Digital standards: Web Strategy

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Changes:	14 February 2017 - version 2 shared
	15 February 2017 - changes after comments from TA and AT
	6 March 2017 - Version 3 shared for review
Date agreed by Digital Programme Board (v3.0)	7 March 2017
Changes after review by ST (v3.1)	27 June 2017
Changes after Chair Briefing (v4.0)	4 July 2017

Ambition and Future

Sutton's Digital Vision 2016 sets out our ambition for the future of the web. We want to "digitally empower our residents", the website will be:
- customer focused – rather than service focused
- self-service wherever possible – driving channel shift
- value for money – delivering cost effective services

Through the website we will foster and encourage:
- the embedding of 'digital' as business as usual
- engagement with communities and businesses by digital and social media means

We seek to offer our users real time information and cover all aspects of the customer journey, allowing a user to understand where in our processes their query is and what to expect from us.

Aim and application of the web strategy

The London Borough of Sutton has developed a web strategy to:
- define what we want the website to be and achieve
- define how we want the website to look and feel
- build on the principles of meeting user needs and encouraging channel shift, given in the Sutton Digital Strategy 2017
- highlight the different types of user need, of content and their order of priority
- give attainable objectives
- give direction to the website project and business as usual

The web strategy builds on the Digital Vision and Digital Strategy developed by the e-Volve Programme and the Communications Strategy developed by the Communications Team. It includes a mission statement that encapsulates what we want the website to be and achieve, followed by a more detailed web strategy based on feedback from users, workshops and stakeholders.

The web strategy will be supported by updated policies ratified and adhered to by the Council. The policies will define what the service does and help them to uphold a set of standards. They will also create a more consistent user experience for our customers.

The web strategy covers Sutton's digital presence. The website (the application run by the Content Management System - CMS) is only part of the user's customer journey. Our digital presence is made up of further online systems, such as:
- microsites
- online transactions (pay, report, apply, book)
- online application systems - eg the housing applications system
- social media
- payment systems
- eforms and Google forms
- digital mapping
- roadmaps and transformational change with other third parties (e.g. TfL, NHS, SHP)

A user sees the experience of using the website as a whole, so if one aspect of the journey fails the whole journey fails. For example, in order to complete a payment task a user may begin on the website but be transferred to a separate payment system. If this fails then they think the website fails. In this way the success of the website, in meeting user needs, is dependant upon the systems it interacts with.

Whether our users complete the task they set out to do may also depend upon the websites our partners provide. For example, the website should not provide information that would be better provided by a partner service. This avoids duplication and ensures the information is provided by an authoritative source. We are therefore likely to link to NHS sites for more detailed information on issues such as mental health or the Sutton Housing Partnership site for leaseholder information. In this way the websites our partners provide and the digital roadmap they intend to follow is also relevant to the success and direction of our website.

APPENDIX B

We should engage with our partners on their digital strategy and how they intend to meet the needs of their (and our) online users.

This web strategy applies to all Sutton Council websites and interrelating digital systems. This includes:

- any site, system or application that presents information which is directly related to the Council's business
- any site, system or application that helps a user complete a task that begins on the website
- shared services sites and Local Authority Trading Company sites

Our main website is the corporate site (www.sutton.gov.uk) but this strategy also applies to microsites and 3rd party hosted services. When we talk about the 'website, we mean the website as a whole, including the 3rd party systems it interacts with.

Our mission statement for the website

Our mission statement defines what we want the website to be and achieve.

We want our website to:

1. meet user needs
2. prioritise the most popular tasks
3. help channel shift

If we focus on these three objectives we should see the following outputs:

- an increase in online self-service
- an increase in customer satisfaction from 'average' to 'good'[1]
- an increase in our SOCITM, Better Connected ranking from 3 star to 4 star[2]

We want to increase online self-service so we can decrease the cost of our total customer contact. A cost analysis conducted by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council[3] showed that an online transaction typically costs as little as £0.15, whereas an equivalent transaction over the phone, or in person, costs £1 per minute.

