Digital Strategy 2017-2020
Foreword

As the introduction of new technologies continues to change the way we interact with each other and the world around us, the publication of this Digital Strategy is a defining moment for Brent as we forge a bold path on our journey to becoming a digital borough.

This will be a borough that embraces the opportunities presented by digital innovation to improve lives and deliver local priorities more efficiently. It will be a place where the council works with residents, partners, communities and businesses to jointly progress an ambitious programme of digital transformation whilst ensuring that all of Brent benefits and no one is left behind.

The last 20 years have been both frenetic and exciting. We have seen advancements in technology that no one could have predicted, which have impacted the lives of local people in ways and to degrees as diverse as Brent’s population.

For many of our residents, using digital technology in everyday lives has already become second nature. We have listened to these residents and want to make it as easy for them to access services and transact with the council as it is to shop or order a taxi online. For those who are less digitally confident, or who lack access, we will provide the support and tools they need to thrive.

We will use data more effectively to redesign service models around the user, eliminating duplication and working with partners to boost innovation and deliver more seamless and joined-up offers, which harness the latest technology to prevent and respond to need in ways that were not previously possible.

We have engaged with local small and medium enterprises and in response will be developing a digital infrastructure that supports high speed broadband and public Wi-Fi in our high streets and business districts. This will be key in encouraging economic growth across Brent and will be the driving force for connecting and uniting all of us, making our communities stronger.

This Digital Strategy sets out how, in this ever-developing landscape of technology and innovation, we will embrace these exciting changes by putting them at the heart of our Brent 2020 vision and making the most of our new digital infrastructure to ensure that Brent Council is an ambitious leader now and in the future; working smarter and delivering better services for all.

Cllr Margaret McLennan
Deputy Leader, London Borough of Brent
Introduction

The digital revolution has touched the lives of people worldwide and has forever transformed the way we live, work and do business. Technology has helped connect people and bring them closer together; improved access to information and services; and created vast opportunities for innovation and businesses growth. But the speed of change has left some of the most vulnerable members of society digitally isolated and has seen many traditional businesses and skill-sets become obsolete.

This pace of change will continue to accelerate, presenting countless more challenges and opportunities. The Council will work to ensure local residents, partners and businesses are able to thrive in the digital future, and play active roles in shaping Brent into a digital borough where technology is used to improve the lives and life chances of everyone.

Brent's ambitions in transforming into a digital borough will be realised through achieving the dual and interdependent aims of becoming a digital place and a digital council:

As a DIGITAL PLACE we will have borough-wide digital infrastructure providing instantaneous connectivity. We will have a training and education framework that nurtures digital skills and expertise, with clear pathways into high-value contemporary employment. We will have an environment that emboldens a culture of digital entrepreneurship and innovation, attracts new businesses and supports the evolution of existing ones. Crucially it will be a place shaped by the strengths of Brent’s local neighbourhoods and destinations, harnessing digital to amplify and promote their unique qualities.

As a DIGITAL COUNCIL we will provide a digital offer in line with modern expectations. Our services and information will be more accessible and personalised, helping residents to make better informed choices. We will provide more efficient and value for money services, with leadership that empowers our workforce to use technology to work smarter across traditional structures and in new partnerships. We will help to connect people with each other and their communities and enable more residents to have their voices heard in influencing decision making. And we will provide resources and support to ensure all residents are digitally included.
The Brent 2020 vision sets out a change programme to deliver the best outcomes for Brent in anticipation of a new funding model linked closely to economic growth and the potential for devolved responsibilities for services that can impact this area. It focuses on five priorities around which we will align our resources: demand management, raising income, regeneration, employment and skills and business and housing growth.

