Customer Experience & Digital Strategy

City of Westminster

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Foreword

We are a council who strive to understand the needs of our customers, and we will use this knowledge to deliver the best possible experience for you. We want to ensure that our contact channels are effective and designed to meet your needs.

Customers will be supported to use digital channels by choice, and we will work with our customers and partners to develop these digital channels to make contacting us as easy as doing business with leading e-retailers.

Improving how we deliver services to customers, and embracing digital ways of providing services, information and transactions will allow us to meet our customers' expectations of being able to engage with us online, mean we can deliver better and more efficient services, and also ensure we are making the best use of our resources.

We are a flagship local authority at the heart of a global city, and this is behind our ambitions in the strategy to make sure we are delivering the customer experience you expect from us and are leading the way in how we engage with our communities and deliver the services they need.

Our ambition is to be the best digital local authority globally.

Councillor Paul Swaddle OBE
Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital

Introduction

Westminster is an ambitious council. We're ambitious for our residents, our local businesses, our visitors and our staff. We want our customers to have the best possible experience when they get in touch with us, and we want to make the most of the opportunities that digital technology provides to help us do this.

The pace of digital change is fast and getting faster. This is true in our daily lives, and in the way the council works. As a result, the expectations of our residents and businesses around how they find information, or interact with us, has changed and we know people expect seamless, intuitive digital services.

In order to meet these expectations, we need to understand what you, our customers want from us, and design our services in a way that works for you.

This Customer Experience and Digital Strategy is a way for us to set out what we are going to do to make sure we understand your needs, ensure we have the right culture, information and skills in the council to work in this way, and that we have the right approach to using the appropriate digital tools to meet your needs.

This strategy has been informed through conversations with residents, businesses, partners and staff. We will refresh this strategy regularly to make sure it stays current, and that we act on feedback and learning to keep improving the way we provide services to you.
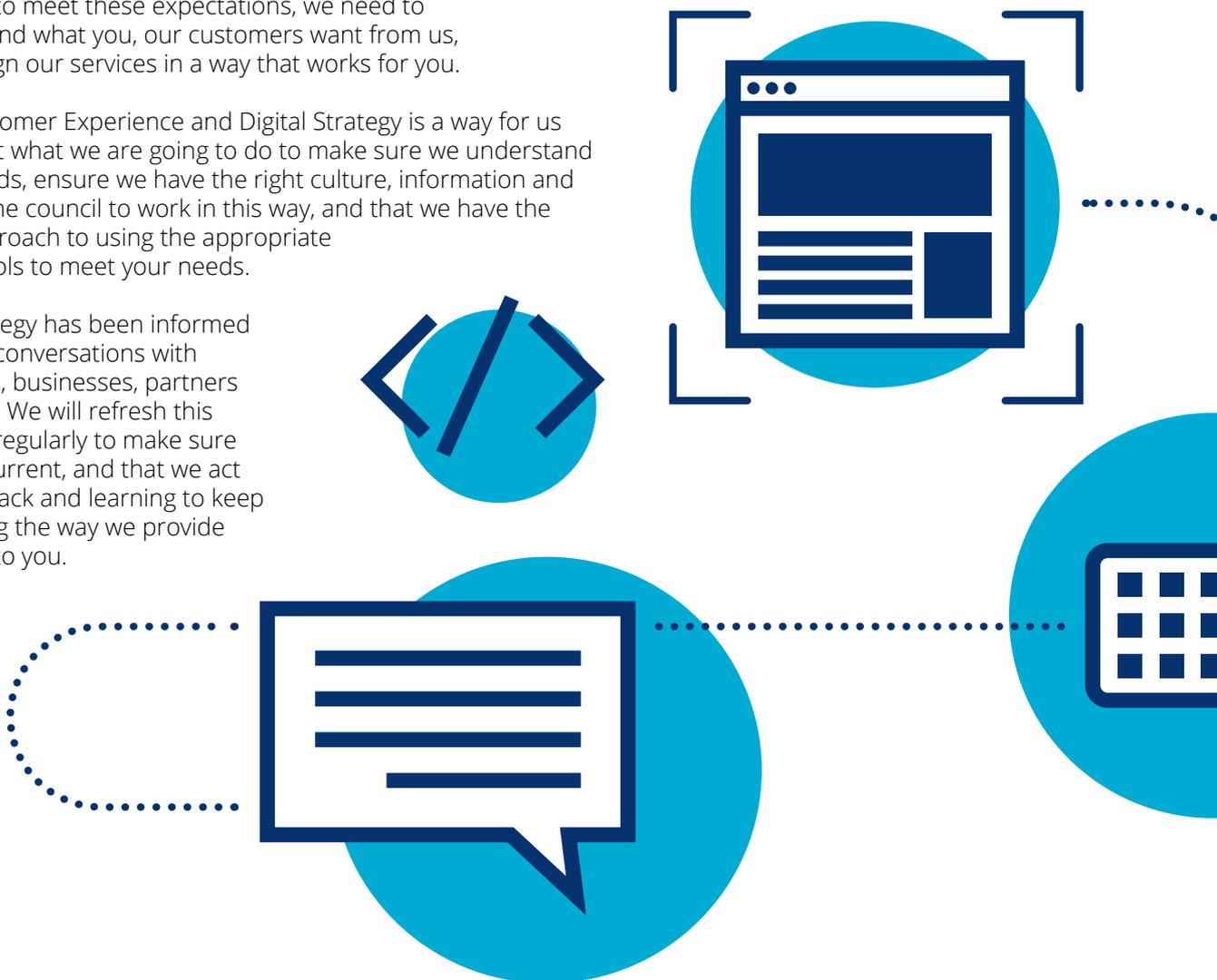
What do we mean by customer experience?

