DIGITAL STRATEGY 2022-2026

Brent

FOREWORD

I am enormously proud to introduce Brent's new digital strategy, the key strategic document that sets out how our digital programme will support delivery of our Borough Plan priorities.

It comes at a time when our borough is facing unprecedented challenges, as we continue to tackle the pandemic and its consequences. These consequences will be far-reaching and long lasting, which is why we are refocussing our digital approach to best support our recovery and respond to new contexts.

These include the findings of Brent's Independent Poverty Commission, which laid bare the inequalities many people face in our borough, and our declaration of climate and ecological emergency - including our ten year strategy to become carbon neutral by 2030. This digital strategy will be key in helping to address these challenges and improving outcomes for local people.

Our response to Covid-19 has demonstrated the extraordinary speed with which technology can be deployed to support our residents. I was extremely proud of how rapidly we responded to the urgent needs of our communities, much of which would not have been possible without digital solutions.

As Deputy Leader and champion of Brent's digital strategy, I am impressed with how far we have come on our digital journey; working with residents, partners and businesses towards our vision of becoming a digital place and a digital council. New systems are making us more efficient and effective, whilst transforming the experience of our residents when accessing services; more residents have gained the digital skills, tools and confidence needed to participate online; and our use of data has enabled us to adapt services to meet the changing needs of residents and provide more tailored support to meet individual needs.

But our work is not yet done. As technology continues to evolve, so must we. This strategy sets out how we will build on these successes and continue to innovate to improve services, realise efficiencies, and support local people. This includes constantly developing and refining our online channels to meet modern expectations; improving access to digital skills training and high speed fibre internet connections, accelerating residents and local businesses' ability to succeed in the digital world; and ensuring no one is left behind as we recover from the pandemic.

Over the next four years, we will make the most of the opportunities new digital technology and infrastructure will provide for us to ensure that Brent Council is an ambitious digital leader now and in the future; delivering better services for all, investing in our local economy and an area in which all who live or work benefit fully from technology.

Cllr Margaret McLennan
Deputy Leader, London Borough of Brent

INTRODUCTION

The Covid19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of digital technology in the way we live and work, and has accelerated the move to online for many more citizens, businesses and organisations. At the same time it has exposed greater inequalities, including digital exclusion, and increased the risk that those who do not have access to digital devices, fast broadband and sufficient data are left even further behind. For this reason, we have refreshed our digital strategy to refocus our priorities as we emerge from the pandemic and better prepare us for the future.

In Brent, we started our digital journey with the launch of our first digital strategy in 2017, which set out our long-term goals of transforming into a digital council and a digital place. In 2019 we published a revised strategy to capitalise on emerging opportunities to help us achieve these ambitions. This updated strategy for 2022-26 reflects on the progress we have made and sets out our plans to build on our successes and respond to new challenges as we move further into post-covid recovery.

By committing to invest in and implement this strategy, we will continue to develop as a digital place and a digital council. We 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.

As a DIGITAL PLACE we are building a borough-wide digital infrastructure providing instantaneous connectivity. We are developing 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. Our locality based approach extends to our Digital Programme. This aims to address complex issues that exist at a local level through tailoring approaches to meet local needs and working with communities to make them more engaged, connected and resilient.

As a DIGITAL COUNCIL we are enhancing our digital offer in line with modern expectations. By collecting data in an ethical and secure way we are using it to make our services and information more accessible, personalised and responsive. We will provide more efficient and value for money services, with leadership that empowers our workforce to use technology to work smarter to continually improve residents' experiences when interacting with the council. We are helping to connect people with each other and their communities and enabling more residents to have their voices heard in influencing decision making. We are also engaging with our partners to inform how we design and deliver services and ensure a joined-up approach to digital inclusion.
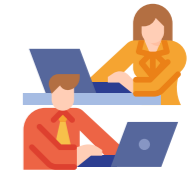
BRENT DIGITAL FACTS

7% of adults do not have access to the internet at home

11% of residents only use a smart phone to get online

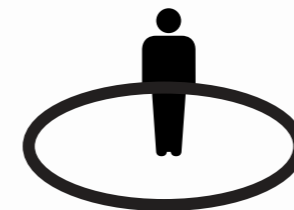10,000+ staff are supported by our Shared ICT services

55% of residents tell us it was easy to carry out council transactions online, 45% said it wasn't easy

Over 150 different systems are used across the council

8% of residents reported feeling socially isolated. A further 15% said they don't have enough social contact

Brent has 337,000 residents today, projected to increase to over 360,000 by 2025, and over 410,000 by 2040

25.5% of properties in Brent can access the fastest full fibre optic services, 4% higher than the London average

50,566
residents have signed up to the Council's My Account

On average, there are 370,000 visits to Brent Council's website each month

18%
of adults don't have the digital skills for life

DIGITAL STRATEGY OVERVIEW

BOROUGH PLAN – BUILDING A BETTER BRENT

The Borough Plan sets out our vision to make Brent a borough of culture, empathy and shared prosperity. It focusses on five priorities around which we align our resources and collaborate with partners: strong foundations; every opportunity to succeed; a future fit for everyone, an economy fit for all; a cleaner, more considerate Brent; and a borough where we can all feel safe, secure, happy and healthy.

Since 2017, we have been working towards becoming a thriving digital place and a successful digital council by embedding digital approaches within our Borough Plan priorities. This strategy sets out how our digital programme will continue to be a catalyst for delivering each of the Borough Plan priorities and help drive our recovery from the pandemic.

BUILDING A BETTER BRENT

BRENT'S DIGITAL JOURNEY

Throughout our digital journey we have been working with residents, businesses and partners to deliver a themed programme of activity, which continues to evolve.

Our digital strategy themes are:
- Access - Improving access to information and resident's services. Making sure that council systems are easy to use for all residents

- Digital Place - Having consistent technology and connectivity available to enable Brent to be a digital borough that is accessible for both businesses and residents. This includes improved access to public Wi-Fi for residents

- Digital Inclusion – Identifying digitally excluded residents and providing access to devices and digital skills to enable all residents across Brent to safely participate in the digital world

- Data and Smart devices – Using our data to better understand our customers and improve the way we deliver services by making quick and robust decisions for residents.

