Gravesham
Borough Council

Digital Strategy

2015-2018

Gravesham Borough Council

December 2014

IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ✔

CUSTOMERS
Easy to use and accesible services

OFFICERS
New skills, processes and culture

REDUCE COSTS

TRANSACTIONS
Promoting and encouraging the most effective methods

SYSTEMS
Reducing systems & Integration

Title	Page

Introduction

The Customer Service and Access Strategy 2013-2018 was endorsed by the Councils Cabinet in May 2013. The four key aims of this strategy are;

- Excellent Customer Service
- Service Delivery
- Engagement, Consultation and Equalities
- Accessibility

This digital strategy supports the customer service and access strategy and aims to expand the **service delivery** options by providing and encouraging customers to use the most convenient and cost-effective digital contact channels, where appropriate. It also compliments the council's IT strategy currently being updated. The IT strategy will aim to ensure that we have the equipment, knowledge and knowhow to deliver the most technical aspects of effective digital services.

Providing an enhanced digital contact channel allows our customers (residents, businesses and partners) to interact with us in a simple, convenient and secure way. Giving them a way to; access, deliver, interact, share and manage information and service requests in a way which they will choose to use first. Examples of different types of interactions are;

- Applying for a service, e.g. bulky waste collection;
- Paying for a service, e.g. a planning application;
- Reporting a problem, e.g. fly-tipping;
- Managing interactions, e.g. email alerts when work has been completed, ability to view how much council tax owed;
- Interacting with data presented online to support decision making and/or entitlement, for example benefits claims; and
- Engaging in real time using interactive tools such as social media, for example in emergency circumstances.

We are at a crossroad for digital services: accept the status quo and deliver what our customers want using what we have already got, or changing how we view (and do) things fundamentally. Our intent to improve customer interaction, service delivery, value for money and the efficiency that digital services can bring has been shown with the formation of a digital team in September 2014.

This strategy sets a vision of service improvements that the *council* can achieve by embracing digital services and keeping service delivery simple. Digital services should not be seen as a challenge but as an evolution.

1.   The digital landscape

1.1   Nationally

The office of national statistics recently quoted that

- 76% percent of the adult population (around 38 million people) use the internet daily.
- 58% of the adult population have used a smart phone to access the internet in the last three months.
- 84% of households have access to the internet
- The most popular way of getting online is through fixed line broadband and/or mobile broadband.

16% of all households have no internet access at all. 53% of these say they have no interest in using the internet and 32% say they lack the skills to use it effectively. Households with one adult aged over 65 have the lowest take up proportion with 59% having no access.

The growth of internet access has been exponential. More people are online, more people have smart mobile phones and the expectation of finding what you want, when you want it, is driving whole industries into a new direction.

These statistics recognise that not everyone will transact digitally and contact channels will remain where appropriate. This strategy gives focus on those will who can transact digitally.

Source: ONS - Internet Access - Households and Individuals, 2014

1.2   Gravesham

To understand our local picture we commissioned CACI, a customer profiling and segmentation specialist to provide a picture of Gravesham using their software tool ACORN.

Acorn is a geodemographic segmentation of the UK's population. It segments households, postcodes and neighbourhoods. By analysing significant social factors and population behaviour, it provides precise information and an in-depth understanding of the different types of people.

Acorn draws on a wide range of data sources, both commercial and public sector Open Data and administrative data. These include the Land Registry, commercial sources of information on age of residents, ethnicity profiles, benefits data, population density, and data on social housing and other rental property. In addition CACI has created proprietary databases, including the location of prisons, traveller sites, age-restricted housing, care homes, high-rise buildings and student accommodation. In addition they utilise the traditional inputs of the Census of Population and large-volume lifestyle surveys.