Customer experience is the impression people have of Westminster City Council when they contact us or use a council service. Our customers vary from:

Residents
We have 255,000 people living in the borough, in 124,500 households
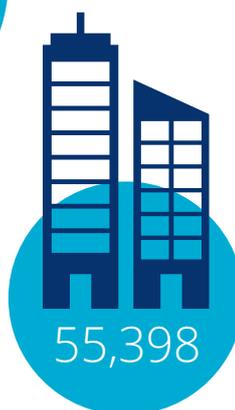
255,000

124,500

Workers, shoppers and tourists
During the daytime the population of Westminster grows by 1.1m people. This means that during the day for every resident there are four non-residents in the borough

1.1m

Businesses
We have 55,398 businesses, hosting 715,000 jobs

55,398

Students
The student (Higher Education) population is around 18,300 – 11,200 undergraduates and 7,100 post-graduates

post-graduates

18,300

undergraduates
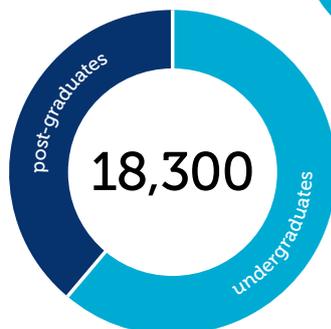
Additionally:

More than 210,000 people are employed in the night-time economy in the borough

OVER **150**

languages are spoken in Westminster's schools

We have a population churn of

27%

What do we mean by digital?

> **Digital:** applying the culture, practices, processes and technologies of the internet-era to respond to people's raised expectations

Tom Loosemore, Public Digital

This definition is adopted by a wide range of public sector organisations, and for us it covers four key areas which we need to get right to give our customers a positive experience.

Digital is not just about technology, it's about having practices and processes which make sense, are simple and work. It is about having the appropriate technology which meets the needs of both internal and external users, supports our business processes, and is secure, flexible and simple to use. It is also about making sure we have the right organisational culture in place which supports and encourages our staff to optimise the use of digital to meet the needs of their customers.