An increase in online self service is also what our users expect of us:

> "Self-service is the only long-term solution to meeting customer expectations. Already, 70% of consumers expect a self-service option for handling commercial questions and complaints."[4]

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[1] Customer satisfaction levels with the site are rated as 'average'. For the 6 month period from 1st March 2016 to 31 August 2016, 7823 people rated the service: 41 per cent rated the site 'good', 38 per cent rated it as 'poor' and 21 per cent as 'average'. (statistics provided by GovMetrics).

[2] In the 2015 SOCITM review, Sutton's website received 3 stars

[3] Tunbridge Wells Council used a 'cost to serve' analysis, following the Government Digital Services approach: Smarter Digital Services: *Cost to serve case study, 2016*, (http://www.smarterdigital.info/casestudy-cost-to-serve.html)

[4] Steven van Belleghem: *The Self Service Economy*, 18 June 2013, (http://stevenvanbelleghem.com/blog/new-report-the-self-service-economy)

SOCITM Better connected survey provides a useful measure of how well we are meeting user needs. The organisation evaluates a wide range of digital performance by local public service providers, covering websites, social media and customer portals, as well as takeup, satisfaction and management.

Building on a strategic direction

Our mission statement complements the Sutton Digital Strategy 2017. Sutton's Digital Vision (as contained within the Digital Strategy 2017) states user needs and channel shift as the first two principles informing that vision:

> **"**Working with colleagues and partners to engage and empower residents to help provide the services they need through the use of future technologies. Our vision is informed by the following principles:
> - citizen and business focus – rather than service focus
> - self-service wherever – driving channel shift"

Our mission statement also supports the Contact Centre's target of moving 50% of all transactions online. A Customer Access Strategy is currently being developed to support the drive to self-service.

User needs

'User needs' are the needs that members of the public, businesses or customers have of Sutton Council. These are the users of www.sutton.gov.uk. Every part of our website design and architecture, and every piece of published content, should meet a valid user need. People visit www.sutton.gov.uk to help them fulfil a certain task, like finding their bin collection day or paying for a parking ticket[5].

"Users have varying needs - in the UK:

- 1.5 million people have a learning disability
- 7 million (conservative estimation) people have dyslexia
- 2 million people have a visual impairment
- lots of us have an unreliable internet connection
- most don't want to read and re-read something just to understand it"[6]

The average reading age in the UK is 9 years old.[7] The Sutton Council website guidelines supports this strategy and explains how we can design content to help meet user needs. These guidelines and our Accessibility Policy outline how we will ensure that the needs of specialist users are met.

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[5] Based on GDS's: *Content design: planning, writing and managing content*, 19 January 2017, GOV.UK (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design/user-needs)

[6] Based on an article by *Sarah Richards* http://www.sarahjrichards.com/blog/dumbing-down

[7] Joe Chidzik, *Writing for 9 year olds?*, 8 December 2016, Ability.Net (https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/writing-9-year-olds-six-expert-tips-creating-great-accessible-web-content-everyone)

In order of priority our users are:

1. residents - those living in the borough
2. businesses - resident businesses of the borough
3. visitors - those passing through the borough for a day or short term

Although council staff and councillors use our website in the application of their role, they are not a separate class of users. When using the website to find information they are acting on behalf of a resident or visitor.

Large and small organisations looking to invest in the borough are not a separate class of user for the site. Their needs are specific to certain projects and it is usual to meet their needs in a different online space, eg Opportunity Sutton.

Tasks

A task is an action, eg:

- Apply for planning permission
- Apply for building control approval
- Apply for a school place
- Report a pothole
- Report fly tipping

If we use statistics to inform us of the most popular tasks and prioritise these - we are part way to meeting user needs. If we meet user needs - research shows that we are more likely to shift contact from costly face-to face and phone options to online alternatives[8].

Prioritising tasks reduces the number of clicks the user makes to perform their task. The website is made up of home pages and landing pages. These pages should contain links to the most popular tasks first. The idea is that we take the top 70% of traffic and send the user straight to the task within two 'clicks'[9].

