

Creating Futures

Digital and Technology Strategy



Digital and Technology Strategy

Foreword

Welcome to Waltham Forest's digital and technology strategy.

Our aim as a Council is to ensure all of our residents can live a quality life. Technology impacts every part of our lives and continues to develop at such a pace that we need to consider how we prepare ourselves for the future.

Today, residents expect to be able to report problems and engage in dialogue with the Council through the web and social media. Waltham Forest is already leading the way in adopting innovative digital ways of working. Already approximately 70 per cent of resident transactions happen online and we recently launched Facebook and Twitter bots to make it easier for residents to report neighbourhood issues and to keep them informed on progress. We've also launched a digital business, ServiceStore, which provides highly trained, accredited service teams for residents and businesses via its website.

These are challenging times. With budget pressures and ever-increasing demands on our services, we have been forced to make some really difficult decisions. Despite this, we have a fantastic opportunity to embrace new ways of working and to develop digital approaches to help us deliver real positive change for our borough.

This strategy sets out our approach to working with the community to develop digital tools to help residents engage with the Council, to help

themselves and to improve life chances by increasing access to digital skills and careers. It outlines how we will transform the way the Council works by updating our core systems and by delivering a more personalised service experience to our residents.

This will be a process where we will need to learn and discover new opportunities together with our communities and partners, and be open about our progress. We look forward to working with you.

Cllr Liaquat Ali, MBE JP

Portfolio Lead Member, Transformation and Commercial Operations





Introduction

In January 2018, Waltham Forest's Cabinet agreed Creating Futures, the Council's Corporate Strategy.

Creating Futures is a strategy for uncertainty, devised for the times we face. It was developed to be flexible in order to cope with the onset of rapid change and global and national influences that we cannot always predict or control. It sets out an approach to achieve the best possible outcomes for our community by drawing on our borough's inherent strengths and assets.

In no area is change happening so quickly as in the field of digital and technology. The digital revolution is dramatically impacting society today, changing not only what we do but also how we do it. From shopping and holidays to how we make friends and talk to them, the world is changing rapidly. Governments, cities and authorities across the world are grappling with how to respond to this revolution.

Waltham Forest has made good progress in digitising our services, with over 70 per cent of transactions now taking place online. But there is much more to do to keep pace with change and harness the benefits of digital and technology for the benefit of our residents and businesses and the effectiveness of the Council.

Our digital strategy vision: "Connecting communities to create futures"

Our digital vision supports the delivery of Creating Futures, enabling the Council of the future to act as a digital platform, connecting it with residents and partners. Emerging technologies are making this more achievable than ever before, enabling us to join up services, help people collaborate and

focus on providing customer-focussed services. At its heart, this digital strategy will enable the new relationships we want to create with our community in order to secure a future for our borough which is shaped and delivered locally.

Changing world

The digital revolution is dramatically impacting society today, changing not only what we do but also how we do it. Driverless cars, smart robotics, drones, internet connected devices, new materials, gene editing and 3D printing are becoming part of society in a way that was unimaginable just a few years ago.

We are now seeing the growth of the Smart City, which tries to link together digital technologies to improve well-being. Barcelona, for example, has technology to smooth traffic flow, smart dustbins to ensure the city stays clean and shares its data with start-ups to help drive innovation. Estonia has the concept of digital citizenship to encourage inward investment and has developed a single care record that can be shared across agencies but is controlled by the citizens themselves.

In this uncertain world we do not know which new technologies will take hold and how they will impact society. For example, despite the hype, we still do not know how advanced artificial intelligence will become and what will be the impact on jobs and our lives. Our approach is predicated on taking advantage of what we know is available today and ensuring we have the flexibility and skills so we can respond to whatever tomorrow brings.