Principles

As an organisation we have chosen to adopt a set of principles to work to, which will make sure we provide the best possible customer experience.
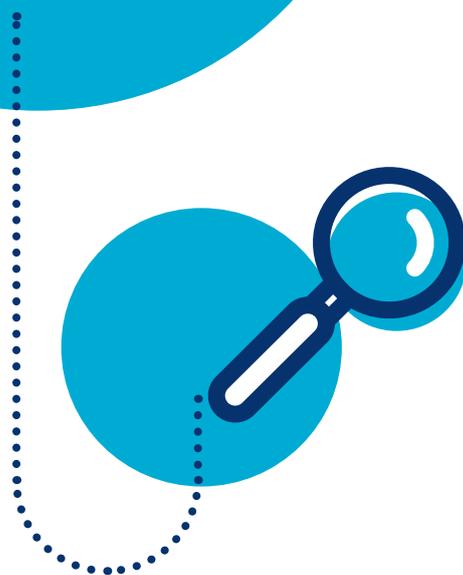
We will:

1 Always put the customer at the heart of everything we do

2 Make our digital channels so good that you prefer to use them

3 Continuously seek feedback and evidence to improve how we do things

4 Create a culture that listens to what you want, and takes the time to understand what you need

5 Continue to recognise that some customers need support to contact us digitally, and maintain alternative ways of contacting us for our most vulnerable customers

6 Support our staff to provide the best possible experience to you, and invest in their training and understanding of digital and good customer service

7 Invest in the right technology to meet our ambitions.

We will also work to the Government Digital Service Standard, which includes the importance of understanding user needs and ensuring we design for accessibility. The standard has been designed to help organisations create and run great digital public services.

These principles have been shaped through engagement with residents, businesses, council staff and partners to make sure they reflect the needs of Westminster customers and help us create a City for All.

Our Vision

Transform the way our customers interact with the council making it easy for them to find the information and services they need to improve their lives.

By implementing this strategy:

Residents

- We will learn what residents' key needs and priorities are and take a proactive approach to resolving issues in the borough which affect them, before they need to contact us

- Will have the best possible experience every time they contact us

- Will find it easy to contact us when it is convenient for them, and will get a response which resolves their issue, query or need first time

- Will find that the service they receive digitally is so good that they choose to contact us in this way

- For those that cannot get online we will maintain our telephone services, protecting these for our most vulnerable residents

- Will be engaged in the development of services, involved in testing new and changing ways of contacting us and see their feedback acted on

- Will benefit from proactive action by our teams and our partners to increase digital skills, access to digital equipment and better digital connectivity around the borough

- Will see that we have a better understanding of their needs and are able to personalise services, both through increased levels of engagement and better use of data

- Will have confidence that we are an organisation that is committed to ensuring the best possible customer experience, having the staff support and culture to achieve this, the right technology and security in place and takes the protection of residents' data seriously.

Businesses

- Will be encouraged to stay and grow in Westminster

- Will see the benefits of improved digital connectivity and an increasingly digital population to feed into their workforce needs

- New businesses will be attracted into Westminster to complement our already thriving world-leading industries, helping increase the availability of fantastic careers for residents

- Will be able to access our open data, which will lead to the development of solutions to meet local needs and support a borough-wide culture of innovation

- Will find the transactions they need to complete with us simple and easy to do online.