Acorn provides some interesting results about the Gravesham population's propensity to use digital channels. Initially the population is broken to five main categories:

Gravesham's Profile

Category	Acorn Category Description	Population	% of population	National %
1	Affluent Achievers	16,431	15.8	22.7
2	Rising Prosperity	3,598	3.5	9.3
3	Comfortable Communities	37,812	36.3	26.7
4	Financially Stretched	22,653	21.8	22.5
5	Urban Adversity	23,108	22.2	17.8

These broad categories are then expanded to sub categories which can be broken down further.

Main Category	Acorn Sub-Category Description	Population	% of population	National %
3	Steady Neighbourhoods	23,651	22.7	8.3
4	Striving Families	10,966	10.5	8.0
5	Young Hardship	9,650	9.3	5.2
1	Executive Wealth	8,531	8.2	12.4
1	Mature Money	7,729	7.4	9.0
4	Modest Means	7,665	7.4	7.5
5	Struggling Estates	7,531	7.2	7.9
3	Successful Suburbs	6,494	6.2	6.2
5	Difficult Circumstances	5,927	5.7	4.8
2	Career Climbers	3,598	3.5	6.0
3	Starting Out	3,358	3.2	4.0
4	Poorer Pensioners	3,235	3.1	4.5
3	Countryside Communities	2,301	2.2	5.7
3	Comfortable Seniors	2,008	1.9	2.6
4	Student Life	787	0.8	2.5
1	Lavish Lifestyles	171	0.2	1.3

84% of the Gravesham population fall into the top nine sub-categories. After careful analysis of the data and cross checking against national information various assumptions can be made, specifically that;

- 63% access the internet on a daily basis
- 33% access the internet on a weekly basis
- 50% use social media
- 73% own a mobile phone connected to the internet

Top three categories

The category 'Steady Neighbourhoods' which nationally accounts for 8% of the population actually represents nearly 23% of the population of Gravesham. The category is more than likely to own a tablet PC, access the internet for financial, entertainment, lifestyle and shopping reasons.

The category 'Striving Families' which nationally accounts for 8% of the population represents nearly 11% of the population of Gravesham. This category is less likely to have traditional fixed line access the internet, with the mobile phone being used instead.

The category 'Young Hardship' which nationally accounts for 5% represents nearly 9% of the population of Gravesham. This category uses the internet frequently and again mobile phone is the method of choice.

In common with both 'Striving Families' and 'Young Hardship' categories, access to gravesham.gov.uk by mobile device accounts for 35% of the total website use, indicating that the demand is in line generally with profiling data.

Conclusion

Internet access across Gravesham is high, with most residents using it regularly. A large proportion can access the internet via multiple methods and nearly a quarter of the residents are more than likely to purchase new technology indicating the demand for digital devices is also high.

Even where social mobility is hampered by financial difficulties the 'smart' mobile phone has given more people access to the internet than was once possible. Social media access is at its peak with the financially stretched, although this does form a relatively small part of Gravesham's population. Residents least likely to access the internet are aged 65+ (as mirrored in the ONS statistics) and they are less likely to use it for any purposes, let alone for council services specifically.

The power of social media in delivering messages and engaging with customers has been recognised by businesses and it is often used as their primary method of engagement. The council has already recognised this and steps have been undertaken to increase the use of social media. However, the expectation of residents to be able to transact and receive information digitally must also be met and therefore all future developments must be designed with mobile phone use in mind.

Finally, recognising and addressing digital inclusion as well as guiding customers through transitioning service delivery channels is key to digital strategy delivery. We must ensure that we help and guide customers through online services where they need help.

2.   Gravesham's digital vision

We will design digital services that:

- are designed with our customers needs first
- reduce the cost of established delivery models
- promote digital uptake by being convenient, secure and simple to use
- avoid the need for multiple contact from customers about the same issue
- are available through our website first, wherever possible
- are optimised for mobile device use
- are integrated to our core corporate systems
- are tested and refined by our customers

We will enhance the systems that provide and support our digital services by:

- redesigning our website to be transactional with improved, simplified content to increase customer confidence, usage and interaction.
- rationalising the systems and processes used at the customers first point of contact to provide a more integrated customer experience
- working towards implementing fully integrated 'MyAccount' functionality to offer our customers individual online accounts for most council services
- using our communications and marketing to direct customers to the most appropriate channels.