Our opportunities

Whilst the future may feel uncertain, there are technological advances available today that we can take advantage of. Amongst the opportunities are:

Cloud computing	This allows companies to store software and data securely in shared spaces over the Internet instead of on expensive computer hardware. This drives down the cost of ownership, ensures updates to software are more easily available and provides access to immense processing power and services otherwise unavailable to small organisations.
Data	Organisations such as local authorities generate ever-increasing volumes of data through daily operations. There is great potential to transform this data into insights that support better, more personalised services to residents.
Internet of Things	This extends internet connectivity beyond traditional devices to everyday objects such as smart speakers and smart watches. This helps connect us to each other and to our environment with the potential to understand our neighbourhoods better.
Social media	Many people communicate using social media. To really engage our citizens we will take advantage of this media, developing a more meaningful relationship with residents and putting them in touch with each other to encourage community-led support.
Fibre connectivity and 5G	With the roll-out of fibre-to-the-premise broadband, internet access speeds of one gigabit (roughly 62 times the average broadband speed today) are becoming achievable. This, combined with the impending roll-out of mobile 5G technology, will mean much faster internet connectivity, whether we're out and about or at home, boosting business growth at affordable prices.
Agile	Modern technology enables us to deliver services in a new way. It allows us to try new things, starting small, engaging with stakeholders and learning and adapting as we deliver. Ultimately, this helps to produce better outcomes for everyone.



Our approach

This is not just about investing in technology. We need to work in a new way to drive better value and automation across simple tasks so the resources we have as a Council can be targeted towards those who are most in need of help.

We will accelerate our work with Digital Champions across the borough to help those who feel excluded from the digital world take advantage of everything it has to offer. We will partner with local organisations to support this and also work with communities, businesses, schools and colleges to improve digital skills and offer real career opportunities within our borough, supporting entrepreneurship and improving life-chances for people from all backgrounds.

Much of this strategy relies on us having the digital infrastructure across the borough that we need to unlock our potential. We will accelerate our work with central government, the Mayor of London and industry to ensure everyone has access to fibre broadband at a reasonable price and to support, when appropriate, the roll-out of new 5G services.

We will ensure all Council staff have the skills and knowledge to take advantage of new digital tools and engage with the community using the medium which works best for our residents and businesses.

What we will deliver

We have divided our delivery plan into three groupings:

Foundation	Enable	Transformation projects
<p>We will refresh the Council's core technology; from the main software our staff use to do their jobs to the system that allows us to answer phones.</p> <p>In a world of growing cyber threats, we will build on the good work we already do in this area. We will constantly update our systems with the latest monitoring software to protect the important information we hold about residents and our borough.</p> <p>We will move quickly to Cloud computing, allowing access to improved capabilities at much better value.</p>	<p>We will work in a new way to enable our transformation.</p> <p>As a Council we look after much valuable information and we will use modern technology to harness this data to bring our services together to serve our residents and businesses more seamlessly.</p> <p>Residents should expect us to deliver personalised services by using their data more smartly, so we consider the whole of their need rather than from the perspective of a single service.</p>	<p>By creating a firm foundation and working in a new way we will deliver projects which transform services.</p> <p>We have worked across Council departments and consulted residents to help define the individual, service based projects which will support Creating Futures and deliver outcomes that improve the lives of those who live and work here.</p> <p>Projects will be approved on a case by case basis through a return on investment process, prioritising those which benefit our residents most.</p>



Case Studies

Below are some case studies which illustrate what we have been working on, and some of the ideas we have for the future.

Meet Walt – our social media bot

We know the cleanliness of our neighbourhoods is an important priority for residents and we wanted to find an innovative solution to help them report and track street service issues. In March 2018 we launched digital chatbots on Facebook and Twitter. The bots enable people to report fly tipping, fly posting, dog fouling, dirty front gardens and street cleansing issues in an easy to use, conversational way. Once an issue is reported, the contractor picks it up immediately on a mobile tablet and it is assigned to a crew to resolve. Once cleared up, a message flows straight to the smartphone of the person who reported it, telling them the issue is now resolved. Feedback from residents has been very positive and shows how we can involve them effectively using the power of modern technology and social media.

Tech Camp

As part of digital month, the Council worked with Waltham Forest College, the local Jobcentre and a specialist digital training partner to run a Tech Camp and awards programme over four days. This was aimed at young people, aged 16 to 19, who were recruited through a competition to develop a digital idea to help the borough. This covered the latest digital trends, best industry practice and advice on how digital skills can help job-seekers stand out in the job market. The sessions were run with the help of large companies such as Google, Apple and Amazon and also smaller, local digital agencies - aiming to establish a new employer pipeline. The camp ended with a job fair. Of those who joined the camp via the Jobcentre, 69% found employment or apprenticeships within the following two months using their new digital skills.