(This presumes users are going to the homepage or a section landing page as their starting point. Many users search directly from Google and we help these reach their task by including simple searchable terms within titles and web pages. They should then reach their task within one to two 'clicks' of the Google search results).

When linking or prioritising tasks, only the top 5 tasks will be included. All tasks should not be included as this would overwhelm the user and undermine the prioritisation. This will evolve as the demand changes.

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[8] Anthony Peake: *Five sources of channel shift failure from councils*, 24 June 2014, Public Technology.net (https://www.publictechnology.net/articles/features/five-sources-channel-shift-failure-councils)

[9] This presumes users are going to the homepage or a section landing page as their starting point. Many users search directly from Google and we help these reach their task by including simple searchable terms within titles and web pages. They should then reach their task within two 'clicks' of the Google search results.

Tasks are specific actions - not general subject areas. For example 'Planning and building control' is a subject area and 'submit a planning application' is a task. Using general section headings does not help the user save time as they then need to make a choice on the second level landing page and choose again.

The popularity of tasks can change by season - so the task prioritisation should change too. For example, 'Apply for a school place' should be prioritised from November to January.

A supporting policy: [Task section on the homepage - Policy, guidance and specific tasks](#) details how this works in practice and gives specific examples of user's top tasks.

Channel shift

We want to move our customer contact from face-to-face and phone to online channels. Research shows that face-to-face and phone contact cost significantly more that self service through online channels. Online transactions can cost as little as £0.15, whereas phone and face to face transactions cost from £1 per minute[10].

As at February 2017, online transactions within the Contact Centre were approximately 45% of all transactions. The website should therefore complement all channel shift initiatives so Sutton Council sees an increase in online transactions to over 50% in the next two years.

When and where we include contact details online affects the take up of online self service. A customer survey taken in January 2017 showed that customers who called the Contact Centre did so because it was their preferred method of contact[11]. All outwardly facing Council communications (including the website) then have a role in persuading users that self service is a quicker method of contact - thus driving traffic away from the phone to the website.

Although contact details will not be removed from the website, they can be held in one distinct area and not constantly offered to the user. Repeatedly telling the user that they can call for more information or for help undermines the value of the web content. A user does not need to be told to call the Council for help - a user will take this action on their own. Web content should focus on helping the user complete the task they came to the website for and not present the idea that more can be found out by contacting the Council (as this is rarely the case).

Content strategy

We follow the GDS content strategy: we only publish content that meets a user need, unless it is something we have to publish for legal or transparency reasons.

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[10] Tunbridge Wells Council used a 'cost to serve' analysis, following the Government Digital Services approach: Smarter Digital Services: *Cost to serve case study, 2016*, (http://www.smarterdigital.info/casestudy-cost-to-serve.html)
[11] See Appendix for survey results

In order of priority, our website is for:
1. completing tasks specific to the Council (eg paying for a parking ticket)
2. finding out information, specific to the Council, that helps users complete a task (eg how do I get planning permission)
3. engaging with residents on issues specific to the Council (eg consultations on major planning applications)
4. publishing information we are legally compelled to (eg statutory notices)
5. publishing information for transparency reasons (eg spending)

In practice, this means we make sure the content for items 1, 2 and 3 is written to meet user needs and is highly visible on the website. Our web team are encouraged to put more effort into the content for these areas than they do for items 4 and 5.

Content for items 4 and 5 will be still be published on time and to the standards asked of us, but we will not be unduly concerned about the language and style. Most often we cannot alter legal statutory notices, so any effort to improve the accessibility of the language is wasted effort. There is also little need for the content to be highly visible; web analytics show that content for items 4 and 5 are not widely read or needed by users.

