LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Full Council

Date: 17/10/2024

Subject: Digital Transformation Projects

Report of: Councillor Rowan Ree – Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform

Report author: Nicola Ellis – Director, Chief Operating Officer, Corporate Services

Responsible Director: Sukvinder Kalsi – Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services

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SUMMARY

The aim of digital transformation is to ensure that we are leveraging and maximising the benefits of technology across all areas of the Council. This will enable us to modernise our business processes and operations by harnessing technology to improve the efficiency of services we deliver for residents and improve the overall resident experience.

The H&F Plan 2023-2026, commits to maximising efficiencies across the Council through digital transformation and includes the following objectives:
- deliver on the aspirations of our Resident Experience and Access Programme to provide a consistent and inclusive approach for resident access across the Council
- challenge digital exclusion to better connect residents with council services
- drive up our in-house capabilities in digital automation and artificial intelligence.

This report provides a summary of some of the Council's key digital transformation projects that contribute to the delivery of these objectives.

These projects include:
- Resident Experience and Access Programme (REAP)
- Development and delivery of our Digital Inclusion Strategy
- Power Platform Automation Hub
- Developing our approach to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Full Council to note and comment on the report.

Wards Affected: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the **H&F Corporate Plan** and the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	Enabling our services to embrace technology to support objectives to deliver a better future for children and young people, deliver economic growth and accessible housing and use technology to support the delivery of high-quality services.
Creating a compassionate and inclusive council	Improving the resident experience and ensuring accessible services for all. Reducing digital exclusion.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Co-producing our digital transformation programmes with the Digital Accessibility Group.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	Delivering efficiencies and savings through the adoption of new technology.
Taking pride in H&F	Enhancing the lives of residents though use of enabling and inclusion technology.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Balancing the benefits of new forms of technology with the climate impacts.

BACKGROUND

The council recognises the value of data, technology and digital services to deliver effective services to residents and support the efficient running of the council. The council has worked with residents to design and deliver improvements in the borough.

Resident Experience and Access Programme

The programme, initially launched in 2019, aims to transform the resident experience by leveraging new technologies and co-producing solutions with residents.
The vision for the transformation includes prioritising residents' needs, enhancing digital services for 24/7 access, and providing high-quality assisted self-serve options. The programme aims to create a single digital pathway for all resident contact, ensuring a consistent and high-quality customer experience across all channels and services.

The pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have changed the demands on our services, necessitating a review and refresh to the programme, to meet current demands and allow us to embrace new technology that has developed since it was initiated. The reset focusses on a phased approach to transforming the resident experience through a revised access model.

The refresh of the programme includes developing our artificial intelligence and robotic process automation (RPA) capabilities in Digital services to support residents to readily access services online and receive an improved resident experience. The council has invested c£690K in automation technologies to enable REAP and other automation initiatives across the council.

The key areas of focus for the programme are:

1. Consolidation and Automation

- **Consolidated Customer Contact Centre**: Establish a unified centre to streamline service delivery and reduce fragmentation.

- **Automation of Repetitive Tasks**: Implement automation to handle high-volume, repetitive tasks, reducing backlogs and allowing residents to self-serve online.

2. Digital Transformation

- **Online Services**: Increase the number of council services available online, enabling residents to self-serve from initial contact to fulfilment.

- **Assisted Digital Offer**: Provide support for vulnerable residents and those who are digitally excluded to ensure they can access necessary services.

- **New Technology Advancements**: Leverage advancements in technology since the programme's initiation to enhance the resident experience and drive efficiencies.

3. Staff Empowerment and Cultural Change

- **Digital Frameworks and Systems**: Equip staff with the necessary digital tools, systems, and processes to support residents effectively across all customer-facing channels.

- **Training and Workshops**: Conduct interactive sessions focusing on customer service, journey, and experience to instil values such as customer focus, collaboration, and commitment among staff.

- **Customer Service Focus**: Ensure all services and staff prioritise excellent customer service, minimising unnecessary contact and enhancing the overall resident experience.

4. Service Standardisation

- **Consistent Service Standards**: Develop a corporate-wide view of good service standards to ensure residents have a consistent experience across all council services.

- **Single Digital Pathway**: Create a unified digital pathway for all resident contact, ensuring a consistent and high-quality experience regardless of the contact method.

5. Customer Feedback and Satisfaction

- **Customer Satisfaction Surveys**: Implement surveys across all main contact centres and service areas to gather feedback and monitor service quality.