We will support officers in making the most of digital tools and services by:

- improving their skills on how to communicate effectively through digital channels.
- working with departmental 'Digital Leaders' to promote continuous learning and improvement of services and processes

We will enhance our digital channels by delivering services by:

- rationalising the councils social media presence
- using social media to provide service based information and respond to customer service requests
- pilot web based chat software to help customers on our website

3. Our current position

3.1 Where are we today?

In 2012/13 it is estimated that less that 5% of the council's transactions (excluding payments) were 'confirmed digital' (where a significant part of the transaction is completed online).
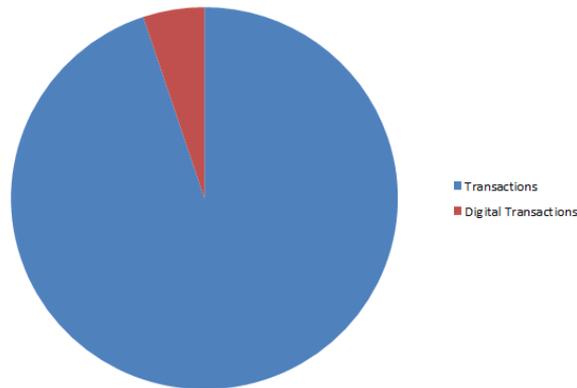
The use of technology across the authority to deliver services online varies greatly. There is no particular reason for these differences, but clearly culture, opportunity and resources available have played a part.

There have also been historic manual ways of working which have in the past precluded the option to deliver services digitally. Although there has been technology implemented to give customers access to information online, there is more to do. We have consistently received feedback that customers want to and expect to do more on our website[1]. Social media is used across the council to promote the events and the ongoing work of the council. There are opportunities to use social media to promote services and to interact with customers about service requests.

It is anticipated that by the end of the 2014/15 financial year www.gravesham.gov.uk will have reached the significant milestone of over 2 million page views in twelve months. Over the last four years calls to customer services have risen on average by 13% per annum.

The use of mobile devices to access our website has also grown significantly, from 12% of all website views in 2011/12 to 35% in 2013/14, in line with an increase in mobile device ownership more generally.

The number of electronic forms is small and direct systems integration has not been achieved through them. Use of the local land and property gazetteer (LLPG) is not to its maximum effect, although investment has been made in this area to improve the quality of the data.

[1]Source: Customer Satisfaction Surveys / Website Feedback Questionnaires (2014)

4. Building our digital future

To effectively use digital services and change how we interact with our customers we need to work in four key areas. These areas, their current status and how this will change over time are detailed below:

4.1 Understanding our customers

When	Our position
Now	Little engagement with customers about digital service improvement
	Lack of intelligence around customers digital preferences
	Website analytics not used to inform developments
Transitional (2015 – 17)	Customer demographics regularly refreshed
	Shape developments around customer needs
	Actively engaging with customers to improve digital services
Transforming (2018 – onwards)	Digital channels built around the customer journey
	Customers keeping us informed on their preferences

4.2 Focus on delivering at the first point of contact

When	Our position
Now	Contact methods and reasons not collected across all services
	Extensive, complex and often outdated website content
	Repeat contacts by telephone (averaging 1.8 times in 2013[2])
	Low numbers of electronic forms submissions
Transitional (2015 – 17)	Reviewing the triggers that cause repeat contacts
	Redesigned website to improve navigation
	Separate website sections of residents, businesses and the council
	Our written style improved and website content reduced
	Electronic form numbers increased
	Conduct business process reviews on high volume transactions
Transforming (2018 – onwards)	A transactional website with tasks at the heart of all interactions
	Local land and property gazetteer (LLPG) underpinning digital delivery
	Personalised 'Myaccount' functionality for customers
	Customers updated as their service progresses
	Direct Integration to systems across all high volume service areas

