residents may focus more on tele-care and the provision of assisted access.

It is also crucial that an awareness of digital inclusion is built into any initiatives from an early stage in order to ensure that all citizens can benefit from the opportunities that technology can bring.

4.2 Continuing challenges

However, challenges remain at both national and local level:

• Within individual councils, it is still often difficult to identify the savings that have been realised by investments in technology and digital tools and approaches. There is a need to do more baseline analysis before implementing new initiatives so that evidence for improvement is clear.

• In the sector as a whole, there is much innovation and good practice. But as always it remains a challenge to find effective ways of highlighting and sharing the progress that councils are making. We hope that reports such as this contribute to this process.

• Much of the infrastructure is in place for partners at local level to share information and resources, and many of the technical barriers are being addressed. However, the issue of sharing is deeply cultural and there is much work still to do to build trust between different parts of the public sector.

• There remains a disconnection between how national programmes are designed and implemented at central government level and how they are experienced in localities. National programmes often seem to be devised in isolation from each other and councils and their local partners are faced with trying to knit together often competing or overlapping demands.

• Central government departments and agencies also seem to discount the real practical experience that councils can offer. We need to move towards co-design of national programmes, rather than seeing local government as merely the delivery channel for a set of pre-packaged initiatives.

• The evidence is that producing a really well designed easy-to-use digital channel or system is only the first step. The service then needs to be marketed, people need to trust it and to feel that their data is being handled securely and that using the service will bring benefits to them and not just to government.

• The core challenge is often around changing behaviours and cultures; amongst the public, and

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38 http://www.digitalbydefaultnews.co.uk/2014/05/02/more-older-people-accessing-internet-thanks-to-tablets

also within services which are facing significant challenges in terms of workload and budget reductions, and are sometimes unable or unwilling to respond to those within local government who have the responsibility for redesigning services using digital and technological solutions. There needs to be much wider sharing of the possibilities and a real effort to build understanding across whole organisations, as well as appropriate investment in change management and co-design of services if the 'digital dividend' is to be reaped.

A recent report from Deloitte, **Making digital default: Understanding citizen attitudes,**[39] highlighted that, while 88 per cent of the public are explicitly open to engaging with the public sector online, they were partly held back by trust issues, with 33 per cent of people thinking that misuse of data was a likely outcome of sharing data across the public sector (and only 18 per cent thinking that service improvement was a likely outcome). The report emphasised the critical importance of "online services that are so well designed . . . that people will opt to go online", with end-to-end digital processes, clear online guarantees to build trust, and signposting, incentivisation, and behaviour change techniques deployed to encourage uptake.

4.3 Looking to the future

Looking ahead we can foresee:

- an ever greater role for councils in enhancing the digital infrastructure and capabilities of their areas in order to support local economic growth and regeneration. This might involve further work to implement superfast broadband, to build digital platforms on which local public, private and third sector organisations – or even volunteers – can advertise their services, or to provide local SMEs with support or advice on improving their digital skills.

- the opportunity for councils to be a 'platform' in a different sense, by providing the online locations and access to data for local community development, mutual support and greater self-service and self-help, and by encouraging the creation of apps and tools for local people to use local government and other public data more effectively

- an increasing focus on addressing the cultural and organisational barriers to effective information sharing, since this is at the heart of so many initiatives to improve services and reduce costs – whether operating community budgets, improving public health, or delivering more joined-up services for troubled families

- a major role for councils in providing 'assisted digital' support to those people who are unable or unwilling to use technology and digital tools, for instance working with carers so that they can help the people they are looking after.

All of this implies a continuing evolution in local government's roles and responsibilities, with councils maintaining their focus on delivering excellent services but at the same time enhancing their skills in areas such community facilitation and support, commissioning and market making, communications, branding and quality assurance.

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39   http://www.digitalbydefaultnews.co.uk/2014/05/02/more-older-people-accessing-internet-thanks-to-tablets

Chapter 5 – conclusions and next steps

Councils are at the heart of their communities, enabling businesses to thrive and citizens and residents to live in clean, safe and prosperous places. Acting often as the first point of contact and facilitator for local people, they help citizens and businesses gain access to the support and services they need from across the public sector.

In the face of the continuing cuts to finances and increasing levels of demand, there is a pressing need to join up across the public sector, to adopt a coherent multi-agency approach to society's needs, to target services to where they are most needed, and to respond and adapt to a rapidly changing world.