The key characteristics of a thriving digital place and a successful digital council can be achieved by imbedding digital within these priorities. This digital strategy sets out our vision for how technology will be a catalyst for delivering each 2020 priority and how we as a council will work with and support local residents, partners and businesses on our journey to becoming a digital borough.
Demand Management

Helping people to help themselves

Brent residents have already demonstrated an appetite for accessing Council services via digital channels including MyAccount, the Cleaner Brent app and an increasing range of online forms. This channel shift has helped to manage demand and deliver considerable savings; with more to come by digitising further services, improving the online user experience and minimising back-office interventions in the transaction process. But most significantly there is massive untapped potential for digital solutions to help prevent, reduce or delay demand for relational council services such as social care. These are areas where the complex needs of residents cannot be met through standard transactions, but where digital can play a key role in tackling the root causes of demand.

example 1

Adult social care is the single largest expenditure for Brent Council. In the context of an aging population continuing to drive demand, an innovative approach is needed to sustain a high quality relational service within projected budgets.

To address this challenge, digital will enable earlier intervention through new analytics tools that collate data from across the council and health partners; identifying those at risk and supporting coordinated, targeted assistance before their need becomes severe. Digital solutions and apps will help residents to manage their own conditions and allow them to choose how, when and with who they share their health history; promoting more personalised and efficient services system-wide. Most importantly, digital will be key in connecting people with friends, family, volunteers and neighbourhood-based support, creating more resilient communities and local networks that reduce dependency on council services.

In 2020

In 2020, Brent residents will experience the benefit of seamless, joined up customer services through streamlined mid and back office functions in the Council and with its partners.
OUR DIGITAL OBJECTIVES FOR DEMAND MANAGEMENT ARE TO:

1. **Design more effective and preventative service models using advanced data analytics and business intelligence.** This includes combining data from a range of sources to understand whole systems and end-to-end journeys. It involves gleaning new insights and designing more efficient, responsive and personalised service models that can be iterated and improved on a frequent basis and promote self-help, self-care, prevention and pathways to partner organisations. It will support further channel shift and ensure that Officer expertise is targeted at the necessary points in the customer journey, freeing up officer time for higher value relational work.

2. **Make online the first choice for interacting with all council services.** This means providing a faster, better and enhanced customer experience through a slick, easy to use customer platform that works effectively across all devices and acts as digital front door for core council services – informing, assisting, segmenting and channelling users according to the complexity of their need. Key to this transformation is following user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) design principles, to ensure that the end user is included at the concept stage and is always at the forefront of our thinking on what constitutes ‘good’ in the new digital landscape. This improved offer will grow customer confidence in receiving the same outcome as non-digital channels, which will reduce demand for officer time as more customers choose and are able to access services using their preferred device. It is also essential in supporting the closure of higher cost non-digital channels as online will increasingly become the only way to access a range of council services.

**Example 2**
Brent Council is working with IBM and partners including schools and the police to build a predictive model that would potentially allow children most at risk of child sexual exploitation and child exploitation to be identified in advance. This project depends on combining a range of data from external partners and individual Brent services, as well as using unstructured information (text) from reports, to understand the strongest indicators.

Once this model has been developed and tested, IBM and Brent aim to generate regular reports and alerts for staff that come into regular contact with children, helping them to intervene as early as possible.

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*6 in TEN adults use a smartphone to go online both at home and elsewhere*  

*In 2020*  

Brent residents will be using smart phones and tablets securely to book, access and pay for all council services at a time and place of their choosing and will be able to track progress online.

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3 Adults’ media use and attitudes report, 2016. Ofcom.
3. **Ensure all residents have access to the resources and support they need to confidently access online information and services.** This will include increased access to free Wi-Fi, self-serve terminals, computers and other devices at locations across the borough, as well as targeted help for residents in becoming digitally enabled and more resilient by attaining the social and financial benefits of participating online. Assistance will be provided through a network of community hubs, delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector to ensure inclusion for the most vulnerable residents.

4. **Integrate channels, applications and workflows to enable seamless end-to-end transactions across a wider range of services, increase automation and maximise the first touch capability of council officers.** This is essential in raising the quality of our digital offer in line with modern expectations, improving business processes and eliminating unnecessary officer case handling and re-keying. More effective data sharing and verification methods, both internally and with partners, will improve the customer experience by minimising evidence requirements and supporting faster, more consistent and automated assessments and decisions for council services including housing, social care and benefits. This will reduce failure demand and enable more customers to independently complete full transactions and do business with the council at times of their choosing. Again, the end user will have a critical role to play in ensuring these channels, applications and workflows work in a way that suits their needs.

