

# Implementing programme leadership and support for local digital

One of four linked reports:  
a digital vision for local government

# Foreword

As Chairman for the Improvement and Innovation Board at the Local Government Association (LGA), I am delighted to introduce these four interlinked papers which set out the sector's position and priorities on maximising the opportunities of digital.

The imperative for local public services to fully exploit the potential of modern digital tools, technologies and approaches in order to improve delivery and save money has never been greater. We face rising citizen demand, needs and expectations at a time of severe spending and resource constraints.

Councils have a long history of investing in digital information and communications technology for the benefit of their localities, from the traditional finance and housing repairs systems that began to emerge in the 1970s through to the 'apps' and social media of today.

There are also many outstanding examples of radical IT-enabled service innovation – such as online school admissions or tele healthcare – being adopted across the sector, successfully transforming the citizen experience and reducing costs.

However, comprehensive improvement and development does not happen by chance in a sector as diverse and locally-responsive as local government. It requires close collaboration between central and local government and other partners, including the voluntary and private sectors and communities themselves, carefully targeted and managed investment in both local 'exemplars' and national infrastructure, a well-coordinated programme of support and communication, and – perhaps most important – leadership at all levels.

The first of the attached papers, 'Delivering better local online transactional services', highlights the specific opportunities to use digital tools and techniques to improve the ways in which citizens find information or carry out online transactions with local government while saving public money. It draws on research by the Society of IT Management and the Local Authority Contact Centre Benchmarking Group, as well as data from a range of individual councils, to demonstrate how councils have been increasingly interacting online with citizens with a particular focus on digitising 'top tasks'.

The paper makes a case for exploiting and promoting more effectively the assets and good practice already available in the sector as well as for designing and implementing some key pieces of common digital infrastructure from which all councils could benefit.

Our second paper, 'Transforming local services through digital', explores the wider potential of digital tools, technologies and approaches to support 'transformation' – that is the fundamental redesign of local services so that they deliver better outcomes, in a more targeted and timely fashion, at less cost. The paper argues that in a landscape where public service delivery is increasingly fragmented across different organisations, but in which joining up services around residents in a locality is essential, councils have a vital role to play as ring holders, 'place shapers' and community leaders. Technology too offers massive potential not just to make individual organisations and transactions more efficient, but to support innovative, collaborative

and transformative work to redesign services and to act as the 'glue' linking disparate service providers.

The paper concentrates on highlighting ways in which existing, place-based national programmes of public service reform in areas such as health and social care integration, the benefits system and troubled families could be substantially accelerated by greater digital innovation.

Our third paper, 'Developing local digital leadership skills and capacity', examines the vital topic of how the leadership skills and capacity required in local government can best be developed and supported, thereby enabling councils and their partners to apply appropriate digital solutions, deliver better outcomes, improve the experience of their shared customers and workforces and reduce costs. Leadership will also be essential if digital knowledge and assets are to be systematically shared and mainstreamed and 'exemplars' scaled up to the benefit of the whole sector.

The paper sets out a series of very practical steps for developing local digital leadership at councillor, senior officer and practitioner level, building on the work and models already in place in the sector.

Our fourth and final paper, 'Implementing programme leadership and support for digital', draws on the learning from previous successful national programmes of change. It proposes a set of operating principles and identifies a small number of practical options for establishing the coordinated programme required to drive forward the take-up of relevant digital tools, technologies and approaches across the local government sector and to tackle cross-cutting issues such as data sharing and procurement.

Taken together, then, the four papers set out a high-level case for investing in a well-structured and comprehensive programme of support to enable local government to maximise the citizen benefits and costs savings that can be generated from fully exploiting the potential of digital in the public services.

We look forward to working with government on this important and timely initiative.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Simmonds', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Councillor David Simmonds CBE**  
Chairman, Improvement and Innovation Board  
Local Government Association

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# 1. Purpose of document

The purpose of this paper is to propose a set of operating principles and to identify a small number of practical options for establishing the coordinated programme leadership and support at national, regional and local level required to drive forward the take-up of relevant digital tools, technologies and approaches across the local government sector and to tackle cross-cutting issues such as data sharing and procurement.

The paper is one of a linked set of submissions to inform the Spending Review 2015 that will also address:

- how councils can use digital tools and techniques and exploit digital platforms to improve their online transactional services, so that citizens and businesses can find information or complete their dealings with their local authority in ways that are convenient to them and also save public money
- how councils can use 'digital', building on existing exemplars, to support the transformational place-based approaches to delivering outcomes that councils are seeking to implement in their localities in

collaboration with local partners (including citizens themselves)<sup>1</sup>

- how the necessary leadership skills and capacity to understand and apply digital approaches successfully in local public services can be developed across local government at all levels including members, senior officers and staff.

