Stockport Council – A Radical Digital Council

Our citizens are at the heart of everything we do in Stockport - embedded within our values and behaviours, our boroughwide aspirations[1] are at the forefront of how we are shaping our organisation for the future[2].

Our digital transformation programme embodies this. What we are changing goes way beyond new digital technologies. We strive to be radical, to fundamentally repoint the way we work with our communities, design our services and drive new working practices to ensure we're fit for the future. For us, it's about people and culture.

Figure.1: Stockport's Values and Behaviours

Our Vision

Understandably, our citizens have expectations of a 21st century approach to customer service. Regardless of the current financial challenges, we know that through modernizing our citizen journeys we can better meet expectations of customer service by radically transforming the way we do things and the way people access services. This includes end-to-end service effectiveness and efficiency and ensuring we have a strong citizen focus in the way that we design services and work with individuals.

Our digital strategy is shaping our services, strategy and culture. We are significantly improving customer experience by embracing all the opportunities digital solutions bring. These include: online self-service, using technology to keep people informed and better connected, engaging with local communities, automating workflow processes and using insights from data to provide the right services at the right time. Take a look at our vision video.

What's important to us is that we grow our skills and capability. Ensuring our digital transformation approach is firmly rooted in and reflective of Stockport. We recognise that technology is changing fast and the only certainty is that it will keep changing. Purchasing software and skills would help us out right now, but won't help to address future changes – we need to evolve too. So we've been bold and decided to write our own code, create our own digital solutions and build our skills and capability to allow our transformation to continue to grow.
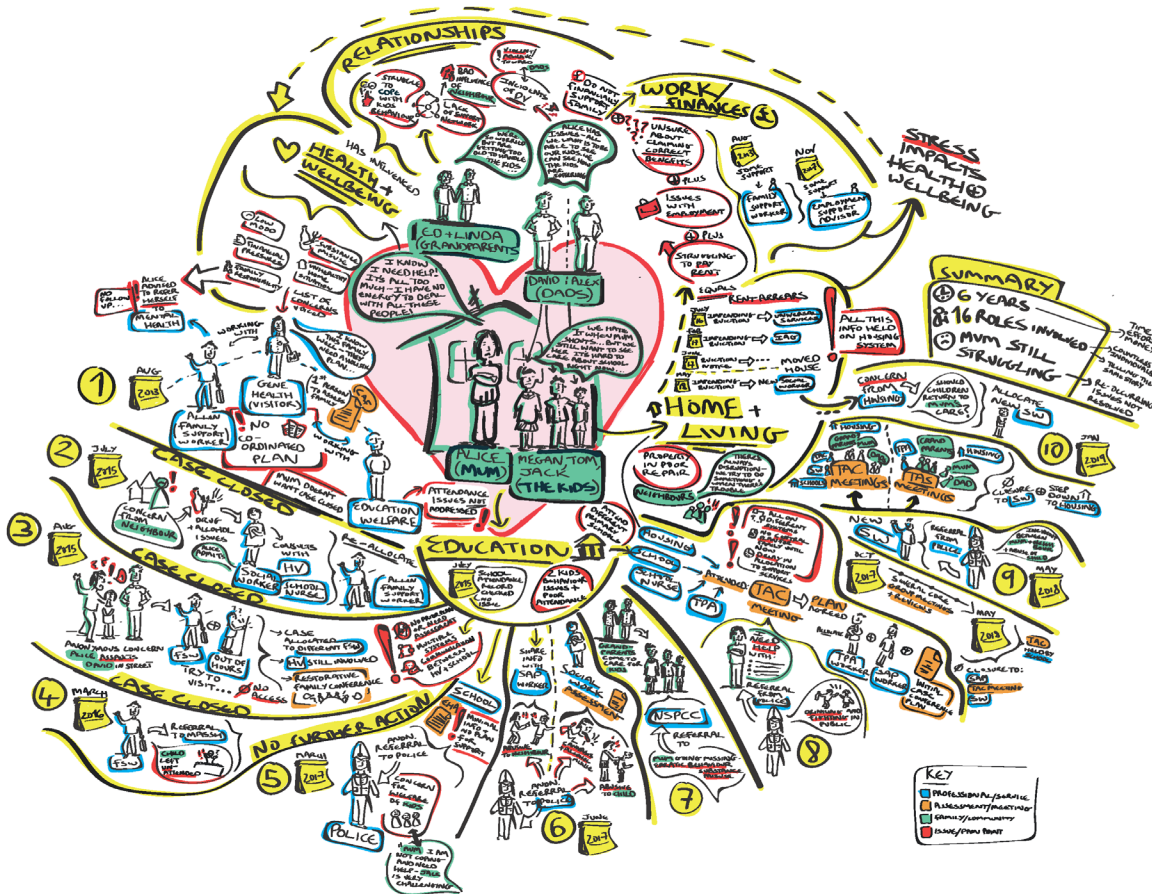
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[1] Our Borough Plan and Council Plan
[2] Our Medium Term Strategy