Brent residents will be able to access a network of community hubs operating, through the voluntary sector, with a virtual digital interface supported by a localised face-to-face offer for the most vulnerable.

Brent residents will be able to fully access and engage with housing management services to get quicker responses and track the progress of issues.

Brent residents will be asked to provide information once electronically, the information will be stored safely and used by the council when assessing eligibility across its functions.
5. **Enable digital communities that connect people with each other and local organisations.** Our digital communities, supported by a network of community hubs, will help build resilience, create choice and reduce demand on needs-led council services. The centrepiece workstream of this objective will be a digital marketplace – a platform, developed with community partners, which provides a safe and secure environment for suppliers and residents to transact (including spending personal budgets) and acts as a portal for accessing information, local partner services and community participation opportunities.

6. **Trial radical approaches and develop innovative solutions for new models of service delivery.** As new and disruptive business models emerge, we will anticipate and embrace opportunities for applying new technologies in improving the lives of local people and realising efficiencies. This will include capitalising on the Internet of Things (IoT) by using sensors and monitors to promote self-care and help vulnerable residents live more confidently and independently in their own homes for longer. By introducing drones into housing services we will perform quicker and cheaper inspections of high rise aerials, cables and roof gutters, eliminating the need for scaffolding and improving response times for issues reported by residents. We will also actively explore advancements in robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence for application in improved service delivery.

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**In 2020**

Brent residents will benefit from new assistive technologies that support them to live more independently, whilst at the same time reducing demand for council services.

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4 Adults’ media use and attitudes report, 2016. Ofcom.
Raising Income

Reducing budgets and uncertain new models of funding mean local authorities need to be intelligent in using their limited income raising powers to help subsidise core services. Digital provides many exciting opportunities for developing new revenue streams, maximising existing ones and enabling cashable savings.

example

In the last two years Brent has entered into an agreement with the Local Government Association (LGA) for the provision of ICT services and ongoing support, and has established a shared service for delivery of ICT services with the London Borough of Lewisham.

These separate arrangements have already generated significant revenue and savings as well as successfully marketing Brent’s ICT expertise to establish a strong position from which to capitalise on future opportunities. The scalability of the shared services model supports Brent’s plans to extend arrangements to other local authority partners and develop vital new income streams to safeguard delivery of core council services.

OUR DIGITAL OBJECTIVES FOR RAISING INCOME ARE TO:

1. Monetise our infrastructure through a range of digital commercial opportunities. This includes benefiting from the increasing demand from telecommunications companies for stronger 4G and future 5G networks by renting space for their small cell solutions on Brent owned buildings and street furniture. Similarly there are opportunities to generate income streams through leasing bandwidth capacity in our new digital CCTV system. There is also significant scope for generating advertising, sponsorship and other revenues through emerging digital platforms and, as more staff use digital tools to work from home and in the community, further office space in council buildings available to rent.
2. **Pursue and implement new service provision partnerships.** This includes more instances of shared service arrangements for Brent ICT, new shared service arrangements where digital will enable traditional services to be joined up or delivered remotely, and capitalising where private sector businesses and other organisations will pay for Brent expertise.

3. **Rationalise the Brent application estate and progress further rationalisation opportunities presented by commonalities across an expanding shared services network.** Significant efficiency and cashable savings will be made through reducing support and licencing costs by consolidating and streamlining applications both internally and in partnerships.

4. **Encourage more payments through seamless transactions and smart debt recovery.** By improving our online transaction capabilities it will be easier for residents and businesses to arrange direct debits and make payments for fees, charges and services. This will also involve supporting with new Civic Enterprise initiatives to introduce smarter ways of requesting and accepting payments (and tracking receipts) in line with the changing expectations of customers.