Content **can** go on the site if it meets a clear user need and:

- is information or a service provided only by us
- explains what people, businesses or professionals can do, need to do or need to know before they can do something that is regulated by us
- is, or relates directly to, something we provide, does or pays for
- explains the purpose of our organisation
- raises awareness of, or shows what we are doing about, issues of major importance or public interest

Content **shouldn't** go on the site if it is:

- information that's already on the site somewhere else
- already on GOV.UK or another reputable site; we can draw our residents attention to it but we will not repeat the information
- general advice for people, specialists or businesses
- advertising or marketing for commercial purposes*
- information or a service that can be better supplied by organisations outside government
- intranet or workflow services for civil servants
- professional training material
- minutes or meeting documentation (this is housed in ModernGov)
- PDFs of printed leaflets
- old copies of newsletters

*Although advertising and marketing is not allowed within the content of the site, the site's design will allow for advertising banners at the top. This allows the website to generate income. The Council Advertising Network will be responsible for vetting the advertising to minimise the risk of advertising unsuitable practices or industries.

Changing content to meet user needs

The website will focus on user needs. This means the current content should be condensed, and simplified with a focus on completing tasks. In some places unnecessary content overshadows transactional content and clutters up the search results. In other places useful content does not exist. For example, in August 2016, a user was trying to buy parking vouchers, but before doing so he or she needed to establish what zone the vehicle will be parked in...

> "I am trying to get visitor parking vouchers for a workman to carry out urgent work on a house in Sutton. I don't know what colour zone the road is in but the zones are all the same price!! What zone is my road in? I don't live there - its rented. Why can't you put an actual map as a search result for "parking zone map"? A picture paints a thousand words, and I don't have the time to read a thousand words that may not help anyway! My workman won't work outside the restricted hours, how do I find out which zone the road is in or should I take pot luck?"

A quick investigation of the website shows that the users comments are sound - there are no specifics about parking zones. This is in contrast to another Council website where a resident can quickly find information on parking zones. The information is given in a list, map and postcode look up facility[12].

Sutton's website needs to publish content that meets user needs. It should publish content that meets those needs fully - not half meeting them so leaving the user without the full picture. This does not mean we need to increase the amount of content online. We merely need to provide the right type of content and remove the content that does not meet a user need.

Content types

When information is added to the site it needs to be added as the right type of content. This filtering helps our users find the right information fast. It also helps the service manage the amount of information held online. For example, date specific information like events or news should be contained within the suitable feed which automatically removes or archives information that is out of date.

Events

Our users want to know how to find out about local events that can:
- improve their health and wellbeing
- help them learn new skills or meet new people

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[12] See
https://www.kingston.gov.uk/info/200258/street_parking/606/parking_zones_-_operational_days_hours_and_charges/2

- allow them to contribute to their community

Publishing our events online helps to meet this user need.

An event is something that happens on a particular day or series of days. The user will need to know: the date, time, venue, booking arrangements and a summary.

The website's Content Management System (CMS) includes an events system that automatically archives events that are in the past. We should use this tool to advertise:

- council events, eg those held in libraries, children's centres etc.
- local events for the community organised by partner organisations (eg NHS, Police etc)
- local events that meet a public good or promote a council strategy

We will not advertise events for private or religious organisations (the exception being accepted religious events such as Remembrance Sunday ceremonies).

News and local activities

Our users want to be informed of local news and activities - things that may affect them or benefit them. News is something that has a short lifespan and so should be contained within the news feed provided by the CMS. The news feed automatically archives news which is no longer relevant.

News, activities or events can be highlighted within the campaigns carousel (part of the home page). A supporting policy: Carousel policy and calendar details how to use the campaigns carousel.

Press releases

A press release informs the press of something newsworthy happening within the Council or the borough. They are not intended for website users but are written for local and national press organisations. Press releases are therefore not held within the website, they are held in a microsite operated by the Communications Team (http://www.newsroomsutton.co.uk/). The need for this microsite will be reviewed with the Communications Team as their needs change in relation to local and national press.

Consultations

Our users want to be informed of and comment on, or object to activities/campaigns/schemes that affect them. Publishing consultation and engagement material helps us to meet this user need.

Consultations have a specific life period. Users need to know the date by which to respond or take action. Consultation content sits best within the consultation hub (a separate microsite https://sutton.citizenspace.com/). Consultations can be highlighted within the campaigns carousel on the home page.

