

Local Digital Declaration

This joint endeavour was initiated by the UK Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Government Digital Service (GDS), and a collection of local authorities and sector bodies from across the UK, **including SBC**.

This declaration affirms our collective ambition for local public services in the internet age, and our commitments to realising it. It commits us to working on a new scale to:

- design services that best meet the needs of citizens
- challenge the technology market to offer the flexible tools and services we need
- protect citizens' privacy and security
- deliver better value for money

The Local Digital Declaration

Speech by Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP at the Local Government Association Annual Conference 2018.

From:

[Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#) and [Rishi Sunak MP](#)

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Good afternoon.

I wanted to start by painting 2 pictures for you; a day in the lives of 2 different council employees.

Let's start with Janet. Before Janet goes to work she remembers that it's bin day, but isn't sure which one. She logs onto the council website, finds the waste page, the check collection page, enters her postcode and then selects her address. Turns out today is black bags.

Janet's daughter attends athletics club, but the club only accepts cheques. So she roots around in her drawer, looking for that chequebook she knows is somewhere there.

When she gets into work at the council, rings her dad to make sure that he is OK. She hopes her brother remembered to go and let the carer in earlier.

Today Janet's working on a performance report, but her system doesn't have any way to access all the data it needs. So Janet spends most of the morning emailing lots of different colleagues and agencies asking for those bits of information.

Now let's take Jane.

Jane works for another council. Just before she leaves for work she gets a text on her phone to remind her that today is black bag bin day.

She quickly pays for her son's school club on her phone, then another app lets her know that there is someone ringing her mum's doorbell. And she can see on the phone that it's the carer.

Jane remotely unlocks the door and lets the carer in.

And when it comes to doing her performance report, Jane's computer gets the data she needs from multiple other systems and automatically updates the partner agencies when she's done.

I apologise for the rather laboured examples, but I wanted to emphasise clearly just how technology is already transforming public services, offering real benefits to local government employees, the general public and the council's bottom line.

And if you take away one thing from my speech today let it be this: an understanding of digital is no longer something we can leave solely to the IT department. It doesn't belong in the basement, it belongs in the boardroom.

And most of the time people in my job, Local Government Minister, when they have this opportunity to talk to you, spend a lot of their time talking about local government finance. And indeed, as I have wondered round the conference today, and in my other meetings, that is what I have mostly been talking about.

But I did want to take this opportunity today where I had all of you in the room - council leaders - to talk about technology.

What I would like is to have that conversation about technology not just with the people running council IT departments but with people running councils.

So today I want to talk about 3 specific things:

Firstly, about how we should focus relentlessly on the needs of our citizens.

Next, I'll talk about fixing our digital plumbing, and how that opens up a world of possibilities.

And lastly, I'll outline what I am going to do in a small way to help make this happen.

Part 1: services for citizens

Today, we now think nothing of checking the location of trains in real time, or looking round a hotel room halfway across the world before booking it.

And doing all of that from something that fits in our pocket.

This revolution has affected public services too.

If any of you have recently renewed a passport online you'll know the process is a delight to use. No more hanging around in the post office waiting for the photo booth.

Now you do a selfie straight from your phone into the system.

There are some great local examples too:

Adur & Worthing is piloting the Going Local service. And here GPs are directly referring can directly referring patients to the council's social prescribing team, helping thousands of them become fitter or stop smoking.

Hackney's Pay My Rent platform, has now been used almost 70,000 times by 15,000 people.

The thing that marks out these top class digital services in both public and private sector is a relentless focus on meeting the needs of their users.

For example, there's no point putting a form online if it's so confusing someone needs to ring up to find out how to fill it in.

We've all been there: you just want to pay your taxes to HMRC, apply for a service, perhaps to get your residents parking sorted. But after you've worked out what the site is trying to get you to do, sometimes you still have to print the form and email it back - or not so long ago - take 2 forms of ID to the town hall.

A few years ago, Camden council found that every time someone came into a council building, it cost them nearly £14. But when they rang up it was £4 and if they did it online it cost just 30p. By moving transactions online, they saved £3 million in just 3 years.

Similarly, think of your staff. A recent study showed that up to 60% of a social worker's time is spent typing data into a system. We should ask ourselves, is that really the best use of such a precious resource?

So getting this right has a huge impact – both in saving people's time but also saving your council money.

So as we continue to innovate and redesign services, the question you as council leaders should be asking your IT departments is this: are we thinking about how our citizens and employees live their lives?

And is what we do making life easier for them, or is it forcing them to do things that suit us but actually end up costing money?

Relentlessly focusing on what our users need is the way forward.

Part 2: fixing the plumbing

The next thing we need to do is having a look at our digital plumbing.

And by this I want you think about an idea that we need to embrace: the idea of "Government as Lego".

