

Case Study:

Harrow Council - Digital Ethics

Using Digital Ethics to build trust with Harrow residents

How Harrow Council has benefitted from expert support to build trust and demystify Digital Ethics.

Background

Harrow Council has embarked on a programme of digital transformation to better serve its residents and operate more efficiently – a programme for which it has won awards such as the Most Accessible Council Website¹ and the second Most Improved Local Government Website².

Harrow Council has a workforce of more than 5000 employees, serving more than 240,000 residents and thousands of businesses every day. Its ambition is to make Harrow a better place to live and work – for its residents, businesses and visitors by building a better Harrow, being more business-like and protecting the most vulnerable. Its digital transformation programme plays a key role in this.

¹ <https://index.silktide.com/uk-councils-february-2020/london-borough-of-harrow-council>

² <https://sitemorse.com/index/uk-local-government/2019-q4>

Challenge

Harrow Council wants to tap into the power of user data to improve residents' experience of its online services. It recognises that offering a more personalised experience could improve people's access to the information they need and increase the 'discoverability' of other relevant services they might not be aware of. In the long term, they want to understand how sophisticated data use could identify people who are at risk of becoming vulnerable and offer preventative support.

One key challenge for the Council is the general lack of understanding within the public of how much personal data is shared and how it is used. For the Council, a culture of trust and transparency is of utmost importance; it wants to ensure that data use is always responsible and ethical, particularly regarding privacy, transparency, diversity, equality and accessibility. One key reason for this is to ensure that Harrow's communities really benefit from their innovative use of data.

"Doing the right thing and earning the trust of citizens has always been important to Harrow Council, and Digital Ethics will help us do that. Sopra Steria's work has already provided tremendous value and helped us to identify some quick wins while building for the future too."

Jonathan Milbourn, Head of Modernisation and Customer Services at Harrow Council

Solutions

Digital Ethics is a topic that has been widely discussed, but councils lack places to find clear, practical advice on how to implement it into their organisations. This is where Harrow Council's partnership with Sopra Steria came into its own. Ben Jones, Head of Digital at Harrow Council, commented: "The Sopra Steria approach is helping make the complex area of ethics real and approachable."

Sopra Steria's Digital Ethics experts worked across 5 key strands to demystify Digital Ethics and make the application of it clear for Harrow Council:

Sharing knowledge

Sopra Steria delivered Digital Ethics training to Senior Managers and the Council's Digital team. This equipped colleagues with additional skills to understand how Digital Ethics impacts their work and begin to address the challenges and opportunities it raises.

Harrow also benefitted from new approaches to citizen engagement, including new ways of conducting user research remotely and gauging residents' perspectives on the Council's use of their data. Sopra Steria also used its Trust & Transparency survey which tracks how residents perceive the Council's data use over time and how that impacts trust in the Council.

Sopra Steria has worked to ensure that these new ways of working and Digital Ethics management can be self-sustaining in the Council; it has conducted knowledge transfer and training on user research, and established a regular schedule of citizen surveys on Trust & Transparency to equip the Council to monitor its progress against a key objective for its Digital Ethics work - building and sustaining citizen trust.

Understanding the Council's context

Sopra Steria's experts worked closely with several teams at Harrow Council including Transformation & Customer Services, Strategy & Policy, and Digital to understand the organisation's culture and values, and strategic context. Sopra Steria also evaluated the Council's policies and processes, including the collection of resident data, how it is protected, what data they plan to collect in the future and how they plan to use it. The Digital Ethics team synthesised and analysed this information to ensure that their approach was aligned to Harrow's strategy and operations.

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New collaboration tools

Sopra Steria introduced the Harrow team to new digital tools throughout the project, including collaborative whiteboarding tools for remote workshops, online surveys to quickly gather feedback and tailor their approach, and a variety of tools to enable the team to adapt their user research to the constraints of COVID-19.

Bespoke recommendations for change

Sopra Steria's assessment enabled Harrow Council to visualise the key ethical risks and opportunities related to their digital programme. Sopra Steria's Digital Ethics team then used this information to derive clear recommendations that the Council can put into practice, driving them towards a Digital Ethics by Design approach to technology. The final phase of the project will use a collaborative approach, consulting with colleagues from across the Council to prioritise their Digital Ethics risks and opportunities. This will result in a personalised Digital Ethics strategy, framework and implementation roadmap for Harrow Council.

Unique assessment tool

Sopra Steria used its unique assessment tool, based on globally recognised standards and best practice, to help Harrow identify the most pertinent ethical risks and opportunities related to its website personalisation project. The assessment tool simplified the myriad of emerging standards and regulations related to Digital Ethics, providing Harrow Council with tangible and relevant advice for their project.

Results so far

- ✓ Identified quick wins to embed Digital Ethics into Harrow's digital programme and ways of working, such as making policies clearer to citizens and using regular citizen surveys and other feedback mechanisms to gauge perceptions of ethical issues.
- ✓ Provided new methods of engaging with citizens, allowing the team to quickly gather residents' feedback and perspectives to support their Digital Strategy.
- ✓ Delivered Digital Ethics training to Senior Managers and Digital colleagues, providing them with a better understanding of how to address Digital Ethics in their work.
- ✓ Prompted wider conversations around embedding Digital Ethics across Council decision-making processes.

What our partners say



"We know that digital technologies are helping us to do more for citizens with less. We also know that we have to take a thoughtful approach to it to ensure we are doing the right thing."

"Digital Ethics is helping us make better decisions about our digital programme in order to provide citizens with better services; respecting privacy, being transparent, and expanding accessibility and inclusion."

"The Sopra Steria approach is helping make the complex area of ethics real and approachable. They've also introduced us to new digital ways of working, and it's felt like we've been working with a boutique consultancy."

Ben Jones, Head of Digital at Harrow Council

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