



COUNCILS: READY FOR RESET

3 KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

Many Councils are only just having the chance to step-back and assess the situation, having battled through intense Reaction and Response phases brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

We now enter the Reset phase, and Local Authorities face tough questions and tougher decisions as they renew delivery models.

Here, drawing upon many hours of conversations with those at the forefront of digital services, we lay out 3 important considerations for all Councils as we enter the

RESET.

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RESET

Local Government responded quickly to this crisis, launching new services at lightning speed that met the immediate needs of communities.

Councils suddenly found themselves having to coordinate delivery of business grants, spinning up services around medicine and food delivery, working with community volunteer groups, processing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) donations and a lot more.

For many, urgency sparked innovation and cutting edge work in partnership with both public and private sector organisations. In some cases, necessity even helped remove blockers.

Local Authorities used digital channels to inform and serve citizens; delivering and iterating important content (advice and guidance, service status updates, park closures information and so on) and delivering new services quickly.

‘Channel Shift’ was suddenly accelerated through necessity. The vital speed and agility was aided in some cases by ‘Low Code’ tools that allowed non-technical people to act quickly and without having to rely on developers.

All of this happened while Council teams worked from home.

Local Government Reacted and *Responded* well, however now we’re entering the **Reset** phase.

This pandemic will continue to change citizens’ priorities, expectations and fundamental behaviours. As we prepare for the ‘New Normal’, there are questions that need to be addressed, including “which services do we want to keep, which do we want to change and which do we want to get rid of?”

Local Authorities face tough questions and tougher decisions. As councils prepare for what’s next, there are important learnings from what came before, and expectations of what’s to come next.

We lay out 3 core considerations that councils can keep in mind as they face down the challenges and leverage the opportunity to rethink and redesign services.



1. Collaboration, Reuse and Repurpose

During the outbreak, Local Authorities proactively shared what they produced with each other at increased velocity, knowing that it was more important than ever to avoid reinventing the wheel.

One such example is [Birmingham City Council](#) creating and sharing a [PPE donation form](#) on the [Jadu Library](#) within 48 hours.

Many others also shared assets such as those related to community volunteering, supporting local businesses and community support requests.

The Local Government community has long been aware of the value of sharing and using resources for the vast cost saving potential (the [Manifesto for Better Public Services](#) highlighted £46 billion worth of potential savings made possible by the practice), but the urgency and vital need to help each other during the crisis has really lit the fuse.

This approach to repurposing and collaboration, like digital transformation, has increased. We need that to continue as Local Government Resets.

We've also witnessed the resourceful repurposing of knowledge and technology of services within Councils. Swindon Borough Council took route optimisation work it had developed for the reporting and collection of fly-tipping and applied it to food and medicine delivery to spin-up vital services. This innovative and highly effective approach to reusing parts of others services has enabled the Council to respond quickly.