Customer Journey

Our customer improvement work is about making it easy for you to complete tasks with us without having to repeat information, to save you time and effort and help you get a resolution quicker.
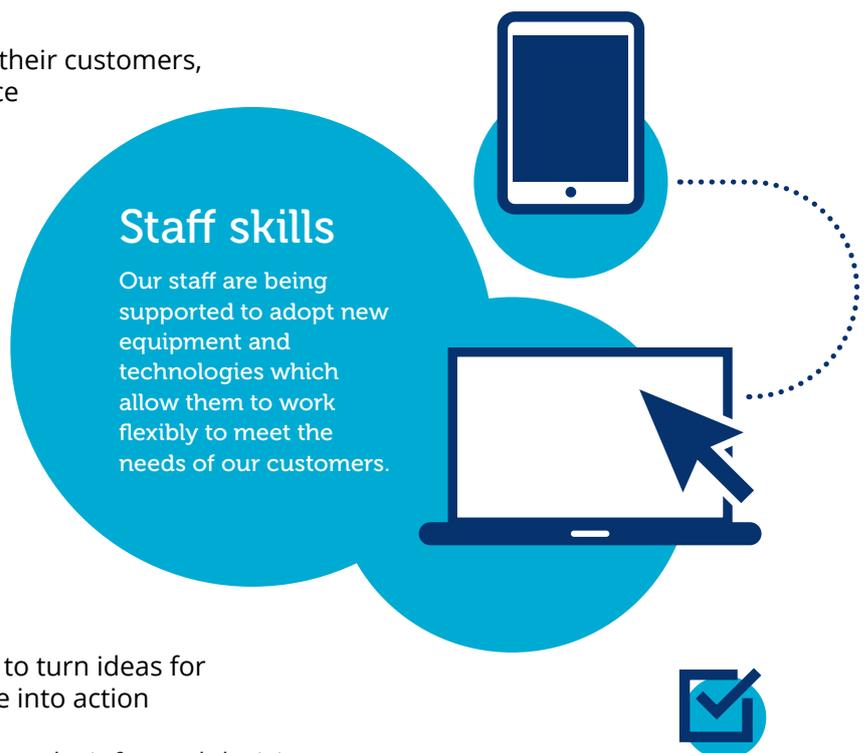
Partners

- We recognise that our partners are also our customers, and we will make contacting us and transacting with us simple

- We will work collaboratively with our partners to ensure we are delivering joined-up services where possible, extending our services to empower partners (e.g. being able to report issues directly)

- Our partnership working will benefit from us having a clear strategy in place, which can be shared with partners to identify common areas of interest and opportunities to work together to deliver improvements

- Close collaborative working will allow us to more easily share our data and access each other's open data, which will help us ensure we are using what we know about our residents to better meet their needs

- We will work with our partners to continue to enable improved digital infrastructure and skills in the borough

- We will have flexible contracts to allow us to adapt to changing demand.

Staff

- Will feel supported to engage with their customers, both when developing a new service or way for residents to contact us and on an ongoing basis

- Will have the skills, tools and technologies they need to deliver the best possible customer experience to residents

- Will be supported to take responsibility for resolving customer issues first time

- Will work in a culture which places the customer at the heart of everything we do, and is supported by the leadership team

- Will be supported and encouraged to turn ideas for improving the customer experience into action

- Will have access to the right data to make informed decisions resulting in improved outcomes for local people.

Staff skills

Our staff are being supported to adopt new equipment and technologies which allow them to work flexibly to meet the needs of our customers.

Themes

Customer

We will provide you with the best possible customer experience.
We will do this through developing a better understanding of your needs so that we can be more proactive and resolve issues for you without you needing to contact us. We will make sure that your needs are always at the heart of any service we provide.

Resident engagement

The Westminster Local Offer forum were involved in the re-design of the Local Offer website, with their input leading to direct changes to the website.

When you do need to contact us, many of you will choose to go online because our digital services will be so good. Your experience will be easy and reliable. You will be kept up to date and you will get a resolution which meets your needs. We will make sure our online information is accessible, easy to understand and designed with our customers in mind, so we can make it easier for you to self-serve and make informed choices based on accurate and useful information.

You will only have to tell us something once – whether it's providing documentation or telling us your story. Where it is appropriate to do so we will share information better between areas of the council in support of providing a seamless experience, helping you and not asking you to repeat yourselves, something we know you don't want to do. Through these improvements to your customer journey you will find you get an answer or can complete a task quicker, saving yourself and the council time and effort. We will explore how technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) can be used in some scenarios to help us understand the needs of our customers and demand on our services so we can provide a better service for you. This could manifest itself in the use of data to understand areas which need attention in the borough and allow us to efficiently and effectively deploy our resources to prevent and resolve issues.