[2]Source: Customer Satisfaction Surveys (2014)

4.3   Promoting our services

When	Our position
Now	Limited social media promotion of new service developments
	Poor signposting to our website and digital services
	High cost contact channels are promoted
	Contacting customers by digital methods not common place
Transitional (2015 – 17)	Removal/reduce the promotion of high cost channels
	Officers actively directing customers to online services
	The benefits of using digital services to customers being made clear
	Active cross selling of council services
Transforming (2018 – onwards)	Digital services promoted first
	Social media embedded as a new contact channel

4.4   Assisting our customers

When	Our position
Now	Little 'assisted digital' service to our customers
	Inconsistent approach to social media interactions
Transitional (2015 – 17)	Service departments digital knowledge improved
	Customers given assistance accessing digital services
	Pre-bookable appointments for council services
Transforming (2018 – onwards)	Customers using self-help PCs to interact with the council
	Officers available to guide customers through digital services

5   What digital will mean?

5.1   For our customers

Improving digital services to customers can improve relationships and strengthen the relationships we already have.

Our customers will be able to login to their account online, review their current council tax and housing rent balance, notify us of changes to their accounts and interact with us to request new services. It will allow them to see their local councillor and confirm when their recycling is due to be collected.

Function	Some examples of services customers will be able to do..
Transactions	See their last bill (for old and new accounts)
	See their last payments (for old and new accounts)
	Report a missed bin
	See planning applications near them
	Report a housing repair
Information	Find their local representatives
	View their collection days
	Subscribe to email alerts for services
	Get specific business start-up and funding advice

5.2   For our officers

We will work to automate many processes that are currently handled manually. Where tasks need to be handled by an officer this will be due to complex requirements only.

We will design digital services based on the needs of the user, not the back office process. We will work to ensure customers deal with an organisation not a department.

The way we work

Function	Change/Impact
Customer contact	Customers directed to our website
	Less 'hand-offs' to other services/officers
	Regular programmed review of digital content
	Service 'digital leaders' championing improvements
Operational	Customer intelligence leading improvements
	End to end service delivery being considered
	Using our resources more effectively to serve customers

5.3   For our organisation

Delivering digital services and improving the customer experience will require all services to work together. We need to understand our customer, their needs and provide services in a way they want and expect.

All digital service development should follow a cycle based on demand, evidence, development, improvement and delivery. This cycle should be embedded across digital delivery to ensure that we provide services customers choose to use.
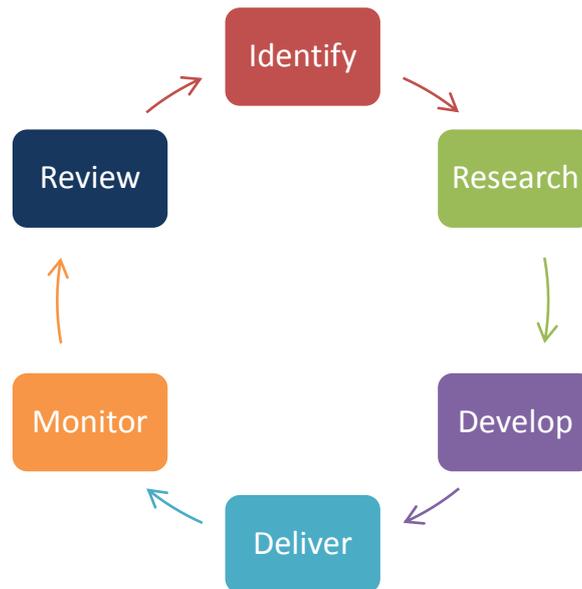
The cycle of digital service delivery

The demand for services should *identify* its priority for development. Following this *research* should capture evidence, best practice and opportunities. Lastly, this should be followed by agile *development,* to *deliver* services that people choose to use. After delivery we will be *monitoring* how we are doing and then *review* what we have done.