- **Business Intelligence Feedback Dashboard**: Develop a dashboard to incorporate all customer satisfaction feedback for comprehensive analysis and monitoring.

The achievements of the REAP programme to date include:

- The implementation of 141 digital forms. These forms have reduced failure demand as they are designed to cover all the questions we need to ask to provide, amend or stop a service. This means we have reduced the number of follow up contacts to complete a transaction. Digital forms will provide residents and the community with a modern, comprehensive, and consistent experience when interacting with the council and allow residents to self-serve for several transactions.

- Quality assurance checks in the main contact centre, enabling close monitoring of service levels and addressing training or development needs as necessary.

- Customer satisfaction surveys via text at the end of calls and for face-to-face services, providing valuable feedback to improve service quality.

- The launch of new service channels like webchat, which facilitates real-time interactions with residents, and proactive text messaging, which allows the council to reach out to residents with relevant updates and information.

More detail on the achievements of REAP are included in Appendix One.

These initiatives have contributed to enhancing the overall resident experience and ensuring prompt and accurate support.

Digital Inclusion Strategy

It is not just the council that provides access to services online. So much of modern life is accessed primarily through digital means. This is why we want to make sure that residents have the skills, equipment, and capacity to do so.

The Digital Inclusion Strategy aims to address barriers arising from digital advancements impacting residents' lives and service delivery. It has been co-produced with residents, the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), and stakeholders to ensure that the needs of residents and the various service areas are effectively captured. The strategy aims to drive a coordinated approach to the existing programs and activities across the council and VCS in this area.

The co-produced digital inclusion strategy will be the foundation for the council to:

- Gain a strong understanding of the scale of digital exclusion in the borough and use this evidence to inform council decision making about future resources not just for digital inclusion but other service areas such as adult learning, social care, housing services and children's services.

- Benefit, in the long term, from residents that are digitally enabled, meaning that they are less reliant on support from the council.

- Deliver a bespoke digital inclusion programme for the borough and embed digital inclusion principles and activities across council services.

- Establish new partnerships and strengthen existing partnerships with public, private and third sector organisations seeking to improve the level of digital inclusion in the borough, with the potential to apply for and obtain additional funding for digital inclusion activities.

- Enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of services available to residents and help residents improve their life chances leading to fulfilled lives.

- Support the ambitions of council services increasingly moving online, such as the housing improvement programme, family hubs, online directories and signposting and events booking systems.

The Digital Inclusion Strategy is an enabling strategy, which unlocks transformative change both within the council and across the borough. The aim of the strategy is to address the causes of exclusion resulting from lack of access to digital connectivity, devices and skills.

The Strategy sets out priority areas of activity, with key actions and objectives contained within the strategy, including:

- Developing a more joined up and coherent digital inclusion 'eco-system' working towards a shared vision and programme of change – a coordinated group of partners across H&F, the WLA, London, Health, the voluntary sector and industry working together to support our vision that by 2030 all our residents will have access to connectivity, devices and digital skills.

- Underpinning this work by data to help us identify who needs help, who provides it, what help is effective, and track and measure our progress.

- Ensuring more H&F residents will be digitally confident and will feel safe and secure online.

- Working with VCS organisations supporting residents in the borough to make sure that residents are aware of and able to access the support that they need. Advice and guidance is at the heart of our strategy, and we will take action to make our services inclusive by default and will be underpinned by an effective 'signposting' platform to provide clear pathways to advice, learning and support.

- Continuing to co-produce our digital inclusion work with residents and VCS to ensure it remains a living document and adapts to changing needs and opportunities.

Devices

- Work with pan-London, regional and local businesses to ensure the borough can access affordable and appropriate devices for those that need it, understanding the mix of needs and requirements of residents.

- Develop a 'library model' of loan devices linked with a support package of training and advice, connectivity if required and ongoing support/maintenance of devices. A wide range of services and local groups will be part of the referral pathways and delivery of the scheme.

- All referrals to the scheme ('the library model' of loan devices) will capture core needs and evaluate usage and impact using a consistent set of data to better understand priorities and continuous learning and improvement.

- Ensure the Council's social care and occupational therapy teams are aware of, can advise on and can access a full range of assisted living technology.

Connectivity

- Actively promote and raise awareness of social tariffs available in the borough to ensure all can be digitally included

- Map all free public access Wi-Fi in the borough and make this available through the signposting tool.