Embedding Design Thinking and Practice

Not only are we working in new agile ways to enable us to build our own technical solutions; we are also transforming our entire culture.

Traditionally services have been designed from a technical and business perspective which creates fragmented and unsatisfactory customer journeys:
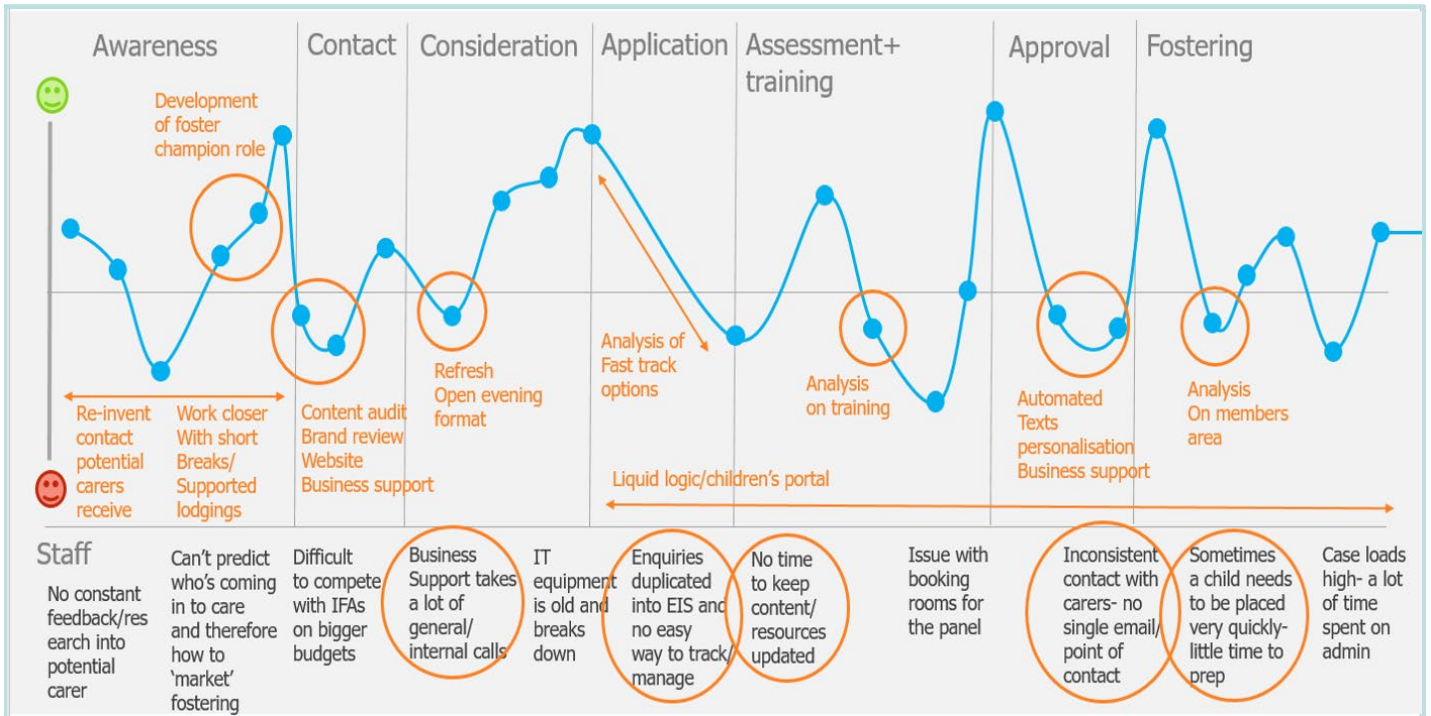
Figure.2: An example family's journey through a period of crisis and escalating need, mapped and designed by one of our service designers to highlight the complexity and need for a holistic view.