We will engage you in how we design our services. We'll do this regularly, to understand how our current services are working for you and when we design new ones. We'll be interested in what's important to you, what your needs are, and how you feel when accessing any of our services.

We know that not all of our customers are able to contact us digitally. For those that want to be able to do this we will support you to build your digital confidence, offering support to increase your skills, providing access to computers and continuing to ensure the borough has the best connectivity to make sure everyone can access the internet. We will keep our telephone and non-digital services for those who still need them – caring for and supporting the most vulnerable in our communities is, and will always remain, our most important priority.

As we better understand you and your needs, we will personalise your services, helping you to find it easier to access what you need and when.

Council

As an organisation we will continuously seek customer feedback and when you provide this, you will be able to see what change it has led to. We will regularly review our services ourselves, using data and information to understand what improvements we can make to ensure we're always providing you with the best possible experience.

We will support our staff to take time to understand your needs and empower them to make sure we are helping resolve your request, query or issue the first time you contact us. We will make sure the staff are in the right place to meet your needs and have the right technology to do this effectively.

We recognise that our staff need support as we use more digital technology, and we will work with them to make sure they are confident in delivering services and engaging with you in this way. This will help us deliver services in the most efficient way and mean our staff can confidently support you to use digital services too. We will also make sure the systems our staff use are designed and tested with them, and simple to navigate so they can meet your needs. The use of technology can support our services to develop and meet their own service aspirations.

Digital inclusion

In 2019 our libraries supported nearly 2,500 people with digital skills training and support for free.

Getting the way we provide services to you and the use of digital right will help us meet our financial challenge. The more we can encourage those of you who can to use our digital channels because we've got them right, the less need there will be for our telephone and non-digital services which are more expensive to provide and which we want to be able to afford to keep for those of you who really need them. Work looking at how we can use new technologies to automate parts of how we provide services, using sensors to provide us with better information, and developing techniques to use our data to make better informed decisions all provide us with opportunities to make savings and be able to protect our core front-line services.

We are already using technologies such as cameras on our vehicles to identify potholes, and we want to explore more how technology can help. The evolving world of connected sensors allows us to monitor a range of things (e.g. noise, damage to street lights etc) which can proactively alert us so we can address issues before you need to tell us. We're also using technology to support how our older residents live independently at home and are interested in how technology can help us understand someone's care needs better. We want to continue to explore how technology can help you, and our services, to ensure we understand and can proactively meet your needs.

We will continue to engage our customers in our decision-making processes, making sure that customers are at the heart of all council decision making. We will encourage all residents to take part in consultations and engagement activity and make it easy for you to access these. We will also make sure we have a continuously improving understanding of your needs through feedback, data and engagement so we can always factor this into our decisions.

Place

We will work with our local public and voluntary sector partners to make sure we are delivering joined-up services to our shared customers. We will use digital technologies to work efficiently together and share data where appropriate to make sure we can provide the best possible experience to you.

Data

We are using data intelligently to forecast trends and demands in Children's Social Care for the types of future placements which may be needed.

We will also work with local, national and international organisations who are world-leading in their use of digital to provide excellent customer service and learn from them so that we can bring these ways of working and technologies to the people of Westminster.

Westminster is a flagship local authority at the heart of a global city. We need to make sure we are keeping pace with other cities around the world and giving you the best opportunities which the right digital infrastructure, technologies and use of data can provide. One of our new City for All priorities is to be a 'Smart City' – Smart Cities are defined in the Mayor of London's Smarter London Together Roadmap as **"a collaborative, connected and responsive city. It integrates digital technologies and uses city-wide data to respond to our citizen's needs."** This focus on responding to citizen's needs is at the heart of our work to make the most of digital and data opportunities for our residents, businesses and visitors. We see a Smart City approach as a key way to embrace technology which helps us ensure the City of Westminster is ready for the future, and which meets the needs of our residents, and already teams are working on key projects to deliver the technology improvements we will need.