Campaigns and engagement

Our users want to engage with us through social media channels: these are web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information. Online tools like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Snapchat enable a two-way conversation. Content that tries to change behaviour, draw attention to something or allow a two way conversation should be contained within social media and not the website.

Announcements

Our users need to know if there is an unusual problem with a system or service - for example if an online payment system is down or the phone lines are down. This type of information is an announcement and can be included within the CMS so it appears at the top of every page of the website drawing attention to the issue.

Announcements should not be over-used and should be written in a friendly accessible style. A supporting policy: Informing residents about issues affecting online services details when and how to use this tool.

Policies and strategies

Content that is a strategy or policy - usually information we are legally bound to publish - should be contained within a web section called 'policies and strategies for (enter the section title)'. Each main section of the website has a policies and strategies category. In this way we can annexe information that is not immediately relevant to the user, nor meets a popular user need.

Minutes, agendas,committees and councillor details

These are held within the Moderngov system (https://moderngov.sutton.gov.uk/) and should not be duplicated within the website CMS.

Digital Development Policy - microsites

Services or partners may argue that online content relating to their service needs to be held in a separate website - a microsite or other application. However, it is more efficient and cost effective if we provide online information through one CMS. We then:

- pay one annual hosting and support fee
- maintain one supplier contract
- manage one supplier relationship
- build up in-house expertise in one product
- invest in one product and make improvements for the most users (for example adding Google site search to the main CMS)

The Digital development policy explains when it's more appropriate to place content within the website or social media and asks those requesting a digital development to make a business case.

Design: look and feel

Design and the user

Research shows that a website's branding, look-and-feel and colour scheme all bring about an emotional response from the user[13]. Good layout and design can make a user feel relaxed and happy when using a site. It can affect how quickly they find information and the feelings they attribute to the organisation. The design can also reflect the ideals, cares and concerns of the organisation behind the site.

The current design and layout of Sutton's website does not reflect the ideals of the organisation. These are detailed in the Digital Strategy 2017, the Sutton Plan and the Sutton Organisational Development Strategy 2017 - 2022 . The Council wishes to promote the website as the channel of choice for residents, whereas the current design has been described as dated and bland.

The navigation and layout of the home page and document pages could also benefit from an update. For example, at present the task options on the homepage compete with engagement messages. Although engagement messages are of value to users, they are not of equal value as tasks. Statistics for the website show that task areas (eg Waste and Council Tax) are the most popular pages[14]. The design of the website needs to support our Digital Strategy and reflect our mission statement: user needs are our priority.

The design of the website also needs to be user driven. Whilst our corporate standards, ambitions and values should shape the design - users should choose the design and help refine it. We are not building a website for the Council or its staff - but for it's users. They will tell us which designs work for them and how to improve the look and feel.

Principles and standards to shape the design

Redesigning the website will be undertaken with Jadu, the CMS provider. We will complete a design questionnaire with them and then choose from 3 design options. A user group will be

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[13] There are many articles on how design affects emotions, an example by Jerry Cao (UX content strategist) can be found at http://thenextweb.com/dd/2015/04/07/how-to-create-the-right-emotions-with-color-in-web-design

[14] See SiteImprove statistical reports

set up with representations from the community. They will be consulted on the 3 design options and asked to help refine further versions.

At this initial stage the design will be shaped by:
- the Digital Strategy 2017
- the Sutton Plan
- the Sutton Organisational Development Strategy 2017 - 2022
- feedback from stakeholders (gathered within meetings, workshops[15])

Design principles

The new design will be built on the following design principles:
- users will find and complete tasks easily - so the search option will be prominent
- it will be responsive wherever possible (the page layout responds to any type of screen - eg mobile, PC or iPad)
- it will be mobile friendly to recognise the vast number of mobile users
- it will be accessible - taking into account different user needs, colour contrast, font size, link formating etc

The design should reflect the following ideas:
- inclusive, everyone, community, caring
- clean, modern, forward thinking
- high-quality, efficient and cost-effective services
- smart

Stakeholders felt the design should reflect that we are a caring, inclusive Council. The website should therefore be trustworthy and reliable. The Digital Strategy 2017 talks of building cost-effective and inclusive digital services and (referencing the Sutton Plan) building a community that we can all take part and take pride in.