We know that to meet the expectations of our citizens and the aspirations of our communities we need to design with people. Therefore we have adopted **human-centered design** as core to our digital transformation approach, focusing on the needs of the people who will be using and delivering the service first, rather than the business goals or technical solutions. We believe that by putting the needs of our users first, the solutions and any efficiencies will naturally follow.

We do everything we can to view the experience through our customers' eyes and have invested in developing new research and design skills including Service design, User Experience, Business Analysis and Content Design. Our team engage with customers to understand what they are thinking and feeling at every point along the end to end journey. They also stand back to consider the service offered in its entirety – how all the processes work and flow together across all touchpoints, whether digital or face to face. All prototypes are user tested with the most appropriate audience to ensure we get the most valuable feedback to allow adjustments to be made before launching a new product or service.

Figure.3 - an example empathy map created by our design team showing high and low points experienced by the customer as they progress through the fostering process.
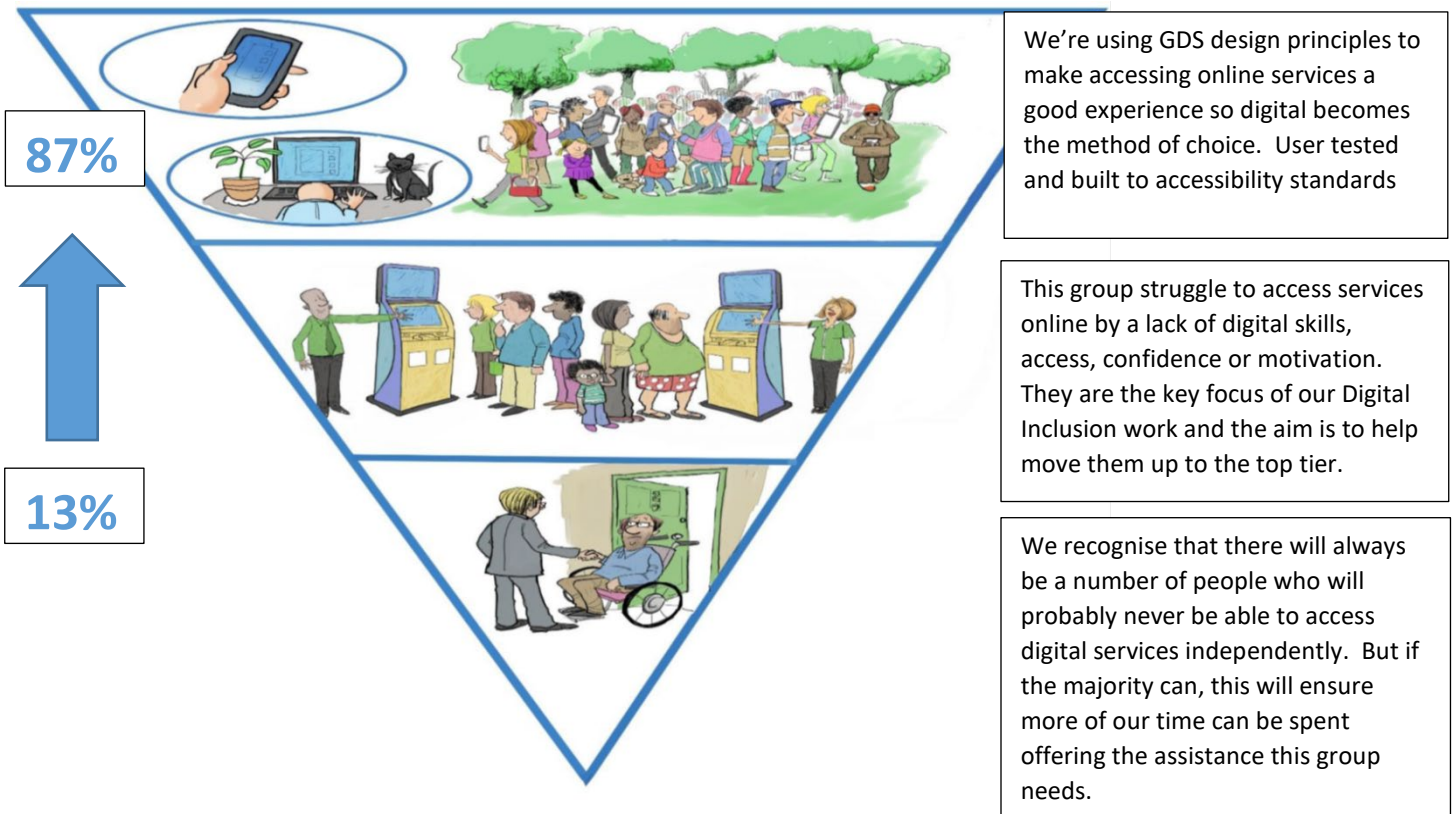