- Digital Workplace - Ensuring staff have access to technology that will enable them to work efficiently and to have the digital skills to effectively use existing and new technology

Theme: Access
- Over 90% of the website now meets accessibility criteria, an increase of over 38% since early 2020.

ACCESSIBILITY

- We have improved our resident online portal so that users have self-serve access to essential services such as housing needs, housing benefit and council tax 24/7 through any device.
- We have improved the security of the online portal to ensure that residents' information is stored more safely within the council.

- The Brent 'My Account' has enabled us to join up residents' interactions with the council by having one login to interact with a range of services.

- We have implemented a new feedback system providing residents with a simplified way to contact the council.

- We have introduced virtual agents (chatbots and web chats) in our online services to instantaneously answer residents' questions about council services and connect them with relevant information and forms, improving their experience when interacting with the council.
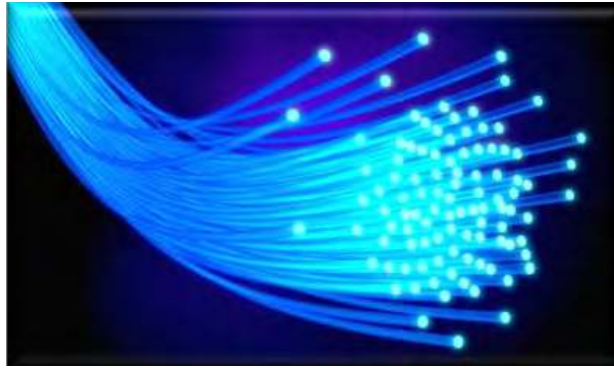
Theme: Digital Place
- We have worked with providers to retrofit fibre cabling to over 6,000 premises within Brent's housing stock, increasing our residents' access to full fibre broadband at affordable prices.

- We have successfully worked with providers to connect 15 community buildings, helping to ensure everyone can benefit from improved internet access and improve the public services delivered from these buildings.

- Throughout the pandemic our digital programme enabled us to quickly develop new processes to help set up local test and trace and other key systems, providing vital support to over 33,000 residents.

Theme: Digital Inclusion
- Through our Resident Support Fund (RSF), which helps those affected financially by the pandemic, we have provided devices and internet access to over 200, and counting, digitally excluded residents.

- We have partnered with Social Box, a community interest group that refurbishes organisations' laptops, to distribute 55 council laptops to residents via Brent's Living Room, the Refugee Support Network and the homeless community. These laptops were given to residents who wanted to develop their digital skills.

- We have worked with Infosys to provide 25 laptops to housing tenants to support them to access the new housing portal. This approach has enabled residents to improve their digital skills and actively engage with services and family members

- We have provided 65 Looked After Children and Care Leavers with laptops to enable them to continue to access education and to promote digital inclusion

Theme: Data and smart devices
- Through working with Mobile Network Operators to better use data, we have been able to understand how people use spaces by measuring footfall and time spent in our local areas, which has helped generate intelligence to inform the recovery of high streets after the pandemic.

- We are one of the first councils to establish a data ethics board to ensure oversight and proper use of data within an ethics framework.

- We have established a data lake which gives us the capability to look across all the data we collect when delivering services, providing customer insights that have informed service improvements.

- Our new Rent Arrears Management Solution (RAMS) is used to identify when tenants begin to miss rent payments and automatically alert case officers that additional support may be required for the resident, successfully preventing escalating debt.


Theme: Digital Workplace
- By investing in technology and skills for staff we successfully delivered council services without disruption throughout all stages of the pandemic, including new and enhanced services for our residents to help them to stay safe and well.

- We have piloted virtual appointments in our births, marriages and deaths service, enabling residents to choose to access this service remotely.

- We have partnered with Microsoft to offer over 20,000 hours of digital training for staff across the council, supporting new skills for improved services.

ROAD MAP

Below is a summary of the key digital initiatives that have been delivered and others that we are working on, or will deliver, as part of Brent's Digital Strategy.

Theme	2023/25	2023/26
Access	Improved customer access for key services, including Environment, Housing, Adult Social Care, Children's Services	
	Planning system replacement	
		Further website improvements
		More services on My Account
		Automation (RPA, AI, chatbots, virtual agents)
		Pipeline of Dynamics projects/ systems rationalisation
Digital Place		Increased connectivity
		Digital jobs
		Business Support Fund
Digital Inclusion		Digital champions
		Digital skills
		Digital devices
Data and smart devices	Biometrics	
		Data lake
		Internet of things hub
Digital workplace		Rollout of Office 365
		Digital skills training for staff
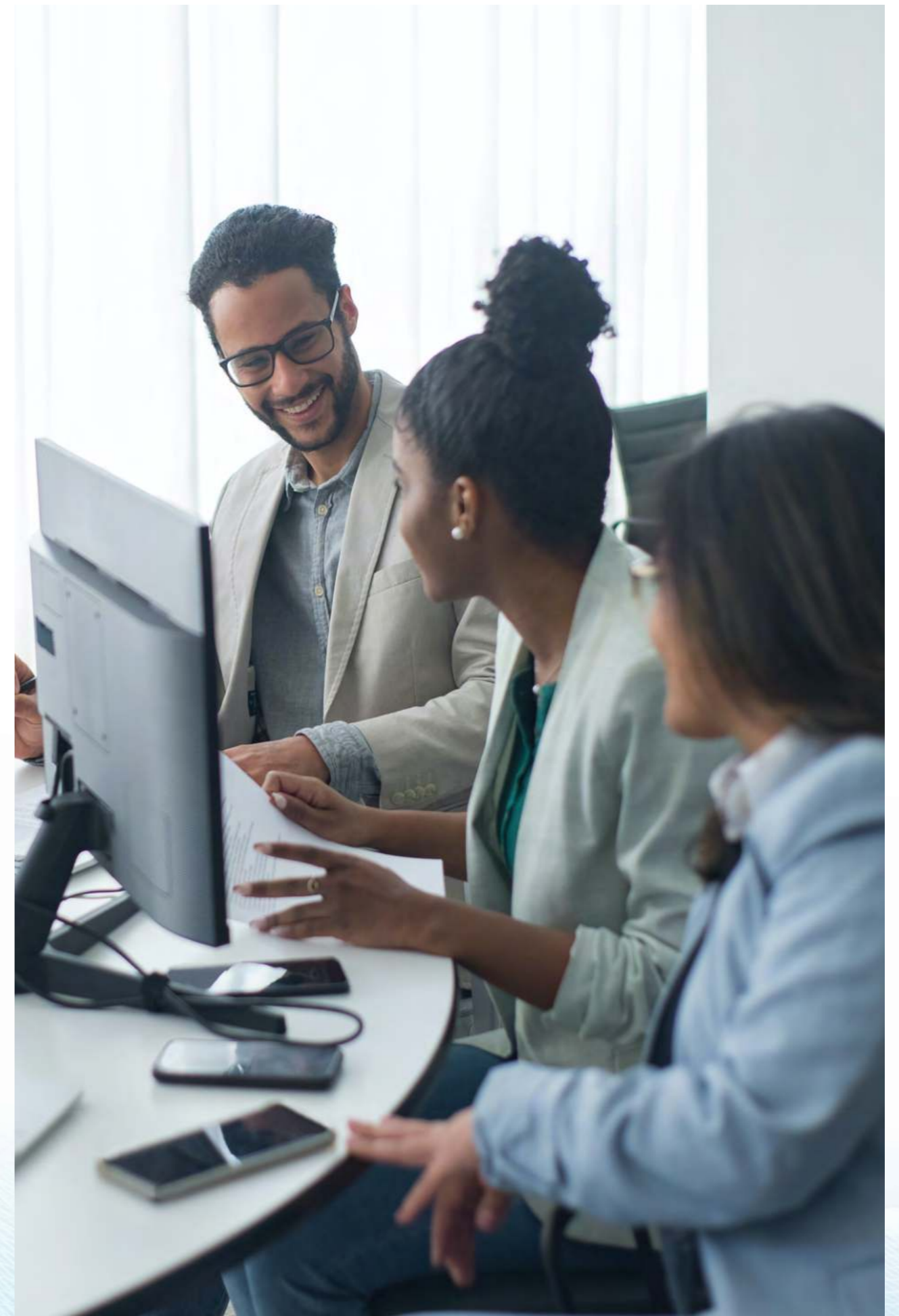
STONG FOUNDATIONS