We are proud of the businesses in Westminster, and our Economic Development Strategic Framework is in place to support them. We recognise that having the right digital infrastructure and access to residents with digital skills are key to businesses staying and growing in our city, and in attracting new ones. We will continue to work with broadband providers to bring super-fast connectivity across the borough and explore further connectivity opportunities such as open Wi-Fi and the Internet of Things. Our work to support residents to build their digital skills will help provide a pipeline of local people with a set of skills that makes them more employable by local businesses.

We are fortunate to have four globally prominent universities with world-leading departments partly based in our borough – Imperial College London, Kings College London, The London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Westminster. We already work in partnership with these institutions and will continue to do so to make the most of the opportunities that our world-leading academics and facilities bring to the area.
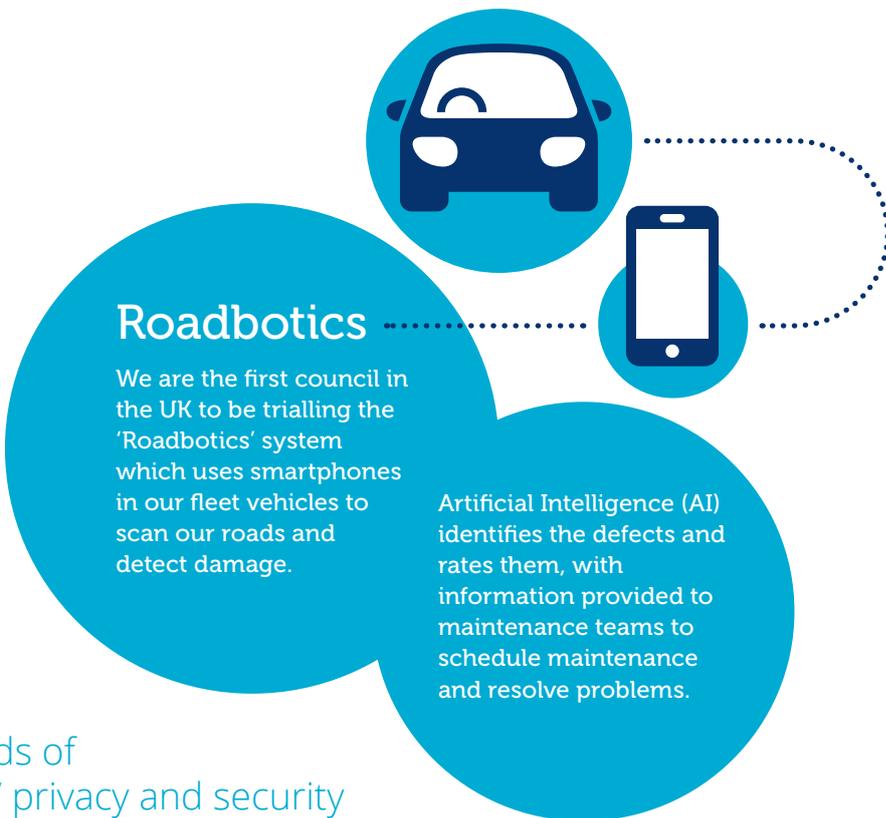
We will also become more open with our data, publishing data which can safely be made publicly available which could be used by businesses to help them grow or develop innovative solutions to help us meet local challenges and improve outcomes for you. This will always be done in line with data protection legislation, is happening in other places and is something we want to nurture with our business community in Westminster.