Human centred design is a mindset as much as it is a skillset and is everyone's responsibility. We are growing this way of working beyond the digital team to enlighten and empower our service managers, so they better understand their customers' journeys and own their service redesign, whether the solutions have a digital aspect or not.

A Digitally Inclusive Council

The focus at Stockport is not just about residents accessing council services - Digital permeates everything. We need it for our jobs, to pay bills, stay in touch and increasingly to live a full and healthy life. Helping our residents to become digitally included is a priority for our Council - to ensure no one's left behind.

As such, a key pillar of our digital transformation programme is our **Digital Inclusion Alliance**. This isn't simply about enabling channel shift (changing contact routes) and service efficiency. We know that those who are digitally excluded are often also socially excluded and if we tackle this right, we will go some way to addressing social exclusion. Across Stockport, it is estimated that 50,000 adults lack the basic digital skills they need to participate in today's world. Supporting those citizens who could go online but who aren't either through lack of equipment, skills, confidence or motivation (the 2nd tier in the diagram below) ensures they have access to opportunities, information and support to be more independent and develop their resilience.

Figure.4 – understanding digital literacy in our communities

87%

13%

We're using GDS design principles to make accessing online services a good experience so digital becomes the method of choice. User tested and built to accessibility standards

This group struggle to access services online by a lack of digital skills, access, confidence or motivation. They are the key focus of our Digital Inclusion work and the aim is to help move them up to the top tier.

We recognise that there will always be a number of people who will probably never be able to access digital services independently. But if the majority can, this will ensure more of our time can be spent offering the assistance this group needs.

Stockport's Digital Inclusion Alliance

Stockport Council has taken an innovative and unique approach to tackling this issue by getting together with key partners and forming a **Digital Inclusion Alliance**. Our alliance is creating a network of digital support centres across Stockport, making it as easy as possible for residents to find help in their local community.

The Alliance was commissioned in 2018 and involves the UK's leading digital inclusion charity Good Things Foundation in partnership with local organisations including Starting Point Community Partnership, Stockport Homes and The Prevention Alliance (TPA). Through the Alliance we have committed to helping 5,000 residents to get online and develop their digital confidence by 2020. In the first 2 months alone the Alliance trained 321 residents using 'Learn my Way'. We estimate that reaching 300 additional residents each month will enable us to reach our target by March 2020. We expect that around 80% of the people we will work with will face one or more types of social exclusion so as well as looking at digital skills we're also measuring positive outcomes, such as: the number of learners who feel less socially isolated following the digital training; whether learners have more digital confidence; and, whether they believe the experience is having a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

This commitment to improving digital skills forms part of the Council's wider circle of support for local people and communities. As well as improving the quality of our residents' lives, digital skills increase employment opportunities and the creation of a digitally able workforce will help both residents and businesses in Stockport to grow and prosper.