The proposals in the current paper are therefore designed to underpin the recommendations in the other three papers and to ensure their effective implementation, based on tried-and-tested programme management and invest-to-save principles.

Taken together, the four papers set out a high-level case for investing in a comprehensive programme of support to enable local government to maximise the customer benefits and cost savings that can be generated from exploiting the potential of modern digital solutions in local public services.

<sup>1</sup> For instance, through generating good customer insight, promoting prevention and behavioural change, enabling citizens and communities to become more self-reliant and designing services in new ways.

Local Government Digital Programme Strategic Operations Unit:  
senior programme leadership  
cross cutting issues including data sharing and procurement

Transactions/Platforms

Transformation/Exemplars

Skills and Capacity

## 2. The context

Local and central government have a long history of working together successfully to enable councils and their partners to implement service innovations and achieve efficiencies, including through the use of digital. The Local Government Online (LGOL) programme, for instance, which ran between 2000 and 2005, enabled local government not only to make significant improvements in the experiences of both customers and staff but contributed substantially to the £4.3 billion of efficiency gains made by the sector during the 2004 Spending Review.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the Customer-Led Transformation Programme invested £7 million between 2009 and 2011 to embed the use of customer insight and social media tools and techniques in local government and delivered over £331 million of financial benefit to the public and public services as a result.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, the Local Government Association (LGA) has worked closely with colleagues in central government on major programmes of support and change, including:

- £25 million of programmes delivered by the LGA on behalf of the Department of Health over the last three financial years, aimed at helping councils to improve adult social care, implement legislation and develop systems leadership in health and wellbeing

boards.<sup>4</sup> The programme office supporting this consisted of 42 staff members/ secondees, some of whom operated on a regional basis.

- The LGA entered into a strategic Land and Property Partnership with the Cabinet Office's Government Property Unit in November 2013. The purpose was to establish that central and local government acting together could deliver better outcomes in terms of local growth, integrated services and property rationalisation. Initially four LGA staff delivered two pilot phases working with 32 councils in what was called the One Public Estate (OPE) programme. Since 2013, the programme has developed plans that will result in over 20,000 jobs, almost 9,000 homes and over £129 million of property sales more than if the partners had operated separately. In July 2015, the Chancellor announced an extension of the OPE programme which will see the LGA team expand to 11 posts. The programme has received more than £7 million in support per annum.

The proposed operating principles and outline programme structure set out in the next section are therefore based on many years' experience of successful collaboration.

<sup>2</sup> Built on a partnership between national government, national local government bodies and individual councils, and backed by central government investment, the programme supported a major investment in councils ICT capabilities, both customer-facing and internal.

<sup>3</sup> For more details of the Customer-Led Transformation programme [www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/3510959/ARTICLE](http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510959/ARTICLE). For an independent evaluation of the programme, see [www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11417/L13-840+CLT+evaluation+report+V5.pdf/0bbea5f9-0914-4690-b92d-8f48a7d75d12](http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11417/L13-840+CLT+evaluation+report+V5.pdf/0bbea5f9-0914-4690-b92d-8f48a7d75d12)

<sup>4</sup> In a number of cases, the LGA operates joint teams and programme offices to support Programme Boards across government. The Association's work on supporting the DoH to implement the Care Act has recently been praised as a good example by the National Audit Office and the Cabinet Office's Major Projects Authority, while its work on the Better Care Fund was praised by the Public Accounts Committee.

# 3. Proposed programme operating principles

There are a number of core principles for any programme aimed at fostering and promoting local innovation:

- Those working most closely with the customers are likely to have the clearest understanding of their needs and preferences. Therefore it is crucial to fully engage organisations at local and regional level.
- In order to reflect the very varied geography, demography and infrastructure in different parts of the country, it is important to involve a wide range of different types of council, from small rural authorities to major metropolitan areas.
- We need to build on the innovative work already underway in many parts of the country, taking full advantage of these 'exemplars' to inspire their peers and to overcome any objections about change not being achievable, while avoiding wasteful duplication of effort.

At the same time, any programme needs to avoid the danger of encouraging excellent but isolated silos of innovation that achieve only a limited impact. There may also be elements of infrastructure (platforms) that no individual authority can fully cost-justify, but which could be very valuable if developed at national scale or on a pan-government basis. There is a role, therefore, for national coordination, promotion and projects to complement the work at local or regional level.

As a consequence, we envisage that the programme structure should support:

**An agreed set of local/regional exemplar projects:** These will involve groups of local authorities and relevant partners coming

together to deliver specified digital exemplar projects or other initiatives that have been identified as priorities for the sector. Examples that have been highlighted in our other submissions include:

- a group of councils working with Cheshire East and Leeds to further develop their models for integrated digital care records
- a number of different types of authority working with the Government Digital Service (GDS) to develop a pan-government payments engine that will also meet local government needs
- the authorities in a devolved region such as the Greater Manchester area building on their existing collaboration to create a comprehensive digital infrastructure for local public services
- councils with recognised expertise in particular areas of digital delivery sharing their insights and know how through a digital champions network.