Strong foundations
To improve residents satisfaction with the way the council does things, we are ensuring they have more opportunities to shape services to better meet their needs. Their voice is key in helping us best utilise new technology as we modernise and redefine the "front door" through which the council can be contacted.

Improvements to our website and portal are supporting residents and businesses to have a more positive experience when interacting with the council online, through simplified processes and improved access to relevant information; helping us to be more efficient and better manage demand.

Enhancing our digital offer does not mean that we expect all interactions to take place online but gives residents the choice to access services in a way that best suits them and allows us to dedicate additional support to those who need it most via our network of community Hubs.

The council's workforce and its digital skills have been crucial to our ability to respond to new challenges, including the impact of Covid and our ongoing recovery, and it is vital that we continue to invest in our staff to enable them to support residents and deliver services in the way our residents want.

Our targets for 2026
- The new Council website will provide a more personalised experience for residents and be accessible on smart phones and tablets

- Residents will be able to book, pay, report and request services seamlessly online through streamlined processes that reduce the requirement of providing duplicate information

- Telephone demand will have decreased by 25% through greater availability of digital access and through the use of virtual assistants

- 75% of enquiries made at Brent Hubs will be resolved at the point of contact

- More than 80% of residents will be satisfied with the new Brent website

- 56% of Residents will say that the council is easy to contact in the Resident attitude survey

- All staff will engage in digital skills training, including Digital Accessibility fundamental training, to support a culture of supporting residents to access services in a way that is suitable for their needs

- We will invest £80,000 in suitable training to fill identified skills gaps for developing and maintaining new technology

- We will recruit eight digital skills apprentices to demonstrate our commitment to encouraging digital employment opportunities in Brent

- Automation (Robotic Process Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning) will increase staff productivity, producing an equivalent of £400k savings per annum in staff time by 2023/24

- Staff experience a more manageable work load due to efficient systems and where possible digital automation of administrative tasks.

CASE STUDY – VIRTUAL APPOINTMENTS

Mrs Shah goes to the council website to complete a housing benefit application. Mrs Shah has limited digital skills but wants to complete the forms online as she doesn't want to travel to the Civic centre. She finds the forms on the council website but feels she needed help as she had never completed a form online. She calls Brent Customer Services who identify that she would benefit from a virtual appointment where she can speak to a staff member face to face on her computer or mobile. The customer services officer discusses a suitable time to arrange an appointment with Mrs Shah and then sent her a text message with the appointment link which Mrs Shah is able to click at the time of her appointment.

At the allotted time, a customer services advisor joins the virtual appointment which Mrs Shah joins from her mobile phone so she can fill out the form on her computer while she speaks to the advisor. During the virtual face to face appointment, the staff member guides Mrs Shah through the housing benefit process and explains the supporting evidence she needs to provide. With this assistance, Mrs Shah is able to successfully submit the housing application with the required information which is then sent to a housing benefit assessor.

Mrs Shah is approved to receive housing benefits promptly as she

has provided all the information that is required. By using the virtual appointment system Mrs Shah is able to successfully complete her housing benefits application and avoid having to come into the Civic Centre

OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

Improved access

As a Digital Council, we've made it easier for citizens to interact with us; continually improving our online provision. Enhancements to our website have included a new, decluttered design to make it more responsive, streamlining of navigation for heavy traffic areas to improve user journeys, and upgrades to MyAccount, making it more secure and easier to log-in and access an expanding range of online services. We are now able to better support residents with the introduction of webchats and chatbots, and improved online forms which collect information in a simple way and avoid users having to provide the same information more than once.

We have implemented video conferencing software to support increased civic participation; utilising this technology to continue to engage with residents remotely, for example, in developing Brent's Black Community Action Plan. And we are now regularly using a wide range of tools and technologies - including MS Dynamics, RPA, AI and Machine Learning – to improve access and deliver services in a smarter way.

The introduction of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax MS Dynamics platform allows Brent officers to have an overall view of residents' interactions with these services, supporting more informed decision making and improved outcomes. Virtual agents and RPAs have improved resident experience by directing them to relevant council website information in response to their query. This reduces the number of calls to Brent's contact centre and enables our customer service officers to dedicate more time to supporting our residents who need additional assistance.