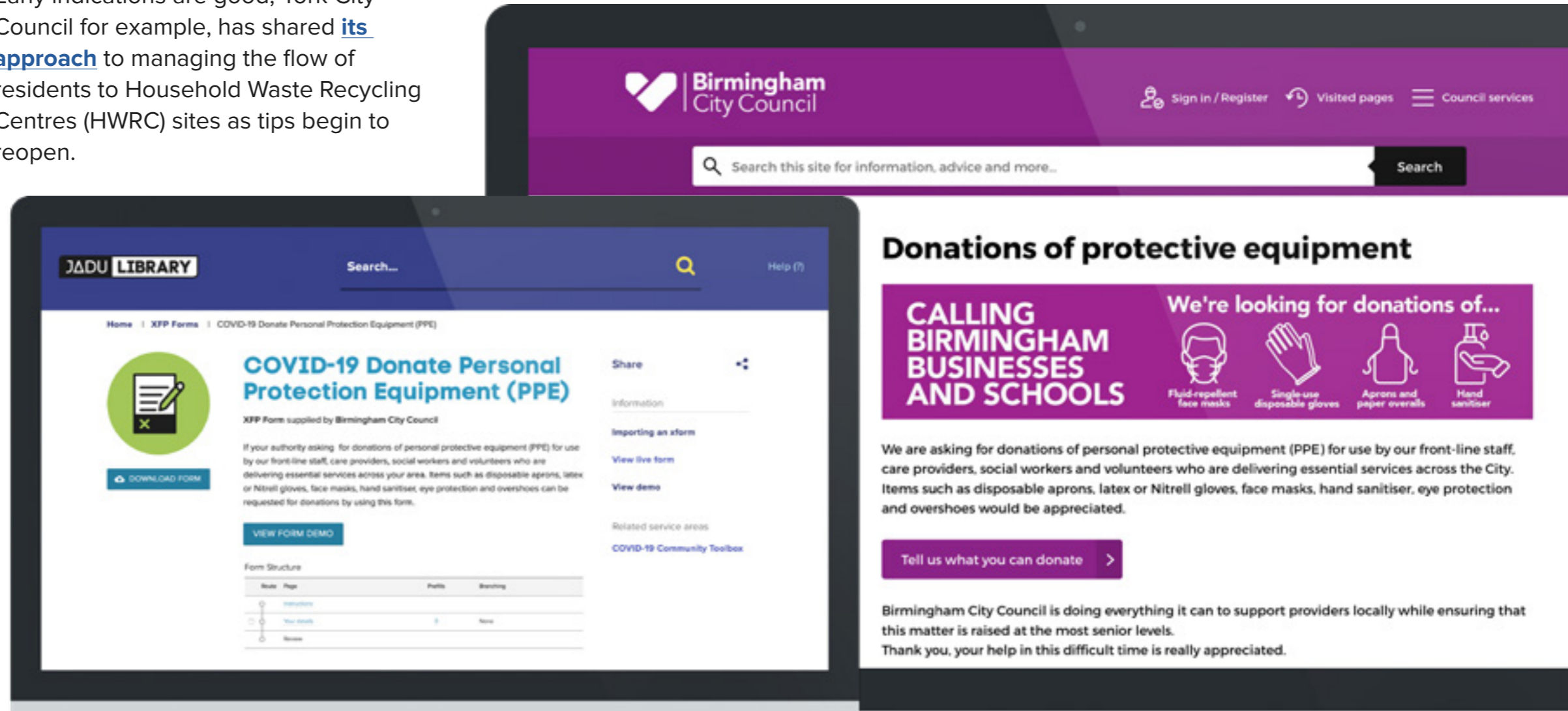
There is a lot to be gained from collaborating, reusing and repurposing. The pandemic has acted as a catalyst, increasing the number of organisations embracing the approach. It is important that this continues with the same urgency.



LISTEN: Innovation in the pandemic. Swindon Borough Council talks about free school meal applications spiking 2000%, using Robotic Process Automation to achieve a 98.3% efficiency gain, reusing work developed to deal with fly-tipping to spin-up food and medicine delivery services and more.

“ Within 48 hours, Birmingham City Council had created a PPE donation form which it shared with the community on the Jadu Library

Early indications are good; York City Council for example, has shared [its approach](#) to managing the flow of residents to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) sites as tips begin to reopen.



2.

Channel Shift (and Provisioning)

The crisis has seen massive spikes in demand for certain services and digital channels have often been the primary ways that citizens, sometimes those in most need, have been able to access them. Channel Shift has therefore occurred organically.

“ There are people out there that have been forced to use tools online that they would have never used, or thought of using, prior to the pandemic.

- David Sanderson, Regional Director of Socitm

As a result, necessity has meant more people are becoming used to accessing services online. This could result in higher expectations for a greater number of council services to be available online and accessible when needed. If more people are accessing services online, other channels can be freed up for those who need them most.

Provisioning is highly important for high-demand online services. Services such as Revenue and Benefits and Free School Meals saw rapid spikes in demand at the start of the pandemic. Returning services that can expect similar high-demand can place an abnormally high strain on server resources.

Flexible and scalable infrastructure requires planning to provision and test and almost always requires down-time. This also applies to the use of third party APIs (Application Programming Interfaces), integrations and products. Councils must be aware of dependencies and limitations set by any APIs that are being utilised.