The effective implementation and utilisation of technology and digital tools and approaches gives councils the ability to deal with these challenges more effectively. By providing those citizens capable of self-serving with the means to do so, councils can focus precious resources upon those in society most in need. And supporting the community to develop self-help approaches can prevent some demand from arising in the first place. Equally importantly, enabling staff to work more effectively while they are out and about or operating from different office sites makes them more productive and reduces costs.

This report demonstrates not only that there is significant technological innovation in local government, but also that it is being applied with real skill and thoughtfulness. Councils have learned lessons from technology projects in the past, and are increasingly using agile and flexible project management approaches to implementation, belying the myth that the public sector cannot effectively implement change supported by information technology.

Councils are approaching innovation from their natural starting point of understanding and engaging with customers. There is a pragmatic approach to technology, first testing out solutions and then implementing them. As a result, councils and suppliers are able to use the knowledge they have developed to quickly apply emerging technologies to a local government context.

This report does not attempt to be comprehensive but has sought to give an indication of the innovative approaches being taken and of how councils are utilising the technology and digital tools at their disposal to tackle a number of complex challenges, as well as to deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

Pioneer work is still underway and many advances in technology that were considered to be innovative and exciting in local government only a few years ago, including smart and pre-pay cards, improved networks and IP telephony, integrated customer relationship management systems, customer data stores, online transactional forms, interactive voice recognition, and even the use of social media have now either become so ubiquitous that they do not merit inclusion here, or have been replaced or supplemented by the next wave of technology which is being enthusiastically explored and applied.

We fully expect that, in another few years, innovations such as secure collaboration platforms, digital engagement, crowdsourcing and innovation tools, integrated mobile and flexible working solutions,

apps with live updates and responsive technology, and the use of sensor technology for parking, analysis of road quality, and all kinds of public interaction and feedback, will be 'standard solutions' adopted by a large proportion of councils.

Continued investment in the necessary digital infrastructure as well as in the capacity to change, despite the challenging financial conditions, is critical. Drawing on customer insight and using this to redesign services so that they are better targeted is where local government leads the way, and this remains essential to the effective implementation of technology and digital tools.

Strong leadership will be required to tackle the barriers and drive progress, while improved procurement processes that are more fit for the rapidly changing world of technology need to be considered. Addressing the challenges of sharing data, as well as mining the data already available, is also essential. More effective collaboration across the public sector and with suppliers will create a more productive environment in which to innovate and will enable councils to continue to set the pace of public service improvement.

Experimentation with new technology to improve local public services and reduce costs, followed by roll-out and widespread adoption, is a continual process. It has been happening since local government began, and is accelerating with the pace of change. Nationally-funded programmes, for example LGOL, have clearly provided the resources to help capture and share the learning generated, as a result helping to mainstream the lessons for the benefit of all.

As the rate of technology change increases, there is a clear need for further support for capturing and sharing learning to ensure that councils are not left behind. We therefore need to look at how best we can enable more councils to draw on the good work being done by their peers.

The LGA will continue to work with partner bodies both in local and central government and in the wider public sector to promote the practical experience and good practice already evident in what councils are doing. We will also continue to address the barriers and blockers to progress including how improvements can be made in areas such as information sharing, procurement, and the delivery of high-quality technological infrastructure and capability.

Appendix 1 – list of relevant publications

Office of National Statistics (ONS) quarterly national update on internet access, February 2014 (http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_353031.pdf)

Cabinet Office Digital Landscape Survey, November 2012 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-landscape-research)

Ofcom Communications Market Report, August 2013 (http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr13/uk/)

Socitm annual Better Connected surveys (http://www.socitm.net/research/socitm-insight/better-connected)

New Local Government Network (NGLN) Smart people smart places: realising digital local government (http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/2014/smart-people-smart-places-realising-digital-local-government)

The Institute for Public Policy Reform (IPPR) Building tech-powered public services (http://www.ippr.org/publication/55/11600/building-tech-powered-public-services)

The Need to Know Review No. 3 – Local government in the digital age (http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11515/Local+government+in+the+digital+age+%28Need+to+know+Knowledge+Navigator+number+3%29/544d1515-3483-4a58-8da4-da92eca6126b)

The Carnegie Trust UK Making digital real (http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2014/making-digital-real)

The RSA 2020 public services reports (http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/community-and-public-services/2020-public-services)

Local Government Online (LGOL) programme outputs (http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/efficiencybetter/localegovernment/products/)

Front office shared services (FOSS) programme outputs (http://www.local.gov.uk/home/-/journal_content/56/10180/3511020/ARTICLE)

The LGA Customer-Led Transformation Programme outputs (http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510959/ARTICLE)

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L14-303