CASE STUDY – CHATBOT

Mr Jones recently welcomed his first child and needs to register the birth with Brent Council. As Mr Jones has never done this before he goes onto the Council's website to find out more information about the process.

When he goes on to the Marriages, Civil Partnership, Deaths and Births page on the website, a Chatbot appears. Mr Jones is able to interact with the Chatbot 24/7 and therefore can access the information at a time that suits him as opposed to calling Brent Customer Services during their opening hours. Mr Jones clicks on the Chatbot and types in 'Birth'. The Chatbot responds straight away and asks Mr Jones if he would like a copy of a birth certificate or to register a birth. Mr Jones selects that he would like to register a birth, at which point the Chatbot tells him which documents he will need to bring to the appointment. It also provides a link to the appointment page which Mr Jones follows and books an appointment for three weeks' time

Three weeks later Mr Jones arrives at the Civic Centre with all the required documents and completes a face to face appointment with the registration team. As Mr Jones has brought all the right documentation he successfully registers the birth of his daughter.

We continue to invest in council systems that improve the resident experience when interacting with the council and support joined up communication between residents and council services. The 'Plan your Pathway' app for young people leaving care is one the applications that will achieve this by offering an interactive way for care leavers to complete their pathway plans. The app also supports young people to provide updates to their social workers and personal advisors instantly.

Changing the way we work

In response to the pandemic, Council employees demonstrated their ability to rapidly adapt and make use of new technology; continuing provide services for residents whilst moving to remote working arrangements.

We have been able to increase the pace of change across the council through successful implementation of new systems, such as Microsoft Teams, which enabled 215,548 virtual meetings to take place in 2020. The introduction of 'Docusign' technology allows council employees to digitally add their certified signatures to documents, removing the need to print documents and upload them onto systems. Alongside this, 'Govmail' has enabled us to reduce time and money spent on printing, supporting the council to continue to send information and forms to residents while staff have been working remotely, ensuring sustained service delivery whilst realising efficiencies. We also have introduced Oracle Cloud which has improved our ability to monitor, analyse and improve processes. This includes improved self-service capabilities and information accuracy for staff members as well as supporting faster payments for external stakeholders and enabling them to access and maintain their own information.

Next steps

- We will launch a new customer-driven web offer that will:

  o Create a customer-first online experience that is accessible for all

  o Allow residents and businesses to effectively engage with council services when and where it is most convenient for them

  o Save the user time by providing quick and easy access to information and online services.

  o Gives the user confidence to transact more online due to an easy-to-use, reliable and consistent online environment

  o Increase efficiencies across the council by enabling customers to access a majority of council services online

- We understand that people will only interact with us online if they feel that their data is secure. We are building a more secure and robust network to keep all data safe from emerging threats and improve user access to online accounts.

- The portal will continue to be developed to provide a 'tell us once' service. This will remove the need for residents to complete several forms to inform separate services of changes in their circumstances and support an improved customer experience.

- We will develop a third party access option for the portal, enabling residents with complex needs to be supported online by trusted voluntary and community sector services.

- We will introduce voice bots in our contact centre, which will use Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to connect residents with the right service at the first point of contact.

- We will accelerate the roll out of RPA to more lines of business, including linking it with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to automatically read and input handwritten forms; enabling our staff to dedicate more time to meaningful and complex interactions with residents.

- AI will be used to support faster, more consistent decisions in areas where there is clear criteria - for example, planning applications or eligibility assessments for council services - enabling more residents to independently complete full transactions and do business with the council at a time of their choosing.

- We will make further use of MS Dynamics to integrate channels, applications and workflows to enable seamless end-to-end transactions across a wider range of services and maximise the first touch capability of council officers.

- We will increase the resources available to support new technology across the organisation and invest in the skill development of the team, including apprentices, to increase our digital capacity.

- As we deploy new systems to improve access and realise efficiencies, we will create opportunities for Brent's staff to develop their digital skills through partnership training programmes with industry leaders.

- We will continue to improve and modernise our Planning systems to improve the resident and user experience

- We will progress our culture change programme across the organisation, engaging with staff to demonstrate their role in promoting innovation and identifying opportunities for digital improvements within their service area and the wider council.

- We will implement Office365 across the council to increase collaborative working amongst colleagues, utilising features such as joint real time editable access to files which allows several colleagues to work on the same document at the same time. It will also enable flexible, secure access on any device at any time which employees can use with confidence as compliance rules are managed automatically.

A FUTURE FIT FOR EVERYONE, AN ECONOMY FIT FOR ALL

Investing in the local and regional economy as well as the creation of new jobs feature strongly in the Borough Plan. We will continue to improve Brent's digital infrastructure to enable our local neighbourhoods to adapt to new ways of working and develop as attractive destinations in which to live, work and do business. This includes improving broadband speeds across the borough so that they are fit for purpose, now and in the future, and working with the market to ensure Brent benefits from the roll out of new 5G networks.

To make sure Brent's a great place to start and grow a business, we will continue to develop an offer that helps businesses prosper in the digital place and makes Brent a desirable location for new and established businesses from across a variety of sectors. One of the ways we will implement this is through our partnership with 'Take Your Shot' in setting up an innovation hub in Brent for entrepreneurs and young talent to start up their businesses. Through the hub, new businesses will have access to business mentors, training and a space to network with other local businesses as they develop. This supports our commitment in the Black Community Action Plan to provide opportunities for black community entrepreneurs and start-ups to connect with large tech organisations.

With an increase in the number of residents working, learning and socialising from home, the demand for high speed internet has increased. Local businesses are adapting to meet changing needs by developing their online presence so they can continue to operate and grow. To support this we will invest in an e-commerce platform for local businesses, accompanied by the introduction of a council business database, to promote relevant local business opportunities and offer support where required.

We will continue to work with Brent Start and other partners to improve the digital skills of businesses within the borough, including through training programmes, access to improved connectivity and devices. This will not only support existing local businesses but make Brent a supportive environment for start-ups and newly established businesses which in turn will increase employment opportunities for residents and support the Brent pound being put back into the Brent pocket.