Lego bricks come in different shapes and sizes, but they all fit together and allow you to build almost anything.

And that's how we should think about our IT.

Today, quite a lot of government IT is a black box. Too often, whether it's government departments or councils, using huge, proprietary systems for each different thing they do. And they are locked into long-term, inflexible contracts, with opaque cost structures.

But those at the forefront of this digital services revolution, Essex, Greater Manchester and Leeds for example, are thinking about the components of our IT that are like a utility and shared across different services.

Now there are lots of bits of IT that are essentially like electricity. Electricity works to a common standard and there is no point in creating your own version.

For example, Adult Social Care and Revs and Bens are very different services, but each has a few common elements - workflow, case management, payment systems. And it may not be right to have services in the same organisation paying the suppliers twice to have two things doing the same thing.

And if you multiply this across the hundreds of services a council offers you can see how the costs rack up.

Worse, because all these different systems might come from different providers, they can't talk to each other and it becomes hard for a council to share the information it needs across different areas.

Instead we should think about separating out those bits of IT that are used a lot across different services, the utility or electricity-like bits.

And for those boring, standard components, we can use modules, or Lego blocks, that we can slot in, swap out and upgrade as we see fit.

Crucially, these Lego blocks are built on common standards which means they are much cheaper and enable information to be shared much more easily.

And as more and more organisations use the same common standards for bits of their IT, this encourages developers to innovate and provide new services and products based on those widely used standards.

Now a simple example of this fixing the plumbing concept is moving services to the cloud

Many local authorities still have services hosted on machines kept in a council warehouse – or even at times – behind the stationary cupboard or under the stairs. As one council found out a couple of years ago that can mean problems if there's a fire in your data centre

But increasing numbers of you are finding out for yourselves that digital services can be hosted for a fraction of the price in the cloud. This cloud hosting has become a commodity. For example, thanks to their cloud strategy, Aylesbury Vale has incredibly saved several million pounds.

For local government, fixing the digital plumbing has the potential to be truly transformative.

Part 3: what I will do

Lastly, I did say what I would talk a little bit of what I can do to help make all this happen.

Well, I believe that we are stronger together than alone. And while the whole point of local services is that they need to differ in how they respond to local need, all of you will have a different approach to how you think you can serve your citizens best.

But it makes sense for us to learn from each other, and share the common technical features that means councils don't have to start from scratch if they want to implement a more user friendly and cost-effective digital service.

And so today a group of us are launching the [Digital Declaration](#).

This isn't my Declaration, or the government's - this is a joint endeavour with over 40 organisations in the sector, including Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Greater London combined authorities, SOLACE, CIPFA, the LGA Government Digital Service and a cross section of local authorities of all sizes and colours from across England.

The Declaration sets out our shared vision for world class public services, and invites everyone else to join the movement.

It commits all of us to work together to make sure that the vision is made a reality.

Words are important. But better when they are backed up with deeds.

That's why I am delighted to announce today that Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will invest up to £7.5 million over the next two years through a new Digital Innovation Fund. This fund support and strengthen your digital capacity.

So what exactly will the money be available for?

Well, a report from the MJ and BT last year found that more than 80% of public sector chief executives see digital transformation as one of their key priorities. That's fantastic.

But many feel that their organisations lack the skills and capability to take full advantage.

So part of this money could be used to fund key leaders from the sector to go through a new world class digital leadership programme that we are in the process of creating.

You might be a Leader, Portfolio Holder, Chief Executive or CFO, but you will be passionate about public services and developing your digital own skills and capabilities.

But beyond this, I recognise that everyone is in different places when it comes to this digital journey. Some are at the cutting edge, others are nearer the beginning of their journey.

So this should not and will not be a one size fits all Fund. Before we open up the fund later this year, I want to hear from you about what would be most useful for you? Where will a small amount of extra resource make the most difference in achieving these aims?

And lastly, in addition to the funding, we at the department are creating a delivery team to support everyone who signs up to this ambitious Digital Declaration.

We've worked with 50 to get this far. We now want to work with many more to turn this into a national movement.

We want 50 to turn into 80.

And 80 to turn into hundreds.

Together, I know we can achieve more than we can alone. By supporting each other, and building on each other's work we can build better services at lower cost, for our residents.

Services that are efficient, modern, responsive and simple and delightful to use.

Services that are built around our citizens' needs.

And services that save us money, allowing more of our precious resource to be where it should be: not in the basement cupboard of our IT department, but on the front line where it belongs.

I believe this is the exciting first step of a journey.

And I cannot wait to see where we get to and what we can achieve together.

I have seen so much already in the short time I've had this job - the exciting innovation that is happening on the ground. And I hope that this small catalyst can drive us forward to ever more greater things.

Thank you.

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