6   How we will deliver the change

6.1   Improving our knowledge

We will capture and utilise the customers preferred contact method to reduce waste and improve the quality of service delivery and ensure high response levels. We will provide the opportunity for customers to feedback through all digital channels and regularly engage with them to improve services.

Inclusion will be at the heart of service delivery to ensure that our customers are not disadvantaged or penalised as a result of digital service delivery. We will ensure that even where a digital channel is preferred they will always be accompanied with an alternative option.

6.2   Resolve contacts first time and reduce high cost contacts

Providing a transactional website aimed at delivering services quickly and efficiently. Through business process reviews tailor routes for customer queries based on their needs – including the ability to self-serve digitally where ever possible. Avoiding internal duplication and rationalising customer contact software.

Changing the way we communicate to customers by adopting standards to improve clarity and content. Completing periodical avoidable contact exercises across high volume contact areas to understand why customers contact us and help improve what we do.

6.3   Having a digital outlook

Expecting internal services to be digital first by building on successful digital initiatives like electronic payslips. Reintroducing a purpose built intranet to reduce and improve internal communications and collaboration. Introducing knowledge databases to provide answers to common questions and improving the quality of information being delivered to our customers.

Procuring software with digital capabilities at the forefront of evaluation and decision making.

6.4   Promoting our digital services

Where we are capable of resolving customer requests digitally we will promote these ahead of other more costly service channels. Capturing customers email addresses and using these to provide services digitally.

7   The Future

Improving our digital services will require a phased approach to ensure that we start with solid foundations. Over time our digital transactions will naturally increase as customers use and trust the services that we deliver.

At the same time other more traditional methods such as the telephone will decrease. The digital growth rate will increase as important milestones are reached such as a unique and improved customer account.
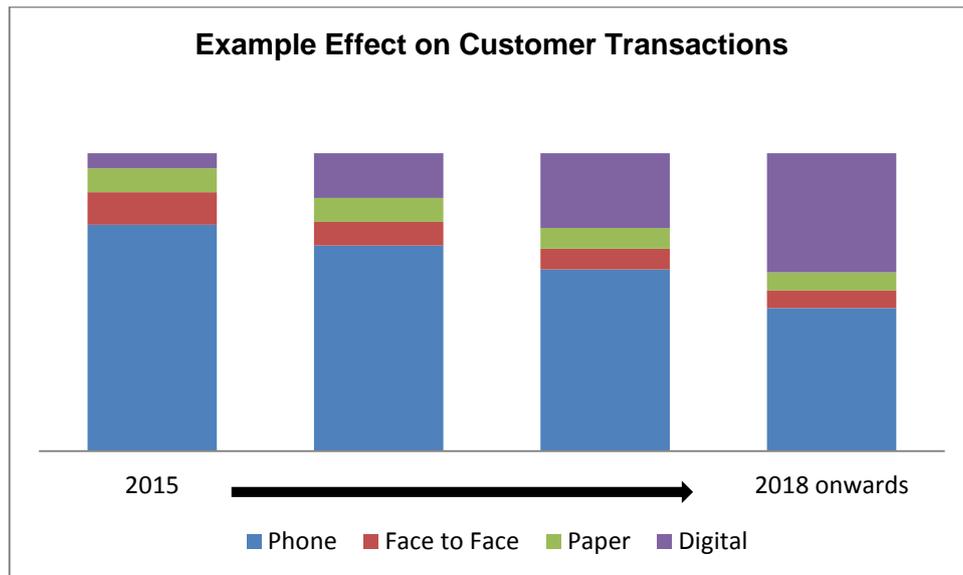
Our Milestones