Future Possibilities

Digital wellbeing

Social care provision is core to the Council's safeguarding role and is supported by the majority of the Council's budget. With growing demand and budget pressures we want to continue to provide an excellent service by finding innovative ways of working. We will create a digital wellbeing portal where residents who need support can access vital information relevant to them without waiting for an appointment. There will be meaningful, personalised self-help guides and information available to people so they find the help they need before the situation deteriorates into crisis. We will link residents to partner agencies and charities that are relevant to them and provide access to their personal record so they can see the information we hold on them for all aspects of their engagement with us. Our aim is to empower residents to be in control of their care, to ensure better outcomes for all.

Modern digital libraries

Our libraries are important spaces where our communities come together and they are often where residents – in particular, young people – come to access computers and the internet. We will reimagine our library spaces to ensure they are at the forefront of digital access and technology. Our new Wood Street Library will be an exemplar digital space. There will be new PCs with simple, intuitive interfaces and high-speed WiFi to improve the flexibility of the space and allow people to bring in their own devices. There will be easy to set up display equipment for videos and other media, alongside the provision of books. We will also provide sophisticated security and booking systems which will enable the library to be run for the community, by the community.



Making an impact

The success of this strategy is predicated on making sure we deliver a positive impact for those who live and work in the borough. We want the strategy to feel different during delivery as well as after. Here is how we think it will feel different:

Residents	Interaction with the Council online or via social media will be such high quality that residents choose to use them. There will be instant access to information and the ability to request services digitally from anywhere, at any time, on any device. Services will be personalised, based on what we know about our residents and there will be easy ways to collaborate across our communities to improve and deliver services. Those normally excluded from the digital world will have access to digital skills training and high-speed connectivity will be available at affordable prices.
Businesses	Waltham Forest will be a destination borough for start-ups and creative businesses due to our high-speed, affordable digital connectivity while access to skills will allow them to grow successfully. By working with local businesses and partners we will provide real employment opportunities in digital technology in our borough.
Staff	Our services will collaborate around the needs of our residents and have new ways of working. We will have automated what we can in order to deliver simple service transactions at lower cost, prioritising staff time and energy for those who need it most. We will have the right tools and skills to make smart decisions based on real time data.



A Waltham Forest approach

Creating Futures defines our approach to change as:

Be radical

We will find radical approaches and innovative solutions that deliver a transformative impact to our residents and businesses.

By using modern technology to link our systems and data together, we can radically rethink the way we work and also link our legacy systems to innovative new technology.

We will make sensible decisions based on what is achievable and affordable today, and we will test before we invest to make sure our plans are pragmatic.

Make and create

We do not have all the answers, so we need to work closely with wider stakeholders to harness their unique strengths.

An agile way of working will help us do that by testing out our ideas and delivering solutions which most suit our stakeholders.

Act with fellowship

We will not work alone. We will bring residents and businesses into our delivery process, not only to capture their feedback, but also to help us deliver a better outcome for all. For example, we recently recruited 80 local people to help test our digital solutions. Their feedback is helping us deliver better results.

Ultimately, we have many of the same challenges and opportunities as other local authorities. We will work closely with the rest of the public sector to share our achievements and difficulties in an open way and find opportunities to collaborate for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

As part of our approach we will be signing the Local Digital Declaration (<https://localdigital.gov.uk/declaration>), which was drawn up in consultation with 40 local authorities. This declaration proclaims a collective ambition for local public services in the internet age and the commitments needed to realise it.



Next steps

This is a five year strategy but we are getting started right away. We will start delivering the Foundation and Enable projects in autumn 2018, with delivery lasting approximately two years. At the same time, we will be prioritising the Transformation projects, developing our plans and delivering and learning during the course of the strategy period.

In everything we do we will constantly consult and talk to those who live and work in the borough to get their feedback and ideas. We will be open about what we're doing, our progress and what we're learning, and will publish updates at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/digital.

During Digital Month, November 2018, we will provide opportunities for residents and businesses to understand more about our plans, to make suggestions and suggest how they want to contribute.