Digital inclusion with a long term goal…

We aim to build a [sustainable 'movement'](#) for digital inclusion across Stockport by delivering digital support and skills through established and trusted community groups and organisations who are already providing social support. We know that the people who are digitally excluded face a range of practical and psychological barriers to getting online, and many are likely to have had a bad experience of formal education. The trust these organisations have already built by helping these residents means they will be more open to new learning and we hope to use these opportunities to great effect to deliver digital support. Furthermore, by empowering communities to drive the movement, long-term sustainability beyond the end of our programme in 2020 is likely.

Sustainability is key for us which is why there has also been a focus on training new trainers who can spread the learning wider. Since we started at the end of 2018 we have signed up 32 community groups to the network. They are receiving training so the legacy of this work continues long beyond the project lifespan.

Maximising the collective digital skills in Stockport…

We recognise that if we join up community digital inclusion activity it will be a lot easier for residents to see where support is available (and for services to signpost them to help). We have worked with all partners to create promotional materials such as the shared 'DigiKnow' brand which is being used by the network of community digital support centres across Stockport. Organisations can use this to promote where digital help is available at a grass roots level and encourage more group to join.

Figure.5 – examples of our DigiKnow campaign

Connecting and growing digital skills within our communities

Getting more residents confident with a basic level of digital skills is ambitious, but just the start. For Stockport to flourish and its people to prosper we need a tech-enabled workforce who can respond to the changes resulting from internet era advances and expectation. The Duke of York's Inspiring Digital Enterprise Awards scheme (iDEA) is a great next step for those who are keen to learn more. As one of the Pioneer adopters, we are committed to providing opportunities for those who want to take the next step and are keen to learn more. Our promotions of the scheme to our staff, schools, colleges and Job Centre Plus has so far been rewarded by over 1,200 Stockport residents signing up to iDEA achieving over 8,000 digital badges in the year since launch. The case study below features three generations of the same family all learning together, demonstrating the power of digital to unite and is a credit to the iDEA product and how it has appeal for all ages, abilities and interests.

Case Study:

Alison read about the iDEA scheme at work and suggested it to her daughter Jess, 14, who enthusiastically completed both Bronze and Silver Awards. Jess says: I'm hoping these awards will help me stand out when I come to find my first job." Spurred on by her enthusiasm Alison decided to take up the challenge and has now achieved her own Bronze award. Alison says: "Being a parent of teenage children both interested in computer science I found this an insight into their world, whilst formalizing knowledge from the world around me. "

Convinced that anyone can take on the bite-size challenges, Alison has now introduced her 81 year old mother, Beth, to the award scheme and Jess is proving an able teacher to her grandmother. Beth says: "I'm feeling more confident about using the internet now. I've even joined Facebook because the women who I do patchworking with are all on there and I was starting to feel a bit left out. "