There are many other potential examples. In each case, the skills, expertise and local knowledge and contacts of bodies such as Solace, Socitm, i-Networks and others would be drawn upon to ensure the successful delivery and promotion of the assets created by the project.

**A core strategic operations unit:** The role of this unit would not be to duplicate or micro-manage the work being carried out at local or regional level, but to orchestrate and coordinate the programme as a whole while ensuring that the learning and practice from different projects are systematically promoted and mainstreamed.

The units responsibilities might therefore include:

- commissioning specific activities from councils, the private sector or other partners and overseeing the delivery of those activities
- working with the supplier market to encourage greater product and service innovation, 'open solutions' and value for money in procurement
- liaising with other parts of government, including central departments and agencies (such as the National Information Board) delivering complementary programmes, to ensure activity is joined up at a strategic level and to tackle cross-government issues such as data sharing
- liaising with representative local government bodies such as the Local Government Delivery Council, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace), the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm), Local Government CIO Council and i-Networks
- developing a suite of communication and marketing initiatives to systematically promote and mainstream the learning and practice from the exemplars
- maintaining a database of excellent practice, including case studies, 'how to' guides, documentation etc
- developing, highlighting and promoting agreed principles and standards emerging from the programme
- monitoring progress and producing regular updates and reports for the programmes steering group as well as the wider sector.

The emphasis would therefore be on the unit being fleet of foot, heavily focused on the delivery of the priorities set out in our complementary papers on transactions, transformation and digital leadership, and answerable to both the sector and government for the overall delivery of the programme.

# 4. Structuring the programme

In reviewing the options for structuring the programme in line with the principles set out above, we have taken account of both feedback from the sector and GDSs recent experience of delivering change in central government.

An earlier draft of this paper outlining four potential models was discussed at the DCLG Local Digital Spending Review Approval Board on 10 July 2015 and the Local Government Delivery Council meeting of 8 July 2015.

Two of the options providing ‘ring fenced’ grant to all councils for digital investment and setting up a digital investment fund for which councils would be invited to bid were ruled out on the basis that they would not adequately promote the mainstreaming of best practice, common approaches and shared assets. The remaining two options, with comments on their pros and cons, are set out below for further consideration.

Option	Pros	Cons
<p>Funded programme to oversee and provide direct support to the sector to drive digital implementation and take-up.</p> <p>This could be run both nationally and regionally, ie using existing regional bodies to get the support out locally &amp; regionally with national coordination to join up all local and regional projects.</p> <p>Nationally could build on the improvement infrastructure based at the LGA and draw on GDS expertise thereby delivering economies of scale.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tackles the digital agenda with the sector holistically</li> <li>• provides leadership and coordination</li> <li>• enables the sector to influence and shape the agenda but with national support</li> <li>• supports both national, regional and local projects</li> <li>• maximises the mainstreaming of practice and assets and makes links with other relevant national programmes</li> <li>• provides more targeted support and funding to councils who need it</li> <li>• drives greater collaboration and standardisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resources required to oversee and run the programme</li> <li>• time to set up and put in place</li> <li>• requires identifying and recruiting the right skills and expertise to provide the support</li> </ul>
<p>Create a joint integrated national and local funded programme with GDS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one pan-sector programme driving digital agenda</li> <li>• focused on national objectives</li> <li>• drives greater standardisation and collaboration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resources required to oversee and run the programme</li> <li>• time to set up and put in place</li> <li>• one overarching programme may be too unwieldy and inflexible</li> <li>• too prescriptive / ie central government perceived as determining the agenda</li> <li>• focused on transactional approach to digital</li> <li>• risk that councils don't get the support and help they need.</li> </ul>

# 5. Next steps

The proposals contained in this paper would form an integral part of the wider programme of digital support set out in the LGA's complementary submissions to the Spending Review (see section 1 of this document). Taken as a whole systems approach, the programme offers a timely and cost-effective opportunity to build on the innovation already present locally in order to systematically:

- develop the sector's digital leadership skills and capacity
- improve local governments transactional capabilities
- build on existing national programmes of transformation
- create a number of pan-government shared 'platforms'
- work more effectively with the supplier market
- address key issues and barriers around data sharing and systems interoperability.

All of which will help to deliver more effective, accessible and cheaper services to local citizens and businesses.

In each case there will be further work to do to flesh out the detail of the proposed programme elements. However, we strongly believe that unless the other parts of the programme are underpinned by an appropriately skilled and resourced team combining both sector and digital expertise, they are unlikely to achieve their full potential. This paper, therefore, although short, represents a vital building block in the sectors overall approach to developing digital excellence.





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