How the Borough of Broxbourne Council emerged as a digital innovator

Just outside the M25, north of London, a digital innovation has taken place that could form a blueprint for the future of public services.

Borough of Broxbourne Council

Broxbourne Borough Council serves just under 100,000 people. It delivers 180 different services ranging from collecting council tax and emptying bins to processing planning applications and supporting people who are experiencing homelessness.

'Innovative Broxbourne' was a key focus of its ambitious 2017-2020 strategy, setting a vision to become a digital organisation which delivers the best value to citizens and staff.

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The Challenge

Achieving this was not going to be straightforward. The ambition for Broxbourne's Digital Transformation was clear; to ensure that they were delivering the right public services with positive customer experiences every time.

> "It's fair to say that processes were driven by policies rather than meeting people's needs"

In reality, whilst the Council was seen as one organisation by local residents, behind the scenes it has eighteen different departments. Each was working separately with its own inconsistent processes and systems and the culture didn't support or enable digital ways of working.

"It's fair to say that processes were driven by policies rather than meeting people's needs," says Becky Davis, Head of Customer & Organisation Transformation who led the project for Sopra Steria.

"A word that perhaps sums up one of the key challenges was inconsistency. A customer's experience of speaking to or getting information from different departments could vary greatly from one experience to another and the council had no ability to bring all these interactions together or respond to people's preferred methods of communicating."

People in the Borough typically manage much of their day to day business online and via their smartphones but the Council was only accessible via telephone or by physically going into the building.

> "The whole infrastructure of the organisation from wiring to operating systems was in need of an upgrade"

"Teams were all using different technology and processes and the whole infrastructure of the organisation from wiring to operating systems was in need of an upgrade," adds Chris Chubb, Head of Business technology Consulting at Sopra Steria.

Staff found that technology was slowing them down rather than helping them to do their jobs.

"From the very start of our relationship with Broxbourne, we wanted to move the mindset away from how we could make the most of new technologies to how we could create the very best experiences for customers," continues Chris Chubb.

The Council needed to create a consistent customer experience and enable any part of the organisation to have a single view of every customer.

The challenge was large and complex but the ambition and buy-in was there.

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Solutions

Discovery then Design

Key to the success of this transformation was collaboration. Sopra Steria partnered with Broxbourne to develop an ambitious vision and deliver a complex transformation improving all 30 service areas and benefitting 500 employees.

"This was a 'bottom up' transformation. The focus was not on technology but rather how technology could deliver the desired outcomes. Throughout the process we had a constant obsession with the right thing for the customer" – Becky Davis, Sopra Steria.

Sopra Steria championed the use of 'blended teams'. This meant that every discipline was always represented at project meetings, there was no silo working and everyone always had a 'single picture' of the overall business.

In the 'One Broxbourne Team', fifteen council leads worked alongside Sopra Steria in the design and delivery of every element of the programme.

> "Throughout the process we had a constant obsession with the right thing for the customer."

- **Discovery – 'Service Design Mindset'**

  Sopra Steria's team undertook an ambitious mapping exercise to understand the technology and processes used by each individual department and what this meant from a customer's perspective. This included user research, persona development and data analysis.

  In just twelve weeks, every service area in the council had been explored.

  The findings and initial recommendations were then presented back to the Council before any design work commenced.

- **Understanding the 'most painful customer journeys'**

  Every aspect of this project put customers at the heart, with the focus always being on how to create the best possible experiences for Broxbourne's citizens.

  Sopra Steria undertook in depth research into customers' experiences, particularly focusing on the most 'painful' journeys. In many cases it was found that difficult customer journeys also related to internal frustrations too.

  This work was supported by a detailed demographics research piece to better understand local people's daily lives, digital behaviours and shopping habits.

  The evidence gathered demonstrated that digital public services were the way to go.

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- **Creating Consistency**

  Everything in the organisation was upgraded to provide a reliable base of consistency. This included Wi-Fi, a new, fast internet connection, software and the introduction of Office 365 across all departments.

- **Developing Broxbourne's Vision**

  Sopra Steria also worked in partnership with the council to identify 'what good looks like in 2021'.

  This was; to become a customer-centric Council delivering and evidencing value for customers, mebers and staff.

  A key element of the transformation was the development of a new vision, values, tone of voice and personality which comes alive on the Council's new website.

Design driven by data

Once Sopra Steria understood customers' habits and preferences, this data was used to phase the brief into bite sized service design projects.

- Smarter technology
- A brand-new customer experience
- Digital services
- Support to become a digital council

1. A brand new customer experience

In the first three months Sopra Steria delivered a transformed customer experience which included a new website, 30 digital journeys. This was coupled with a purpose-built reception area with self-serve technology.

2. Digital Services

The next phase moved onto the transformation of services. Sopra Steria delivered a further 120 digital services, transforming the way the Council works end-to-end. Business processes were redesigned to deliver efficiency and support a new, digital culture.

3. Support to become a Digital Council

Through this collaboration, people were supported through this change every step of the way. Teams embraced new technologies, Sopra Steria developed new capabilities all while sustaining an agile approach to service improvement.

"What makes this approach unique in the bringing together of our project methodology and our multi-disciplinary approach. We call this 'Digital Organisation'." –Becky Davis, Sopra Steria

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Results - Services for people

Outcomes are improved for citizens and staff alike.

"People in Broxbourne no longer have to wait in reception to speak to a service. They can report a missed bin at any time using their smartphone and the most simple questions can be answered by the information online." Becky Davis, Sopra Steria.

- Digital Capability
  Four new platforms, cloud-based technology and integrations making the most of legacy systems.

- Efficiency
  150+ business processes redesigned and implemented.

- Culture
  268 staff supported and trained to work digitally. Changes have been embraced by council staff and they are now working in a new, digital way.

- Self-Serve
  A new website opening up access to 150+ end-to-end digital services.

- Experience
  New digital-enabled reception, 92 query types resolved at first contact and a new online account.

What does this mean?

- Customers get what they need more quickly and staff are empowered to deliver outstanding customer service.

- Easier for customers who need to contact the Council by telephone to do so.

- Staff are reporting quicker service processing time, meaning customers get quicker outcomes.

- Services are re-investing capacity to deliver better outcomes for customers.

- Broxbourne Council is the 'most improved' Local Government Council website according to SiteMorse moving up 365 places in the ranking from 390 to 25.

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32%

More customers are now serving themselves

69%

Increase in public take-up online

117%

Increase in over-65s using online services

50%

Reduction in calls going unanswered

#25

Moving up 365 places in SiteMorse ranking from 390 to 25.

A quick response to Covid-19

"Never was a cultural shift so evident than when staff could no longer work from an office due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Service provision continued the following day from employees' homes with no loss of services to the community" – Becky Davis, Sopra Steria

What our partners say

"It's so exciting to see the complete change in the way that we work. The whole Council is so different to the organisation it was this time last year. I can't praise this transformation programme enough, particularly in our waste management services. People can now access us 24/7 online in a completely automated process. It's fantastic" – Sandra Beck, Director of Finance at Broxbourne Borough Council.

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