Another good example of how digital can be used as a catalyst to unite generations is a local digital photography project which will see residents of three Stockport care homes get together with students at Cheadle Hulme High School. Over the length of the 6 week digital photography course they will get to know one another and build a bond through sharing memories from photographs and learning a new skill together – demonstrated in figure 10 below.
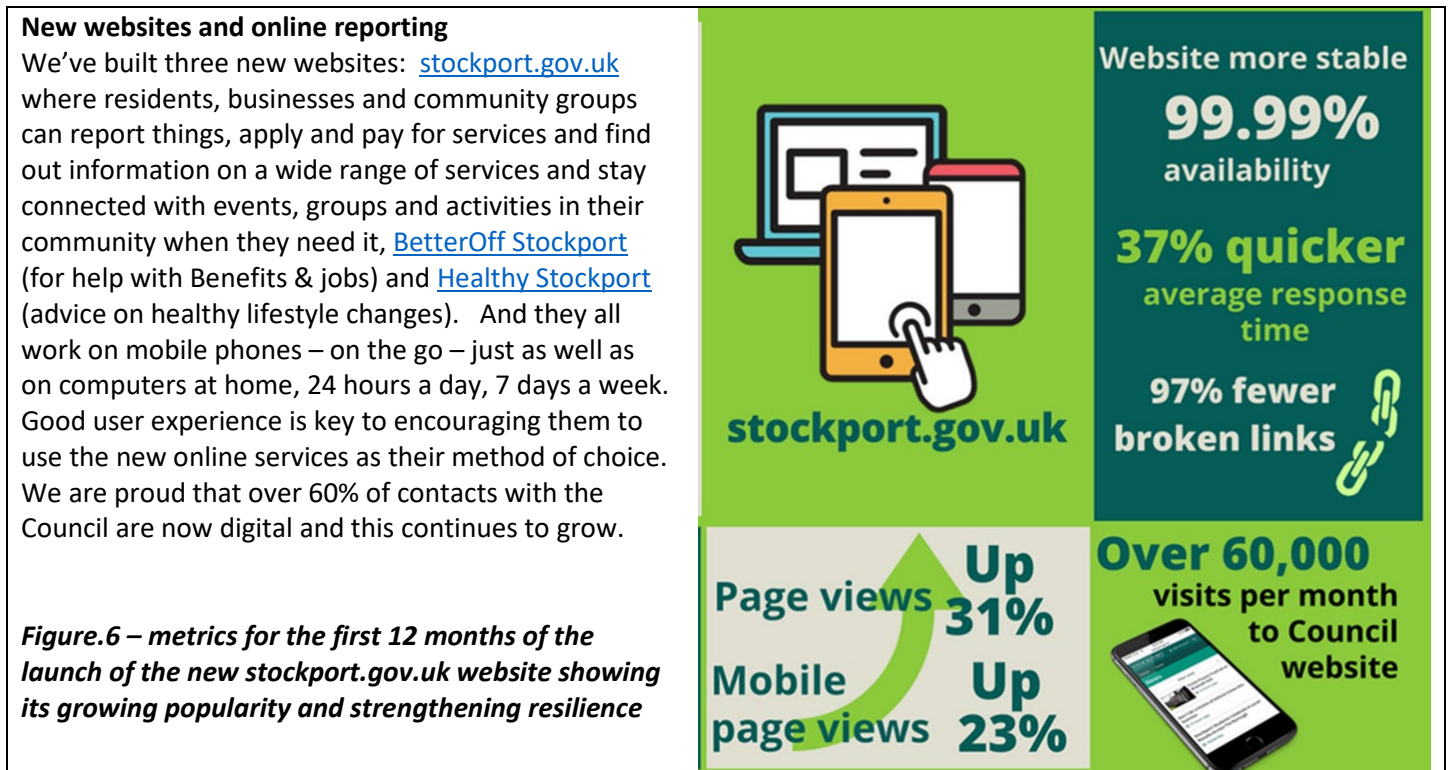

Dear Photograph is a website where people post photographs of old photographs lined up in the same location where they were originally taken, preserving the memory of special times in each location.

Figure.10 - One example of how digital photography can be used to elicit memories from an older generation and help bring the past of Stockport back to life

What we have delivered so far – Our new digital tools

87% of people in Stockport are already online and enjoying the benefits of using the internet. These customers expect to report, apply and pay for services online, to get answers around the clock and updates on progress. We are not enforcing channel shift. By creating well designed, accessible digital services that our customers want to use and find easy to use, we are finding that customers are self-electing to use these digital routes in to our services. Our new websites and My Account give them the tools to self-serve in areas that receive the highest volume of queries. By reducing routine demand on more costly channels our resources can be focused on ensuring support is always available for customers who are vulnerable, unable to access digital services or have complex circumstances.

We have delivered significant improvements in our digital offer to residents:

New websites and online reporting

We've built three new websites: stockport.gov.uk where residents, businesses and community groups can report things, apply and pay for services and find out information on a wide range of services and stay connected with events, groups and activities in their community when they need it, BetterOff Stockport (for help with Benefits & jobs) and Healthy Stockport (advice on healthy lifestyle changes). And they all work on mobile phones – on the go – just as well as on computers at home, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Good user experience is key to encouraging them to use the new online services as their method of choice. We are proud that over 60% of contacts with the Council are now digital and this continues to grow.