   Through a digitally joined-up approach to debt recovery we will know more about council debt and will utilise improved verification processes to develop personalised and innovative approaches to recovery. This process will provide a better understanding of the data we hold and may also present opportunities to repackage and market it where appropriate.

5. **Develop and use real-time management information that combines holistic spend and service pressure data.** Greater and timelier intelligence will increase understanding of key services and processes in relation to cost and enable us to more accurately forecast and realise operational and supply chain efficiencies.

6. **Develop a strong position to access innovation funding.** This includes horizon scanning across areas including entrepreneurship, digital infrastructure, investment start-ups, digital enablement, data protection and smart cities/communities, and understanding how the various streams could be implemented and joined-up for highest impact within our digital vision.
By 2020 local authorities will be reliant on business rates as the primary source of funding for services. This means that we must develop an offer that helps our existing businesses prosper in the digital place and makes Brent a desirable location for new and established businesses from across the digital spectrum, growing our business rates base and providing new employment opportunities.

example

In December 2016 Brent completed phase two of its digitally integrated high street plan for Wembley High Road. This year long project involved engaging and working with 20 SMEs to develop a bespoke, joined-up website and social media presence, with content specifically celebrating its diverse heritage, food, retail and leisure offer.

The 20 SMEs participated in a series of digital skills workshops, and benefited from further one-to-one mentoring to ensure the skills and tools provided were suitable for their business, were integrated into their day to day operations, and could be used regularly and sustainably - with all participants confirming they would continue to use these skills following completion of the project.

Recommendations to replicate the successes of this model across Brent’s town centres are now being progressed, with a key aim of ensuring more local businesses gain the essential digital competencies required to adapt and prosper in the digital place.
OUR DIGITAL OBJECTIVES FOR BUSINESS AND HOUSING GROWTH ARE TO:

1. **Ensure local SMEs have the support they need to thrive in the digital place.** Approximately three quarters of Brent’s current businesses are SMEs, with many having no online presence. We will work with these businesses to understand their digital needs and how opportunities in online trading, marketing and digital efficiencies could benefit them. Working with partners in education and the private sector we will develop a support framework to ensure local SMEs can access the suite of digital skills their business needs to compete and succeed in the changing world.

2. **Become a digital enterprise friendly borough.** Linking with our regeneration objectives, this includes providing the best conditions for digital businesses to collaborate and evolve together, including establishing information sharing agreements and joint workspaces. We will become a workspace and incubator champion, using a place-based approach to encourage clustering of businesses and organisations, create exciting new partnerships and build interconnected digital business communities.

3. **Create an Incentive Framework to stimulate growth.** This will articulate what we will do to make it easy for new digital businesses to locate, invest and grow in each of Brent’s digitally themed destination areas. It will promote our next generation infrastructure and will include a digital gateway for businesses, which enables them to access funding sources, find cost effective premises and back office support and ensure they comply with regulations and planning requirements - providing a clear and attractive offer to prospective digital start-ups and SMEs.

4. **Become a hotbed for trialling and developing new and innovative ideas and business opportunities.** Brent is committed to developing new service models using IoT technology and exploring the application of robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence in improved service delivery; and will ensure that the infrastructure these solutions depend on is in place. Businesses are invited to capitalise on these resources and open data to innovate and exploit commercial opportunities. This will include tenders from the council inviting bids to work in partnership on radical pilot initiatives including the use of sensors, monitors and drones in local government spheres such as wellbeing, transport and environment.

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“**The most digital small businesses are twice as likely to report an increase in turnover than the least digital.**”

Local businesses will have access to a digital gateway that enables them to access funding sources, find cost effective premises, back office support, and ensure they comply with regulations and planning requirements.

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Employment and Skills

From digitally excluded and vulnerable residents to computing graduates and tech entrepreneurs; we will ensure the right information, services and conditions are in place for all stakeholders to confidently interact with the digital council and thrive in the digital place.

example

The digital revolution has long since displaced many mid-skill jobs that were characterised by routine, repetitive tasks. Basic IT skills are now a requirement for most employment opportunities and, as digital technologies advance and become further imbedded across all industries, computerisation is forecast to replace nearly half of today’s jobs over the next two decades.