Stakeholders also felt the design should be clean, spacious and uncluttered. It should be modern - not traditional. If we have a clean, modern design it shows our services are high quality, efficient and cost effective. What we present online will reflect on the services we provide. (Islington Council website given as an example).

The Digital Strategy 2017 (referencing the Sutton Plan) aims to build a community that is increasingly proud of the place it lives in and benefits from being: open, green, fair and smart.

Stakeholders gave GOV.UK was given as an example of 'smart' - it doesn't need to be over designed, just clean and smart. Let's not overdesign or recreate the wheel, but let's provide a smart, forward thinking website that works well.

Design standards

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[15] Full results of the workshops are found in Workshop results - website strategy and design

The new design will also be driven by the following standards (taken from: Smaller, Bigger, Different: Sutton Organisational Development Strategy 2017 – 2022):

Aims:
- PRIDE: People-focused, Responsible, Innovative, Diverse and Enterprising
- together, making Sutton a better place to live, learn and work
- a successful and high-performing council

The people:
- make a difference for Sutton with everything that you do
- to inspire a community in Sutton where all can take part and take pride
- diverse workforce at all levels, reflective of our local communities

The place:
- Sutton's identity is both a part of London and a place with an important and unique heritage with its own great opportunities to offer to residents
- Sutton is a dynamic, diverse and inclusive place to be
- Sutton is a vibrant, inclusive and great place to live and work
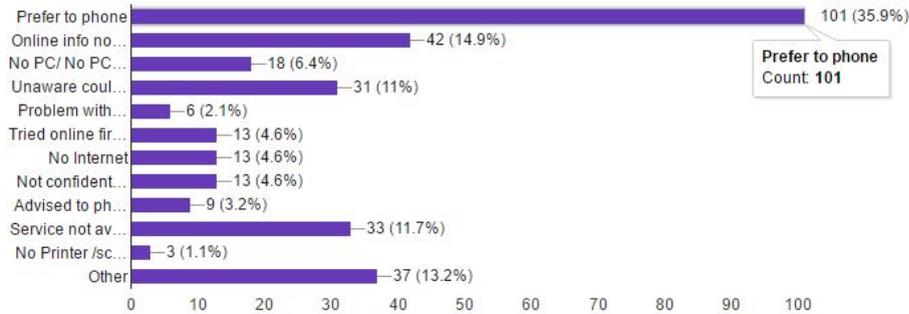
Partnerships and performance:
- we aim to be at the cutting edge of digital delivery.
- we use all our resources in a smart and innovative way, ensuring local services are efficient, effective, sustainable and fair.
- we are entrepreneurial and innovative in how we approach new challenges
- we have zero tolerance of discrimination, harassment or victimisation in our organisation and in our borough

Appendix

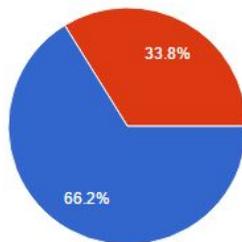a. Telephone survey January 2017 - undertaken by Frank Garofalo

Most council services are available on our website. Can I ask the reason you choose to call us instead of doing this online?
(281 responses)

Prefer to phone	101 (35.9%)
Online info no...	42 (14.9%)
No PC/ No PC...	18 (6.4%)
Unaware coul...	31 (11%)
Problem with...	6 (2.1%)
Tried online fir...	13 (4.6%)
No Internet	13 (4.6%)
Not confident...	13 (4.6%)
Advised to ph...	9 (3.2%)
Service not av...	33 (11.7%)
No Printer /sc...	3 (1.1%)
Other	37 (13.2%)

Prefer to phone
Count: 101

When contacting us by phone, which of the following would you prefer?
(278 responses)

- 66.2% To wait longer for your telephone call to be answered (up to 4 minutes) but have a full reply to your query?
- 33.8% Speak to someone quickly but may need to wait for someone to call you back with a full response to your query?