Figure.6 – metrics for the first 12 months of the launch of the new stockport.gov.uk website showing its growing popularity and strengthening resilience

My Account

Around 2,000 new residents are signing up and seeing the benefits of 'My Account' every month. This single sign on facility is where residents and service-users can access personalised information on council services such as Council Tax, benefits and bin collections. They can report faulty streetlights and blocked grids, receive progress updates or manage their appointments, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This is improving customer experience and reducing demand in the contact centres front and back office which is enabling waiting times for home visits to be reduced from 10 to 2 weeks. You can find out more on our video.

Figure.7 – the impact 12 months in to the introduction of our online facility to report and track faulty street lights and blocked grids.

Stockport Local

Better information, advice and guidance is assisting community efforts to connect and grow. Stockport Local - our online groups and services directory - is helping to create more resilient communities by connecting residents with the support they require in their local community. We are using digital to create access to community spaces where groups can meet, organise and hold events. And we have launched a new investment fund, applied for online and processed digitally, to enable us to grow Stockport's voluntary and community sector. Finally we're using this network of trusted community groups (that can be found on our Stockport Local online directory pages) to signpost to where digital help is available. If they are interested in getting more involved we are also offering them training so they can become digital champions and offer digital support themselves.

Mobile working

We are enabling our workforce to spend more time with residents wherever and whenever they need to rather than being tied to their desks. Our mobile working programme has initially been rolled out to social workers in our Stockport Family service, switching to Cloud-based systems and replacing equipment, so they can access up to date information on the move. This is achieving efficiencies in both time and cost and also better outcomes for residents.

Open Library Plus

All Stockport libraries now have free Wi-Fi and free-to-use devices for residents to access the internet, as well as staff who can help them get started. To support this we have started introducing new technology *Open Library Plus* into libraries (6 of the 16 libraries so far) which will allow members of the public to continue to use the library long after standard opening hours.
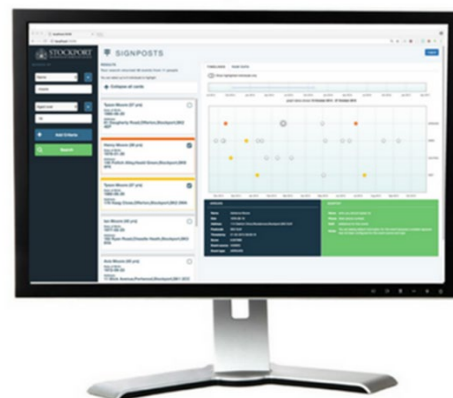
We are also delivering improvements and efficiencies by using digital to streamline our back office and improve the way we respond and support our citizens…

Figure.8 – the total saving delivered from back office services in 2018 as a direct result of digital improvements.

'Single view' of customers

We are carefully, but boldly, navigating data sharing rules by building our own safeguarding triage system called 'Signposts' which pulls together relevant data from different agencies relating to contacts they have had with a child or family. This is enabling all the little jigsaw pieces of information to be pooled into a single view, with a chronology of events which is saving time and more importantly enabling good decision making and early indication of need.

New insights from data

By automating data processing, analysis and reporting we are providing our managers with much easier access intelligence to inform decision making across the organisation based on citizen needs and behaviours.

Case management tools

We have introduced a new case management system with scripting and smart questions and easy integration to online forms. This has reduced the cost of system support and improved how we manage customer contacts.

