



Browne Jacobson

Delivering Modern Digital Public Services

Speakers

Anja Beriro,
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Browne Jacobson LLP
(Chair and Facilitator)

Dr Annabel Causer,
GIS Professional Services Manager,
Kier Transportation

Nigel Herbert,
Industry Director - Government,
HealthCare and LifeSciences,
Medallia

Phil James,
Community Engagement Manager,
DLUHC Local Digital

Richard Nicholas,
Partner,
Browne Jacobson LLP

Dale Shepherd,
Digital Services Manager,
Shropshire Council
and
LocalGov Digital Steering Group member

In November 2023 the BSA, in collaboration with [Browne Jacobson LLP](#), organised a seminar in Birmingham on Delivering Modern Digital Public Services, focused on the West Midlands.

The seminar had speakers from central and local government, and from the private sector. Several local government representatives from the region participated, as did service and infrastructure project providers from across business and the VCSE sector. The focus of the seminar was on harnessing digital techniques to deliver services which were accessible to all and had cyber security at their core.

Anja Beriro and Richard Nicholas opened the seminar by welcoming everyone and setting out the context for the discussion, with an emphasis on the need to collaborate and share best practice on new and emerging technologies.

Phil James was the first speaker, outlining progress being made through DLUHC's LocalDigital team. He outlined the range of work, including in cyber assessment and training.

The Local Digital Declaration, launched in 2018, now had over 300 signatories. It was currently being improved, to make it easier to understand and put into action.

The Local Digital Fund supported councils to create more user-centred, cost-effective and cyber-secure local public services. Over £16 million had been awarded to 61 council-led digital projects. Phil presented a map showing the wide range of geographies represented in Round 6 of the funds.

He also highlighted some recurring themes and initiatives.

Eight councils had adopted Open Digital Planning; 35 had adopted Local Gov Drupal, enabling them to save up to 80 per cent of costs for building new council websites; the Open Referral Standard was used by 20 councils; and the Housing Repairs Service had reduced council calls by almost 40 per cent.

The Future Councils programme was the most recent initiative. It brought together digital services and cyber security reform across multiple areas in a council, in recognition of the fact that improvements to one service had not necessarily driven council-wide transformation.

The goal was councils that were both modern (fast and responsive, delivering services that were effective, relevant, clear and accessible) and resilient (resistant to cyber attack and future threats, sustainable and cost-effective). There were eight pilot councils. Three common challenges were identified: how to influence the organisation-wide factors; how to make digital and cyber improvements across the whole organisation; and how to reform services, including the big, critical services, which were riskier and harder to change. These systemic barriers and their root causes were being explored collaboratively.

Dale Shepherd spoke next, bringing a local government perspective. He began by setting the context. Public sector organisations were responsible for huge amounts of sensitive data and critical systems, and needed to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data and systems in the face of both external and internal threats. Furthermore the services being provided needed to work for everyone in an authority area, and sometimes beyond. Those requirements were backed up by legal obligations, covering the security of the data, and the accessibility requirements for websites and mobile applications.

There were however significant challenges, in terms of resources and levels of understanding, and in dealing with suppliers. Dale outlined the negative impacts when things went wrong, and the effect this could have on relationships - both internally and with suppliers - and the time / cost impacts.

Collaboration helped to overcome some of these common challenges by providing help, support and advice as well as a stronger voice when dealing with suppliers. Examples of collaboration through networks such as LocalGov Digital were listed, along with success stories arising from them.

There was a range of practical questions to the first two speakers, including on website accessibility, overcoming resistance to change and considering different solutions, and problem resolution. This also prompted a discussion on the role of data as an 'untapped gold mine' which was often trapped in proprietary systems. Work to extract data and link data and policy teams was underway, for example through LOTI in London, but this was not nationwide. There were issues about the nature and quality of data, however, and, with so many systems holding data in different formats, it could be a struggle to determine which was the latest version. The ability to access data from systems, both during and at the end of a contract, was often a key issue that had not been addressed. This impacted the ability to integrate with other systems, as well as making it harder to change suppliers.

The final question was about the extent to which the projects had involved partnership working between the public, private and VCSE sectors, and this was then examined in more detail in the second session.

Dr Annabel Causer opened this discussion. She started by outlining the scale of Kier's work, especially in the transportation sector where she worked. The vision was that a digital world would improve design, manufacture, delivery and operation, to provide safer, greener, and better outcomes for people, supply chain and customers, including sustained and measurable improvements in our productivity.

This included training and retaining a digitally competent workforce, such as through the Multiverse Data Academy. This enabled streamlining of supply chain information and subcontractor processing, reducing costs and increasing satisfaction; and embracing a digital role through new techniques such as Digital Twin and QuikSTATS in construction and service delivery. Digital techniques were also being used to enhance community engagement. Annabel emphasised the importance of collaboration in all this work.

Finally, practical examples were outlined of how this was put into practice. Kier had recently demonstrated an ability to reach 100 per cent compliance for Digital Handover at HMP Five Wells. Its work with Birmingham Tree People - urban forest volunteers - had enabled them to improve both efficiency and accuracy of data.

The final speaker was Nigel Herbert. The focus of his presentation was on maximising citizen engagement, trust and experience through the delivery of modern digital public services. These were themes around which Medallia had been based from its inception 20 years ago, to address the 'experience gap' between the public service experience delivered, and the citizen's expectations. AI and other mechanisms were used to capture multiple experience signals from right across the citizen journey, translating these into actionable insights, to empower staff to take action in the moment, in order to optimise the citizen and employee experience, delighting the 'customer' and driving continuous service improvement.

Despite attempts at digital transformation, often the user or citizen experience had not improved. Yet the pandemic had served to shift expectations, so the experience was now out of kilter with that which citizens had come to expect. Medallia's 'active experience approach' aimed to bridge this experience gap, and at the speed of the consumer. The Medallia 'experience cloud' worked by capturing and organising data; analysing and predicting; empowering and engaging staff; and automating and personalising interactions. This had been deployed across health systems, local government agencies, and central government departments, encompassing citizen touchpoints right across the spectrum of operations from contact centres through to digital apps and websites, providing a holistic view of the end-to-end 'customer journey'.

There then followed a discussion, involving all the panellists, focused on the needs of local authorities, starting with a question of what more councils were looking for. Access to data from suppliers and the supply chain, once again, was key, as was interoperability and the ability to integrate systems. A case study was given of where this had been achieved in the public sector. And for Medallia, the customer always owned the data.

This led to a discussion about use of common platforms, which could be more cost effective as opposed to standalone platforms. However interoperability brought security risks and data cleansing challenges. The Procurement Act may change behaviour, especially in enabling more innovation. Agility was still being impeded by procurement processes.

The conclusion was that the needs and wishes of the end customer - the consumer of public services - were vital; and that communication was key to fruitful engagement. These themes would be carried forward in future BSA discussions on this topic.