We will also continue to provide digital skills support to Westminster start-ups and businesses, helping them develop their presence in the digital world and make the most of the opportunities to reach new customers, and scale sustainably.
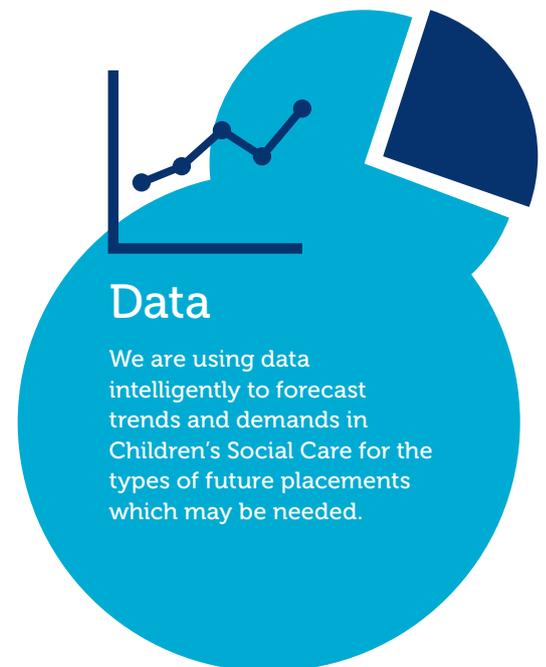
Technology

We are founding members of the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) and have embedded the GDS Local Government Digital Service Standards in our technology governance processes. This involves a commitment to developing services that meet the needs of citizens, protecting citizens' privacy and security and striving to deliver better value for money.

Roadbotics

We are the first council in the UK to be trialling the 'Roadbotics' system which uses smartphones in our fleet vehicles to scan our roads and detect damage.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) identifies the defects and rates them, with information provided to maintenance teams to schedule maintenance and resolve problems.

We know we shouldn't try to run before we can walk, and we know that not all our technology works as it should now to enable us to provide our best possible customer experience. We have big ambitions, but know we need to get the basics right first and have already started this work. Our single IT service across both the City of Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea allows us to pool technology resources and work to offer a consistent experience to staff and customers across our bi-borough services. We will work with public sector, government and technology partners to help us meet our technology ambitions, learn from others and share what we are good at with partners to help them improve their services too.

We are keen to explore how we can better use our data and information to help provide the best possible customer experience. This will include continuing to explore how automation and machine learning techniques can help us make the best use of the information we have, preventing issues before they occur and supporting new, more efficient ways to deliver our services. The better we get at knowing the needs, preferences and behaviours of our residents, the better we can be at delivering an effective and proactive customer experience. We want to better use our data internally to inform our decision making, and how we run and provide our services. We increasingly wish to share our data with partners and use data they can provide us too to really build our knowledge and mean we can better jointly support people in the borough. Opening up our data, within the lines of the regulations, provides opportunity for others to be able to use it to find out information about the borough, develop innovative solutions to meet local challenges they can identify, and hold us to account.

We recognise that the more we do digitally, and the more we open up our data, the stronger we need to be around our cyber-security. Protecting your data will always be a key priority, and we will be transparent about how we are using and sharing data. We take our data protection obligations seriously and will always work within the relevant Data Protection legislation.

Measuring our success

By 2023...

Customer

✔ **Our customers will...**
be choosing to use our digital services, as they will have been designed to meet their needs

✔ **Westminster will...**
design all services with a comprehensive understanding of user need

✔ **Westminster will...**
be accessible – designing for everyone from the start.

Council

✔ **Westminster will...**
have robust user engagement and testing functions, ensuring the customer is at the heart of service design

✔ **Westminster will...**
view staff as users, creating processes and systems that are accessible and efficient for both customers and officers

✔ **Westminster will...**
have the right metrics and processes through which user satisfaction and take-up can be measured and evaluated

✔ **Westminster will...**
carry out a Government Digital Service assessment on all new or redesigned services to ensure the customer journey is well understood.

Place

✔ **Our customers will...**
have a seamless experience through the council working efficiently and collaboratively across departments and with partners – reducing repetition and follow up contacts

✔ **Westminster will...**
be known as a global leader in Smart City approaches and technologies.

Technology

✔ **Westminster will...**
use data to take a proactive approach to problem solving, minimising the number of service requests that customers generate

✔ **Staff will...**
be supported to make effective use of their technology to support customers.