Our targets for 2026

- **62% of Brent will have access to full fibre connectivity**, meaning a year on year increase in coverage of 8%

- We will pilot a '**Business support fund**' to help businesses thrive and increase economic growth within Brent

- We will give **25% of local businesses access to the training** to be able to have a presence online and enable them to **make use of available technology** and increase their online presence

- Over **2000 residents** will have access to classroom based digital skills training through Brent Start

Our journey so far

As our lives become more dependent on digital technology, connectivity is essential for helping residents and businesses to thrive. From a starting point of 4% access to Fibre To The Premise (FTTP) broadband in 2017, Brent now has full fibre available across 25.5% of the borough, higher than the London average of 21.05%. FTTP provides far faster connection speeds and much greater capacity than traditional broadband services. This means that internet speeds won't slow down, or buffer, during peak times. It's also much faster to upload material, which businesses have told us is particularly important to them. We've reduced the barriers to providers wanting to invest in Brent's digital infrastructure and continue to work with them to support their investment within the borough.

The development of resident's digital skills through Brent Start training courses ensures they can take advantage of new employment opportunities. To support this we have been working with new and existing providers to offer employment opportunities to Brent residents through Brent Works as part of the social value element of our contracts.

Work has begun with local businesses to better understand the specific digital skills training and support they require. The Business Support Fund is bringing together a range of training for these businesses, including setting up social media platforms, accessing online marketplaces and enabling cashless payments at their stores. We are piloting an e-commerce platform for local businesses as part of our investment in the local economy and to encourage the Brent pound being spent in Brent. This pilot will explore how we can support businesses to have an online presence to increase sales and help Brent to be a place where local businesses thrive.

As part of our commitment to Community Wealth Building, we are supporting local businesses by ensuring they form part of the Council's supply chain and encouraging them to actively engage with the council through the introduction of our Local Supplier procurement register. This register will enable us to support local businesses by providing them with information on the range of support and future procurement opportunities available to them.

Next steps

- We will invest in an LPWAN (low-power wide-area network) to support the introduction of monitoring sensors that provide real time information to our systems. We will utilise the LPWAN and other available technology to measure footfall in town centres to better understand and support high streets Covid19 recovery and inform future plans for the local area, including the promotion of active travel

- The 'Living Room' and Brent Hubs will be used to support employers and employees to access digital training.

- We will engage the market to ensure Brent receives investment for the rollout of 5G to enable smart cities technology and make societies more sustainable and supportive by:

  o Enabling 5G connections between appliances and service providers so residents can reduce their household energy use and costs

  o Helping to care for people in their homes and within care settings by using telehealth to monitor vital signs remotely, reduce loneliness and observe medicine administration using 4K video

- We will continue to work with providers to increase the number of properties able to access FTTP Broadband at an affordable cost. And, in partnership with the West London Alliance, we will secure free gigabit capable connections for key community buildings, to ensure everyone can access fast and stable broadband.

- We will work with the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation to improve the digital infrastructure on the Park Royal industrial estate. The learning from this project will inform improvements to CCTV systems, Internet of Things applications and the capabilities of 5G.

- We will work with local businesses to demonstrate demand for full fibre broadband and share this with providers to stimulate investment programmes for the borough. By increasing the fibre coverage accessible to businesses we will address online business barriers, including 'not spots' and slow internet connection speeds.

- We will explore opportunities to introduce block chain systems to increase security when sharing information between public sector organisations, such as the NHS and other local authorities.

- We will develop our use of digital twin technology to virtually assess the impact of new technology in an area before implementing it. This will assist with the planning process for 5G masts and small cells, ensuring they provide consistent coverage across the borough and do not adversely impact existing infrastructure.

- A business database will be developed to collate information on businesses within the borough and identify areas of growth. This will be supported by a business portal which will enable businesses to access valuable information and support, including training, licencing information and procurement processes.

- We will continue to work with providers to create more employment and apprenticeship opportunities for Brent residents and seek partnerships with other companies in the technology sector to widen the range of apprenticeships available.

- We will launch a two year academy, via the apprenticeship level, which will focus on upskilling Brent staff who work with data in their current roles. Through the academy, staff will achieve a level 4 qualification in data management.

- We will ensure local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have the support they need to thrive in the digital place, working with these businesses to understand their digital needs through a Business Support Fund and share opportunities in online trading, marketing and digital efficiencies.

EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO SUCCEED

The Independent Brent Poverty Commission, which reported in 2020, laid bare the huge challenges many people face in our borough. Through our digital strategy we are addressing the digital divide by working with residents and the community and voluntary sector to make Brent a digital place for everyone. By identifying and supporting individuals who need help developing their digital skills, more residents are being empowered to overcome barriers and access vital digital services, for example, online GP appointments.

We want to ensure that all residents and businesses across Brent have the right skills and access to devices and connectivity to fully participate in the modern world, including online shopping, access to training and employment opportunities and engaging with the council online. We recognise that people's needs vary. As we improve our understanding of the barriers to engaging with technology we are better able to tailor support and services to meet diverse local needs.

The importance of access to digital devices and reliable broadband to help Brent children and young people engage in education and to achieve was highlighted throughout the pandemic. By supporting Brent families to access devices and by working with schools and colleges to promote digital innovation we will work to help every Brent child and young person fulfil their potential.

Our targets for 2026

- We will work with the voluntary sector and crowdsourcing platforms to provide 8,000 households in Brent with a digital device, connectivity and the opportunity to develop their digital skills and improve digital inclusion

- 35% of currently digital excluded residents will increase their digital confidence

- We will give access to over 20,000 hours' worth of self-study digital skills training to all residents

- There will be 500 trained digital champions across Brent to support residents in developing their digital skills

- We will improve and expand our front of house offering with Hubs and Family Wellbeing Centres assisting residents with developing their digital skills both face to face and virtually

Our journey so far

Tackling digital exclusion has always been a key objective for our digital strategy. In 2020, we commissioned an independent review which found that 19% of adults in Brent do not have access to a laptop and 6% of residents have no digital skills. In response to this we have continued to develop new targeted approaches to ensure no one is left behind on our journey to becoming a digital place.

We have piloted providing devices and connectivity to adult social care service users. . This has included day centre users and residents known to AgeUK who otherwise would not be able to interact with services as they moved to virtual provision. By supporting these residents they have been able to engage in activities including arts and crafts sessions and physiotherapy while centres closed during the pandemic. AgeUK has also supported older residents to develop their digital skills so that they are able to interact with others and reduce their social isolation, as well as complete their shopping online and attend virtual GP appointments.