Type	What will change for our customers
Information	Condensed website content
	Information being simple, clear, up to date and consistent
	A new transactional website
	Opportunities to feedback and shape content
Transactional	An increase in electronic forms
	New payment types being delivered
	Social media use being utilised to offer services
Integrated	MyAccount being developed and integrated to existing transactions
	A faster response to service requests
	Digital services being promoted first
Optimised	Customers receiving notifications through their MyAccount
	Digital assistance being provided by Customer Services

8 Measuring our success

8.1 What our success will look like

Providing a new alternative and a comprehensive suite of digital services will be measured in a variety of ways. The key measures will be:

- A yearly reduction in telephone contacts
- An evidence based improvement in the quality of services provided
- Uptake through other new channels increasing
- Improved understanding of the needs of our customers

Function	Change/Impact
Customer contact	Reduction in telephone calls
	Reduction in paper application forms
	Increase in key website analytics
	Reduced resolution times
Operational	'Confirmed' digital transactions rising
	Increased number of electronic forms
	Using our resources more effectively to serve customers
	Reduced repeat contact
	Anticipating demand

8.2 How we will measure this

For every new digital service provided we will measure the following areas to ensure that we are providing quality services

Metric	
Cost of transactions	As digital transaction volumes increase, the overall cost of transactions will decrease.
Take up	The increased use of each digital service/channel will demonstrate a shift in customers habits
Satisfaction	Customer feedback through all available channels
Performance	Decreasing the number of transactions requiring manual intervention

9. Progress (2014 - 2015)

No	Actions	What has/is being done	Strategy Section	Status
1	Creation of mechanisms to obtain customer feedback	Page feedback was introduced to every page of the website in August 2014 A customer and access survey was made live in October 2014 to gauge customers digital preferences	4	COMPLETED
2	Commission customer segmentation about customers digital preferences and propensity/confidence to use online services	CACI/Acorn, an industry leader in customer segmentation, were commissioned and have provided an area report for Gravesham detailing how our households are distributed over 59 citizen types.	1	COMPLETED
3	Upgrade of the corporate call logging software to provide intelligence on call levels across the council.	The call logging software was upgraded in August and now provides details of all external calls coming into the council	4	COMPLETED
4	Nominate 'digital leaders' for services with the highest contact levels	Management Team approved the concept of digital leaders and seven leaders have been nominated	4, 5	COMPLETED
5	Redesign the website home and service pages to aid customer navigation and improve the transactional capabilities of the website	Draft designs have been created	2	
6	Contact exercise to be undertaken across five services to establish reasons for contact and how this could be avoided	This exercise will be conducted in January – February 15	1	
7	Evaluation of the use of CRM and eForms software across the organisation	eForm evaluation was recommended in the IT service review. This work will be completed jointly with Customer Services and IT Services	2	
8	Reduction in website content to reduce the amount to be managed and to remove old and outdated information	This information is being compiled and will be circulated	2	
9	Creation of guidelines, style guides and editorial policy for the website	Documents currently in final draft; Style guide, writing guide, editorial guide and accessibility guidelines.	2	

No	Actions	What has/is being done	Strategy Section	Status
10	Creation of a social media policy to guide the use of social media throughout the organisation		1, 2	
11	Content editors will be trained in how to write for the web. All digital content will be approved by the digital team removing the requirement for content approvers	Quotes have been given for an external consultant to complete a training session for content editors.	2, 4	
12	Creation of an internal intranet	Intranet in alpha stages of design. IT services scheduling installation of the software onto the network.	6	
13	Review of website content and structure across five high volume services; Housing Planning (Development Management) Regulatory services Revenues and Benefits Waste Management		2, 4, 6	
14	Expansion of eForms currently offered across the website. These will be designed and implemented in conjunction with business process reviews.		2, 4	
15	Replacement of emails addresses and where appropriate individual telephone extensions detailed across the high volume service areas.		2, 4, 6	
16	Creation of a digital inclusion plan to address the requirements of customers who require support to communicate with the Council due to a lack of skills, language, ability, a disability or access to technology. These issues will also be considered in any redesign of services.		1, 2, 4, 6	