In terms of digital inclusion, Brent residents compare well with majority of other London boroughs but there remain pockets of exclusion in some of our most deprived areas. Brent also has a significantly higher proportion of workers in the least skilled jobs bracket - 24% compared to 14% in London as a whole – making it more vulnerable to the next wave of digital displacement.

To address these concerns, we will work in partnership with local organisations, businesses and all levels of education, to develop a collaborative system that creates the right skills, opportunities and pathways to support local people in accessing contemporary employment in the rapidly changing landscape.
OUR DIGITAL OBJECTIVES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS ARE TO:

1. **Ensure full digital literacy across the borough.** There is an existing offer of basic IT skills and a range of digital inclusion themed activity delivered by partners in the community and voluntary, social housing, education and private sectors - as well as core Brent Start courses and further opportunities to negotiate additional offers from partners as social value outputs. Using digital solutions this loose borough-wide network will be joined-up, developed and better coordinated for greatest impact.

2. **Upskill at-risk workers.** This involves a proactive approach to identifying and engaging with unskilled workers in industries placed at risk by the digital revolution and helping them move to proficiency levels that give them choices within the digital labour market.

3. **Build new partnerships with key businesses and industries.** These relationships will be essential for developing access routes into digital employment for apprentices, mature hires and graduates, and will ensure key private partners have a greater stake in a local digital ecosystem of education, local government and business.

4. **Enable the creation of an agile, highly skilled and digitally included future workforce.** This will require providing local young people with sufficient opportunities to gain digital skills early and at all points in their educational journey. Increased engagement with young people and direct actions such as coding clubs and community hackathons will help grow their appetite for digital innovation and nurture the entrepreneurs of tomorrow. Crucially this will include working with education, business and industry to establish clear and accessible pathways through the system and into digital employment for people of all ages. Workforce progression will be supported by the Apprenticeship Levy as a tool to boost investment by employers in workforce development for the future, taking into consideration areas of growth such as digital skills or digital apprenticeships, which can be applied to a range of roles such as digital marketing, IT, creative industries or manufacturing.

5. **Develop and build a creative education quarter in partnership with a higher education establishment.** The campus will have a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) focus and enable a vibrant university community with access to state of the art facilities, including a digital hub. As an influential council partner it will help shape the offer of local secondary schools aspiring to become part of its pipeline and can be promoted as the key step for local young people in their journey to gaining the skills that help them flourish in the digital place. It will support innovation and future business start-ups and provide a strong incentive for high value digital employers considering Brent as a location for their business.

43% of tech businesses say they face challenges finding digitally skilled workers ⁵

The advertised salary for digital roles is 36% higher than the national average.⁷

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⁵⁶⁷ Tech Nation 2016 report, Nesta and Tech City UK.
Regeneration

New offices, facilities and marketplaces have been the most visible signs of regeneration in recent years at sites across the borough including Wembley, Old Oak and Park Royal, South Kilburn, Willesden and Harlesden. Moving forward we will use digital as a catalyst to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions in the borough by building the infrastructure that will connect Brent and enable our local neighbourhoods to develop into dynamic and attractive destinations in which to live, work and do business.

example

Brent is celebrated for its cultural diversity and unique town centres and neighbourhoods. From iconic Wembley, to vibrant Harlesden and trendy Kilburn, no two places are the same and each is characterised by different institutions, businesses, communities and priorities.

Using data sensors on street furniture and new Internet of Things (IoT) infrastructure we will capture and communicate information in real-time to develop shared insight and faster responses to local priorities such as sports and entertainment events, traffic, parking, footfall, waste management and lighting. This technology will enable more interaction between people and the places they live and work, increasing their stake in the community through new ways of connecting with and influencing the environment.