We have introduced digital champions within our council services and Community and Voluntary services to support residents with digital queries and develop their knowledge of different technology. We currently have 50 digital champions across libraries, Brent Hubs, AgeUK and health partners who are members of the national digital champion network.

To further support residents, Brent Start have continued to run digital skills programmes for using email, the internet and improving digital literacy. As more universal services move to online platforms the development of these skills has never been more important for ensuring all residents can be active participants in day to day life.

We continue to be active members of the London Office of Technology Institute (LOTI) and engage in collaboration and the sharing of best practice with other local authorities. Through this group, we have been awarded funding to develop a digital inclusion map for the borough to inform the areas of investment required to ensure all residents opportunities to develop their digital skills and become digitally included members of society.

Next steps

- We will work with existing and new providers to offer residents digital skills training opportunities, both in person at our locality based hubs and through online platforms.

- We will extend the offer of digital skills training to more more community and voluntary sector partners to empower them to provide digital services to meet the needs of the communities they support.

- We will expand our digital champions programme to increase the trained resources available for supporting digitally excluded residents. The digital champions will be trained as part of a national digital champion network that will support the sharing of best practice on engaging residents and developing their skills.

- We will continue our commitment to the London Recovery Board's Digital Access for All Mission goal for 'Every Londoner to have access to good connectivity, basic digital skills and the device or support they need to be online by 2025' through Brent's Resident Support Fund - providing devices and connectivity to our digitally excluded residents.

AGE UK
DIGITAL INCLUSION PILOT

Mrs Kohen was referred to the digital Inclusion programme with AgeUK through Elders Voice. Mrs Kohen was hoping to acquire a place on the Board of Trustees for Elders Voice and the support provided would allow her to develop her skills which would be useful for her position as a Trustee.

Mrs Kohen was contacted by one of the AgeUK volunteers to discuss her objectives and gain more insight into what she hoped to achieve from the programme. She stated that she wanted to be able to use means of communications to attend remote meetings and that she was also interested in searching the National Archives as a hobby.

Mrs Kohen already had an email address, which meant that she was able to start the course straight away. She had used a laptop in the past, however, she stated that she had not used one for some time and was not confident to operate one independently. She lives alone, however, her daughter visits often and would be able to assist her if needed. The volunteer met with Mrs Kohen via Zoom every week to develop the digital skills she needed to achieve the objectives she had shared. After successfully completing her course and increasing her digital confidence from working with the volunteer Mrs Kohen graduated from the programme.

- We will develop our Digital Inclusion Network (made up of the voluntary sector, health partners and local businesses) to monitor the implementation of the council's digital inclusion plan and ensure it meets the needs of residents.

- We will continue to implement the recommendations and embed the learnings from the 'Digital Inclusion in Brent' report (completed by Citizens Online in 2020) to ensure we reduce digital exclusion

A CLEANER, MORE CONSIDERATE BRENT

In 2019 Brent Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and began developing an ambitious ten year strategy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. Investing in technology that supports a cleaner, more considerate Brent will support this goal and help improve the quality of life for all residents.

Technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), the Data Lake and smart devices present opportunities to better understand our borough by generating new insights for areas from air quality and waste management to transport use. By harnessing these types of technologies and making best use of data we will be in a better position to:

- improve our environment – green spaces, homes and businesses;

- tackle poor air quality;

- better plan service provision; and,

- react quickly to changes, such as those ex perienced during the pandemic.

Our targets for 2026
- We will develop an in-house Internet of Things Hub that supplies good quality data and real time information regularly to our data lake which will inform a range of environmental and property based safety actions

- The use of Internet of Things will monitor the progress of reduction in consumption emissions within Brent to meet the targets of the Brent Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy

Our journey so far
Our first steps in implementing Smart City technology and IoT networks that link into

our data lake have started to give us an improved understanding of the borough in real time. Air quality sensor pilots inform us where traffic changes or promoting active travel have improved air quality and are assisting with identifying areas where additional investment is required. Sensors have also enabled us to monitor humidity levels in homes and be able to take preventative action before mould becomes an issue for our tenants.

We are working with our partners at Microsoft, through their Green500 programme, to identify opportunities to roll out smart devices to support our Climate Emergency strategy. This includes approaches, where appropriate, for retrofitting our housing stock with energy efficient materials, encouraging investment in electrical vehicle charging points and identifying opportunities to use solar powered energy.

Next steps
- A range of Internet of Things (IoT) technology will be piloted, particularly within housing and adult social care, to test how it can help identify required works at an earlier stage, sustaining living conditions and reducing the costs of repairs in some circumstances.

- To enable the implementation of Smart City technology. We will work with the market to identify devices to pilot in Brent, focusing particularly on our town centres. We will test how well the devices assist in improving air quality, congestion and parking problems and the management of waste.

- Through participation in the Microsoft Green500 programme we will monitor the impact of new technology, including the retrofitting of energy efficient systems

within properties, and learn from partners across local government and the private sector to develop new approaches to support our Climate Emergency priorities.

- We will develop and expand Brent's open data platform to give the community, academics and businesses access to more information, empowering them to shape solutions that will improve the environment in Brent.

A BOROUGH WHERE WE CAN ALL FEEL SAFE, SECURE, HAPPY AND HEALTHY

The Covid19 pandemic highlighted the importance of using data and intelligence to understand issues and best respond to the needs of our different communities. It became apparent early on that Covid-19 had a disproportionate impact on BAME communities, including health and employment outcomes linked to social and economic drivers. By rapidly developing digital solutions for local test and trace systems and surge testing we were able to improve our understanding and help reduce transmission of Covid19 within local communities. This approach also enabled us to identify, reach out to and work with hard to reach groups to encourage engagement with local testing and participation in the vaccination programme. As we have built a holistic view of how the pandemic has impacted different communities we can use this knowledge to inform future projects to overcome these challenges and improve health equality in Brent.

As a digital council we are committed to collecting and using data in an ethical and secure way. To support this we are developing our first data strategy, which will set out our council wide approach to data, and intend to refresh the cybersecurity strategy, which builds on the work we have done to implement the existing Brent 2019-23 cybersecurity strategy.

The Shared Technology Services roadmap for 2020-25 outlines the investment required to refresh and renew Brent's infrastructure to be stable, scalable and reliable. The roadmap focuses on four areas of technology change and investment to achieve the strategic objectives:

- Datacentres, datacentre networks and campus networks

- End user experience modernisation

- Cyber protection

- Service improvement

The benefits to our residents will be realised through improved security, customer experience and the increased resilience of Brent's systems.