- Achieve better connectivity outcomes using 'wayleaves' to ensure positive outcomes for residents.

- Consider how the Council and its partners could develop a universal basic service approach in its requirements for residential developments and in its own supported living settings – e.g. care leavers, foster carers etc.

- Work with pan-London, regional and local partners to improve access to free SIMs linked to devices.

- Improve access to free and good quality Wi-Fi provision in community settings including schools, faith organisations, colleges, food banks, jobs centres, community centres etc and through our own highway infrastructure.

Advice and Guidance

- Develop a network of digital champions and volunteers across the borough, including expanding the digital assistance available at 145 King Street as part of the Council's core face to face offer, to other areas such as Libraries and Family Hubs.

- Work with business partners to develop a clear pathway for small and medium size enterprises.

- Proactively identify and target support at those most likely to be digitally excluded or with the greatest need, including specific support offers for priority group working with trusted organisations.

Skills

- Develop a digital skills working group to agree on/develop a set of common standards/assessment tool and pathway progression and connect with education providers and local banks and businesses.

- Map and promote the full range of training and skills development opportunities available in the borough.

- Develop targeted offers for specific groups – foster carers, disabled people, those with low levels of literacy, older people and those unable to attend venues, etc.

- Develop and implement an accreditation, support and training offer for digital champion volunteers.

These actions are designed to create a digitally inclusive borough, improving residents' life chances and reducing reliance on public services. The strategy has

recently been approved by the Cabinet and commitment given to recruit to a Programme Manager role to develop the initiatives identified in the strategy.

Power Platform Automation Hub

In recent years, the Business Intelligence (BI) Service has successfully harnessed technology to underpin the day-to-day support provided to residents via new Council services and to improve Council business processes. This has been achieved through building and implementing new digital applications, automation of data and tasks and enhancing how we report on the performance of these new services and applications. Successful examples include:

Pandemic Response – The Council's response to Covid-19 was data and intelligence led. A series of new services were set up for residents, covering a range of support and help needed in this emergency. BI implemented a customer relationship management (CRM) application to manage the Council's support to shielding residents and the activity of the new Community Aid Network service. This application managed requests for help and the successful fulfilment of these requests, such as emergency food packages, allocation of digital equipment to children with additional support needs or calls with residents isolated. The CRM application was supported by a range of other analysis by BI during the pandemic, that included monitoring and reporting of school attendance, testing completed in nursing and residential care homes and the Council's inventory and allocation of Personal Protective Equipment.

Recruitment App - All new recruitments in the Council require multi-layered authorisation including by finance, human resources and senior officers. Formerly, this was a heavy manual process, relying on a word document being shared via email between individuals and decision-makers, which led to delays, issues with version control and inefficiencies in how officer time was being spent. BI developed a new recruitment app, which has transformed this Council process, and in doing so has provided a centralised repository of information and enhanced audit trail for decision-making. The app has also generated efficiency savings through reducing the time spent on authorisation so officer time can be spent on higher value activity.

Family Hubs – In 2024, the Council has launched three new Family Hubs for the borough at the Stephen Wiltshire Centre, Tudor Rose community centre and Old oak community centre. These hubs are a one-stop-shop for resident support services across a range of partners, including baby groups and parent classes, support for wellbeing and mental health, support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, access to financial and debt advice and information about local youth clubs. To support the operations of the new hubs and meeting service expectations, BI has built a new Family Hubs digital application. This manages information submitted by residents and referrals from professionals and allows the hub staff to process help and support based on the needs of each family or referral, including signposting to a range of services. The application also manages participation in various support services provided at each hub and receive feedback from residents on the family hub offer.

We know there remain services within the Council where heavy manual tasks remain and where efficiencies, fewer errors and better decision-making could be realised

through new products and solutions that integrate processes, workflows and systems.

The BI service is therefore building capacity in the Power Platform to take forward transformation opportunities it presents. The aim is to scale digital transformation by building new business solutions. The key objectives are:

1. **Automation of Manual Tasks**: Address inefficiencies, reduce errors, and improve decision-making by automating repetitive manual tasks.

2. **Integration of Processes and Systems**: Enhance integration between various processes, workflows, and systems to streamline operations.

3. **Development of Custom Applications**: Use Microsoft Power Platform to develop bespoke applications tailored to the Council's needs.

The existing examples have demonstrated the benefits of this approach to:

- **Efficiency Savings**: Significant time and cost savings from automating workflows and processes and avoided spend.