This same infrastructure, highlighted alongside the distinctive assets of each local place, will be used to market Brent as a borough of multiple digital destinations, attracting investment and enabling regeneration to be shaped by Brent’s diverse strengths.
OUR DIGITAL OBJECTIVES FOR REGENERATION ARE TO:

1. **Futureproof Brent's digital infrastructure.** This will include delivering ubiquitous public Wi-Fi and mobile access, secure cloud technologies, smart grid linked sensors, 5G networks and fibre connections for ultrafast broadband. This will be achieved by imbedding digital requirements within our planning and regeneration strategies, agreeing new private partnerships and focussed council investment in key areas.

2. **Become a ‘smart borough’**. This means using digital to coordinate and manage our assets through increased connectivity and sharing of data and information. To achieve this we will ensure the provision of an open data platform and a targeted and joined-up approach to developing a smart grid of connectivity across the borough. This model will enable the council, residents, partners and businesses to access and use data to develop pro-active solutions to social issues including planning, transport, energy, health and community safety, as well as opening up unlimited new commercial opportunities as a test bed for developers.

3. **Develop local areas into themed digital destinations.** Our modern digital infrastructure will enable us to present a compelling investment case to the information and knowledge based community. Linking with wider plans, we will work with stakeholders to develop areas and neighbourhoods around specific digital themes, implementing a place based marketing approach linking to their traditional strengths and unique qualities, and encouraging cross-sector partnerships, clustering and an integrated business community.

4. **Increase community connectivity and coordination.** This means using technology to put people in touch with and make more effective contributions to their local community. It includes working with and building the capacity of community partners to co-design and co-produce peer-to-peer platforms for sharing skills and expertise; identifying and responding to need at a neighbourhood level and coordinating community and voluntary group initiatives for the highest impact.

5. **Increase participation in civic life.** This involves creating modern pathways and more effective methods for residents and other stakeholders to engage with the council, have their voices heard and influence policy and decision making. It will include harnessing social media and emerging digital technologies to reach all of Brent’s diverse communities, understanding key issues and providing the skills and forums to jointly develop solutions.

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2 Tech Nation 2016 report, Nesta and Tech City UK. (% is based on the profiles of 27 key digital tech clusters across the UK).
Governance Arrangements

Delivery of this digital strategy will be overseen by the Brent Digital Board and championed by the Deputy Leader of the council. The Brent Digital Board is chaired by the Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships – the digital lead for the Corporate Management Team – and its membership includes the Strategic Director of Resources. The board will drive and support the ambitious programme of change and will be responsible for:

- Identifying, prioritising and coordinating digital work packages
- Acting as the gateway that formally assesses and approves digital work packages
- Aligning and deploying resources, skills and expertise for most effective delivery of digital work packages
- Ensuring membership of the board is representative and has the appropriate skills and authority
- Supporting the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) in fostering an organisational culture that values, protects and uses information for the benefit of its customers
- Linking closely with other Brent 2020 strategic boards - the Commissioning and Procurement Board, Business Development Board and Civic Enterprise Board - to ensure strategic oversight and alignment of priorities
Key Commitments

We recognise that the scale of transformation outlined in this strategy represents an unprecedented culture shift for the council, residents, partners and businesses. It will change the relationship between the council and stakeholders and have far reaching influence over future service models, the customer experience and the role of the council and its workforce.

To support this sustained programme of change, delivery of this digital strategy is underpinned by the following key commitments:

- We will work with residents, partners and businesses to co-design and co-deliver transformation, ensuring that Brent’s evolution as a digital borough is shaped by the energy, ideas and requirements of local people and key stakeholders.

- We will imbed our digital vision within our policies and strategies including HR, Planning, Regeneration, Employment and Skills, ICT and Engagement.

- We will deliver robust information security measures to protect resident and stakeholder data from misuse and cyber threats, and we will safeguard their privacy through increasingly secure and modern information governance and data sharing arrangements both internally and with partners.

- We will invest in our workforce to ensure they have the resources and agile skills they need to innovate, collaborate and excel in the digital workplace. This will include imbedding a culture of change across the organisation, moving away from a traditional ‘service and department’ approach to working in flexible, multi-disciplinary teams that use methodology aligned with the Local Government Digital Service Standard to iterate continuous service improvements in response to user needs.