Our targets for 2026
- We will utilise Robotic Process Automation (RPA), Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve quality of collected data across the organisation

- We will publish and implement Brent's data strategy

- We will implement a robust framework for the use of peoples' data and champion an ethical approach through the use of our Data Ethics Board

- We will increase the number of integrations between systems to support consistency across council services

- The number of IT applications will be reduced by at least 10%

Our journey so far
The development of our data lake has helped us to collect better quality data and use it to improve services and processes. We are increasingly able to combine data to build an overall picture of residents' interactions with multiple different council services; using it to inform new approaches and tailored support that meets individual needs.

In utilising data from across council services and the Internet of Things, we are committed to keeping all data secure and only collecting data that is necessary to help improve outcomes for residents.

To safeguard this commitment, we have established a Data Ethics board, which is one of the first of its kind. The board consists of council partners and industry experts who provide oversight to our approach to collecting, storing and using data.

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CASE STUDY – RENT ARREARS MANAGEMENT SOLUTION (RAMS) DASHBOARD

Miss Patel regularly pays her council rent on time and has done so for the past eight years since she moved into her property. However, in July 2020 Miss Patel did not make her agreed rent payment to the council. This appeared on the work allocation on Brent's new RAMS dashboard as it was unusual for Miss Patel to be in rent arrears. Miss Patel's case was allocated to a case officer who contacted Miss Patel and found out she lost her job due to Covid19 and was unable to pay the full amount of rent this month.

The case officer was able to direct her to the application for housing benefit and also signposted her to BrentStart to receive skills and employment support while she was looking for a new job. The case officer also discussed with Miss Patel about how she would be able to pay back the arrears within her means. These repayments show on the dashboard as well as her rent payments so that further support can be provided if these are missed in the future.

Next steps

- As part of our data lake, we will develop fully operational data products to help professionals make more informed decisions around early intervention and support for residents.

- To utilise our learning from IoT pilots, and ensure we have a secure and sustainable model for IoT technology across the borough, we will explore setting up an IoT hub on Azure. By developing an in-house IoT hub we will have a self-sufficient method for gathering data from sensors and developing insights to shape future service improvements.

- We will explore the opportunities to use biometrics (e.g. passports, finger prints or iris scanning) to validate individuals' identities in a user friendly and secure manner, reducing the need for individuals to present paper documents.

- We will use the data lake to identify opportunities to improve existing services, including developing more effective and preventative service models, and do this in a way that improves resident's experience when they are interacting with the council.

- We will develop and implement a data management strategy that will form the foundations of an organisational culture change in our approach to data.

- We will ensure that we follow the highest standards when handling residents' information and ensure that data is protected with up to date security processes by adopting Shared Technology Services cyber strategy.

- We will improve the experience of our Adult Social Care residents by joining up back office systems to introduce efficiencies

Governance arrangements

Delivery of this digital strategy is overseen by the Brent Customer and Digital Board and championed by the Deputy Leader of the Council. The Board is chaired by the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services – the digital lead for the Council Management Team. The Board drives and supports the ambitious programme of change and is responsible for:

1. Identifying, prioritising and coordinating digital work packages;

2. Acting as the gateway that formally assesses and approves digital work packages;

3. Aligning and deploying resources, skills and expertise for most effective delivery of digital work packages;

4. Ensuring membership of the board is representative and has the appropriate skills and authority;

5. Supporting the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) in fostering a culture that values, protects and uses information for the benefit of residents.

With so many different elements to the Digital Programme, a consistent technical architecture is essential. While it's recognised that different services have different requirements, there does need to be a corporate approach to the systems and applications that support our work. The Technical Design Authority (TDA), has been established to make decisions regarding technical implementations for projects.

The TDA makes decisions and provides guidance and support where projects will impact more than one project or service, or when a new idea is being tested. This is accompanied by a Customer Experience Board which ensures that digital processes are implemented in a way that supports a positive customer journey and is accessible to the majority of residents.

The implementation of Brent's Data Ethics board ensures that before the council uses a dataset to drive its decision making we will have reviewed how the data will be used. The Data Ethics Board utilises The Open Data Institute (ODI) data ethics canvas to review the data, how it is collected, how it will be analysed, and ensure that the intended use is ethical, sensitive to the needs of our residents and makes a positive difference. Each review of data use and feedback provided is underpinned by the following ethics principle themes:

- Privacy

- Accountability

- Safety and security

- Transparency and explainability

- Fairness and no discrimination

- Human control of technology

- Professional responsibility

- Promotion of human value

The Shared Technology Services strategy will support the implementation of Brent's digital strategy as its driving ambition is to provide a suite of common tools for each partner to consume and a standard method of monitoring and managing

our datacentres, networks and devices to provide efficiency in operation and security protections.

To ensure existing and future online information is protected our Shared Technology Service has implemented a Cyber Security Strategy. The strategy ensures that there remains a focus on putting the right controls in place to protect and react to cyber threats going forward.

Our Shared Technology Service will continue to harness their strong relationship with the National Cyber Security Centre and other cyber agencies to protect residents', business and staff data in Brent. The Cyber Security Board is responsible for the implementation of the strategy and identifying, monitoring and managing risks. The introduction of a Chief Information Security Officer and a Cyber Security Team will focus on delivering technical controls and guidance for Brent council as well as other partners.

Key Principles

We recognise that the scale of transformation outlined in this strategy represents the continuation of an ongoing

culture shift for the council, residents, partners and businesses. It will 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 principles:

1. We will ensure that our services are accessible to everyone. We will develop guidance on digital inclusion, set out the accessibility standards new technology needs to comply with and help services plan their digital provision so that it is accessible for all residents.

2. Services will be people centred. 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.

3. We will embed our digital vision within our policies and strategies including HR, Planning, Regeneration, Employment and Skills and ICT. We will also reflect it in our engagement with the community and models of working with the community and voluntary sector.

4. 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.

5. 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 and work smarter.

6. We will work openly and actively collaborate with other organisations, including the community and voluntary sector, the Greater London Authority, the West London Alliance and the London Office of Technology and Innovation to develop innovative solutions and share learning and good practice

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

AI - Artificial intelligence (AI) is the simulation of human intelligence processed by machines, especially computer systems.