- **Improved Service Delivery**: Enhanced outcomes for residents through more efficient and effective service delivery.

- **Better Decision-Making**: Improved data integration and analysis capabilities leading to more informed decisions.

The BI service is taking forward this work through incrementally building specialist skills and capacity. An extensive pipeline of opportunities has been identified through information and opportunity identification workshops with various Council services. These opportunities will be prioritised and are forming the future programme of work.

An early example is the implementation of the new Fraud, Recovery, Error and Debt hub. Through the implementation of a series of projects, this cross-cutting programme will improve the detection of fraud, support the recovery of avoided spend, reduce errors in Council processes, and support debt recovery. The hub is involving a high level of automation, in cleansing, matching, and enhancing datasets through the Council's data warehouse that is managed by the BI service. Each new application and product is supported by reporting of benefits and management information through Power BI software.

An example of an early project under this programme is a termly exercise to identify children in the borough who may be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) but whose parent(s) or carer(s) are not claiming it. This stands to ensure parent(s) and carer(s) of eligible FSM children receive the financial help they need and secure much needed FSM funding to schools in the borough. Additionally, FSM is an entitlement for schools to claim Pupil Premium to improve educational outcomes for FSM-claiming pupils.

Longer term, the BI service aims to build applications that will provide single views of data relating to properties, households and families in the borough, through the progressive matching of large datasets across the Council.

Developing our approach to the use of Artificial Intelligence

The Council is exploring artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI, focusing on its potential to revolutionise various tasks and challenges within H&F. The scope of work includes consideration of:

- **Capabilities and Applications**: Generative AI's potential to enhance service delivery, streamline operations, and improve decision-making.
- **Risks and Challenges**: Addressing concerns related to information security, privacy, accuracy, ethics, bias.

A paper was presented to the Policy and Oversight Board in April 2024 highlighting the opportunities presented to the council of AI and Generative AI technologies, and a further update will be presented in November 2024.

Some departments across the council are already making use of traditional AI, for example the deployment of Internet of Things (IoT) sensors for Damp and Mould monitoring, sensors in gullies and air pollution sensors across the borough. The approach to the adoption of AI thus far has been iterative and agile. This has enabled the council to experiment and learn with targeted use cases/projects, thereby enabling the identification of AI enabled technologies that can potentially have wider benefits to the council departments.

A Cross-Departmental Working Group informs and coordinates AI adoption across various departments. The group is currently overseeing a number of pilot projects using Microsoft Co-Pilot and other AI use cases. The working group will test and evaluate how AI and Generative AI applications can be used across the council to:

- **Streamline Operations**: Automating and optimising various operational processes
- **Improve Decision-Making**: Leveraging AI-generated insights to make more informed and accurate decisions.
- **Enhancing Service Delivery**: Using generative AI to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided to residents

We have held 'Envisioning Sessions', collaborating with Microsoft and other partners to gain insights into generative AI and will be collaborating with industry forums and local authorities to share knowledge and best practice. An important aspect will continue to be engaging with our community to raise awareness and engage the community in AI adoption, drawing on our approach and learning to digital inclusion.

CO-PRODUCING OUR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Disability Access Group (DAG) group was set up in June 2022, comprising 12 residents and 9 Council officers across 4 departments.

DAG now has 14 residents and 16 officers across 9 departments, (REAP, Comms, Digital Services, Co-Production, Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Housing, AALS and Independent Living). It is the first co-production group of its kind, made up of residents from a range of backgrounds, abilities, ages, and professions, and the issues it discusses span more than one council department.

There have been 19 DAGs held so far, the last in August 2024. They are well attended by an engaged and enthusiastic membership. The August DAG contained

an interactive session which will help us understand residents' expectations of customer service from the council.

The group have worked closely with the REAP team in the development of digital processes and web content. The team developed the processes and web pages that supported our cost-of-living crisis response.

The digital inclusion strategy was coproduced with residents from June 2022 – October 2023 through the Digital Accessibility Group (DAG). A digital inclusion open day was held for residents in September 2022, and input was also obtained from the voluntary and community sector (VCS), with organisations attending workshops with officers in both January and November 2023. The DAG reviewed and gave feedback on the final version of the strategy before it was finalised.

The Digital Accessibility Group have been integral to the delivery of our current projects, and we will continue this approach in the future to ensure that our digital transformation is co-produced and meets our residents' needs.

LIST OF APPENDICES
Appendix 1 – Achievements of the REAP Programme