Automations

Using APIs and online forms to automate our Council Tax Change of Address and payment-plan requests Automation is not only delivering efficiencies for the organization, it is also delivering better quality customer experience through reduced waiting times and stopping families falling deeper into debt as demonstrated in figure.7 below:
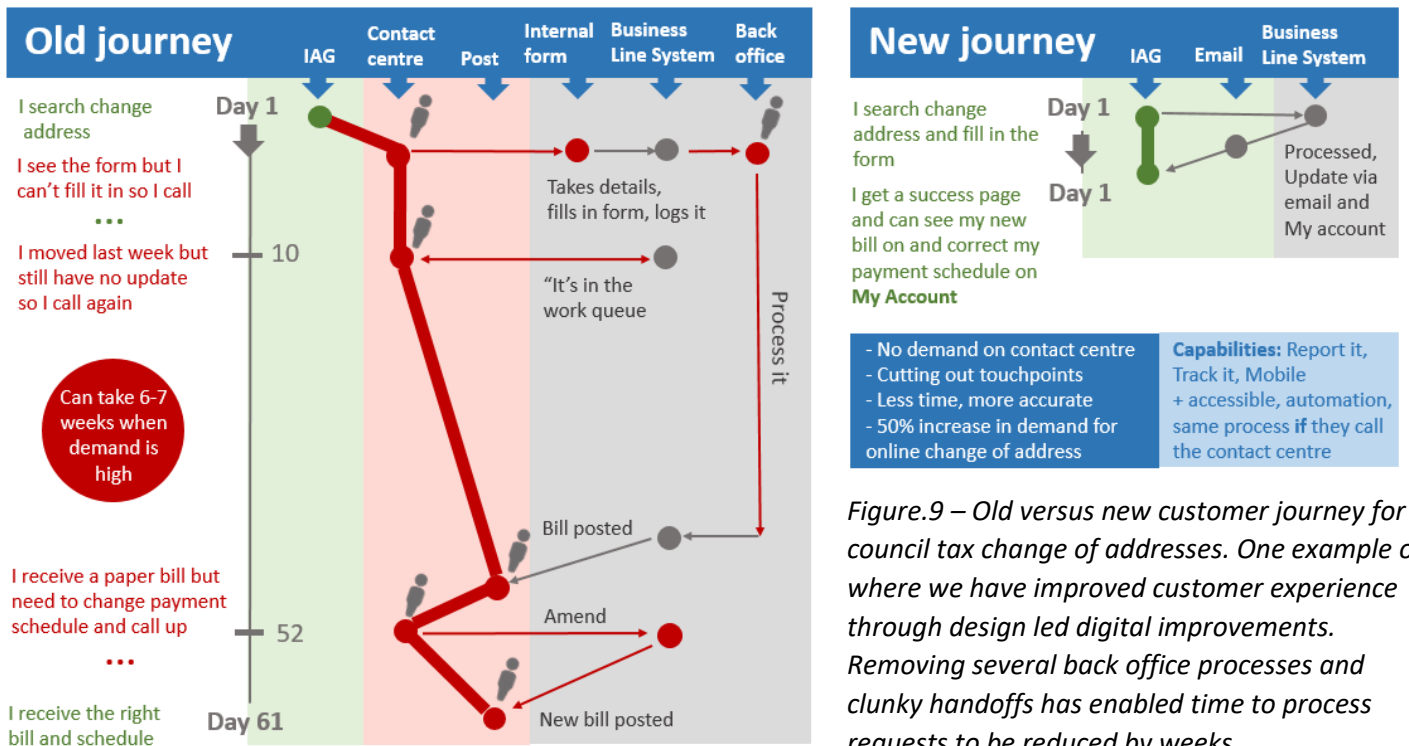

Figure.9 – Old versus new customer journey for council tax change of addresses. One example of where we have improved customer experience through design led digital improvements. Removing several back office processes and clunky handoffs has enabled time to process requests to be reduced by weeks.

Leading by Example

The challenges of keeping up with technology, meeting the growing and often complex needs of our community and delivering to tighter budgets are not things we are facing alone and as one of the founding signatories of the Local Digital Declaration we are committed to reshaping local public services for the benefit of all.

We are creating and nurturing an open learning culture to share and collaborate – leading in line with the Local Digital Declaration and Government Digital Service standards which frame the way we work. We open-source our new digital capabilities and actively encourage their reuse by other local authorities and public bodies. We have entered into new partnerships with colleagues from other areas, for example working with Essex County Council who are using our Website platform and with whom we are discussing together how to develop it further. We are also working with three other Local Authorities on a technology project for Adult Social Care.

We have held three Open Days so far where we have invited local authorities from across the country (as far afield as Scotland and Cornwall) to see how we work, take away what they need, and discuss shared challenges and opportunities for collaboration.

For us this is about embodying the culture we set out in our values, the ambition we set out in our strategy and delivery plans, and leading the change we want to see in our organisation and for our communities.

Stockport To keep the people of **stockport** at the heart of what we do
team To succeed as a **team**, collaborating with colleagues and partners
ambition To drive things forward with **ambition**, creativity and confidence
respect To value and **respect** our colleagues, partners and customers