Biometrics are body measurements or calculations, including voice recognition and fingerprint scanning, that can be used as a form of identification and access control.

Chatbot – A Chatbot is a computer program that fundamentally simulates human conversations. It allows a form of interaction between a human and a machine via messages or voice command.

Data Lake – A Data Lake is a centralized repository that allows you to store all your structured and unstructured data at any scale. You can store your data as-is, without having to first structure the data, and run different types of analytics—from dashboards and visualizations to big data processing, real-time analytics, and machine learning to guide better decisions.

Digital Twin - a virtual representation of an object or system that exists throughout its lifecycle. It is updated from real-time data, and uses simulation, machine learning and reasoning to help inform decision-making.

Dynamics – Microsoft Dynamics is a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for managing a company's interactions with current and future customers. It often involves using technology to organize, automate, and synchronize sales, marketing, customer service, and technical support.

EDM - An Electronic Document Management system (EDMS) is a software system for organizing and storing different kinds of documents.

IoT - The Internet of Things is a system of interrelated computing devices, mechanical and digital machines, objects, animals or people that are provided with unique identifiers (UIDs) and the ability to transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction.

5G - Fifth-Generation cellular wireless follows previous generations of mobile technology such as 3G and 4G. It provides improved bandwidth, meaning higher download speeds and a faster user experience. It also offers greater capacity, allowing thousands of devices in a small area to be connected at the same time.

Full Fibre - Full-fibre broadband uses fibre-optic cables to connect your home to the street cabinet, replacing the old copper connections. Full-fibre connections provide a better service that can deliver much faster speeds – up to one gigabit per second.

RPA - Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is the use of software to handle high-volume, repeatable tasks that previously required humans to perform.

Smart Cities - A Smart City is a designation given to a city that incorporates information and communication technologies to enhance the quality and performance of urban services such as energy, transportation and utilities in order to reduce resource consumption, wastage and overall costs.

APPENDIX 1 –
TARGET BREAKDOWN BY YEAR

2026 Target	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
There will be 500 trained digital champions across Brent	100 digital champions are recruited	200 digital champions are recruited	350 digital champions are recruited	500 digital champions are recruited	A network of 500 active digital champions will be maintained
We will introduce automation to improve quality of data and contribute to efficiencies and savings	10 RPAs 3 Virtual agents	10 RPAs 3 Virtual agents Contribute to £450k savings income via increased debt recovery and £400k in staff productivity savings AI / ML pilot	10 RPAs 3 Virtual agents £450k savings income via increased debt recovery and £400k in staff productivity savings	10 RPAs 3 Virtual agents £450k savings income via increased debt recovery and £400k in staff productivity savings	10 RPAs 3 Virtual agents £450k savings income via increased debt recovery and £400k in staff productivity savings
Telephone demand will decrease by 25% and enable a channel shift to accessing services online	15% call demand reduction, seeing 575,596 calls received or less A 200% increase in MyAccount users from 36,000 in 2021	20% call demand reduction, seeing 541,738 calls received or less An additional 68% increase in MyAccount users	25% call demand reduction seeing 507,879 calls received or less An additional 40% increase in MyAccount users	Maintain 25% call demand reduction An additional 29% increase in MyAccount users	Maintain 25% call demand reduction An additional 22% increase in MyAccount users
We will increase the number of services delivered through MyAccount	Children and Young People department and Council Tax services will be accessible online	Regeneration and Environment services will be accessible online	Regeneration and Environment services will be accessible online		
We will re-platform and rationalise the number of forms used to reduce the number across the council systems	All forms sitting on Umbraco to be redesigned and replatformed onto Sitecore. All frequently used forms to be redesigned and replatformed	'Pay It', and 'contact us' forms to be rationalised and replatformed	Book it' and 'Apply for it' forms to be rationalised and replatformed	'Report it' forms to be rationalised and replatformed	
Staff experience a more manageable work load due to efficient systems and where possible digital automation of administrative tasks.		70% of staff will agree that digital technology enables them to do their job more efficiently			75% of staff will agree that digital technology enables them to do their job more efficiently
We will increase the number of Community Hub customers that are more confident in using online services	Maintain 75% or higher resolution rate	Maintain 75% or higher resolution rate			56% of residents say the council is easy to contact

APPENDIX 1 –
TARGET BREAKDOWN BY YEAR CONTD.

2026 Target	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
80% of residents will be satisfied with the new website	60% customer satisfaction levels	70% customer satisfaction levels	80% customer satisfaction levels	Maintain 80% customer satisfaction levels	Maintain 80% customer satisfaction levels
2,000 residents will have access to classroom based digital skills training with Brent Start	338 digital skill learners	371 digital skill learners	408 digital skill learners	448 digital skill learners	448 digital skill leaners
We will continue the rationalisation of systems in Brent and IT applications will be reduced by 10%	3 applications will be decommissioned or integrated with existing systems	4 applications will be decommissioned or integrated with existing systems	3 applications will be decommissioned or integrated with existing systems	3 applications will be decommissioned or integrated with existing systems	3 applications will be decommissioned or integrated with existing systems
An additional eight digital skills apprentices will be recruited		3 digital skills apprentices recruited	3 digital skills apprentices recruited	2 digital skills apprentices recruited	
35% of currently digital excluded residents will increase their digital confidence	7% increase in digitally included residents 20,000 hours of digital skills training for all residents	7% increase in digitally included residents	7% increase in digitally included residents	7% increase in digitally included residents	7% increase in digitally included residents
We will invest £80,000 in suitable training to fill identified skills gaps for developing and maintaining new technology	Digital accessibility fundamental training for all frontline staff	Digital skills training Culture change of digital learning	Digital skills training Ember culture change of digital learning	Digital skills training Maintain culture change of digital learning	Digital skills training Maintain culture change of digital learning
We will develop an in-house Internet of Things Hub that supplies good quality data and real time information regularly to our data lake which will inform a range of environmental and property based safety actions	Publish and implement Brent's data strategy	Pilot IoT sensors within an IoT Hub	Develop an in-house IoT hub	Digital skills training	56% of residents say the council is easy to contact
Pilot a Business Support Fund to help businesses thrive and increase economic growth	Pilot business support fund for 250 businesses	Review learnings and needs analysis following completion of pilot			