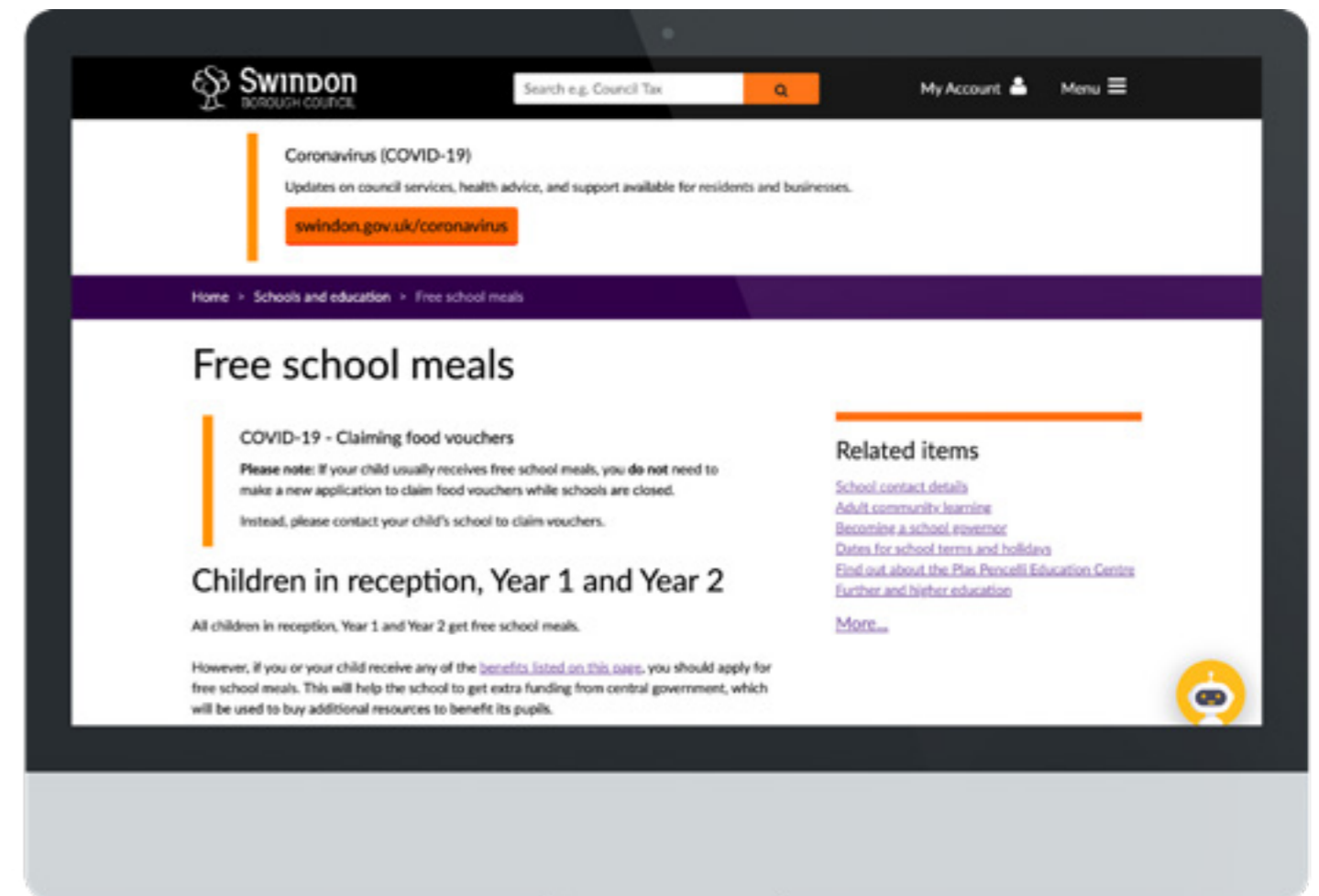
For example, such restrictions could impact booking services, such as those that enable citizens to book recycling centre slots (as they start to reopen). It is recommended that Local Authorities contact any such third party services to understand limitations before relaunching such services.

“ At Swindon we have achieved in eight or nine weeks, what would have taken years.

- Susie Kemp, Chief Executive of Swindon Borough Council

Some Local Authorities are handling immediate spikes for particular services through virtual waiting rooms, such as those used by supermarkets at the outbreak of the pandemic. Although this may have been received poorly prior to the crisis, when the alternative is a site or service ‘going down’, the approach is proving invaluable to some.

Whereas some services must obviously be brought back as before, for others there will be questions. Which have channel-shifted through necessity (and perhaps should stay that way)? Which should not return at all? Which new services should be kept long term?



Swindon Borough Council's new necessary approach to organising visits to its household waste recycling centre, has led to requests to keep it long term.

Feedback from Local Authorities shows that some services do not need to be brought back online at all, whereas others will need to be modified. Services such as virtual support for children, supporting the vulnerable and working more closely with volunteer groups are likely to be kept for example. These conversations are ongoing and continuous feedback is being received as the next phase unfolds and Local Authorities make time to review and reflect.

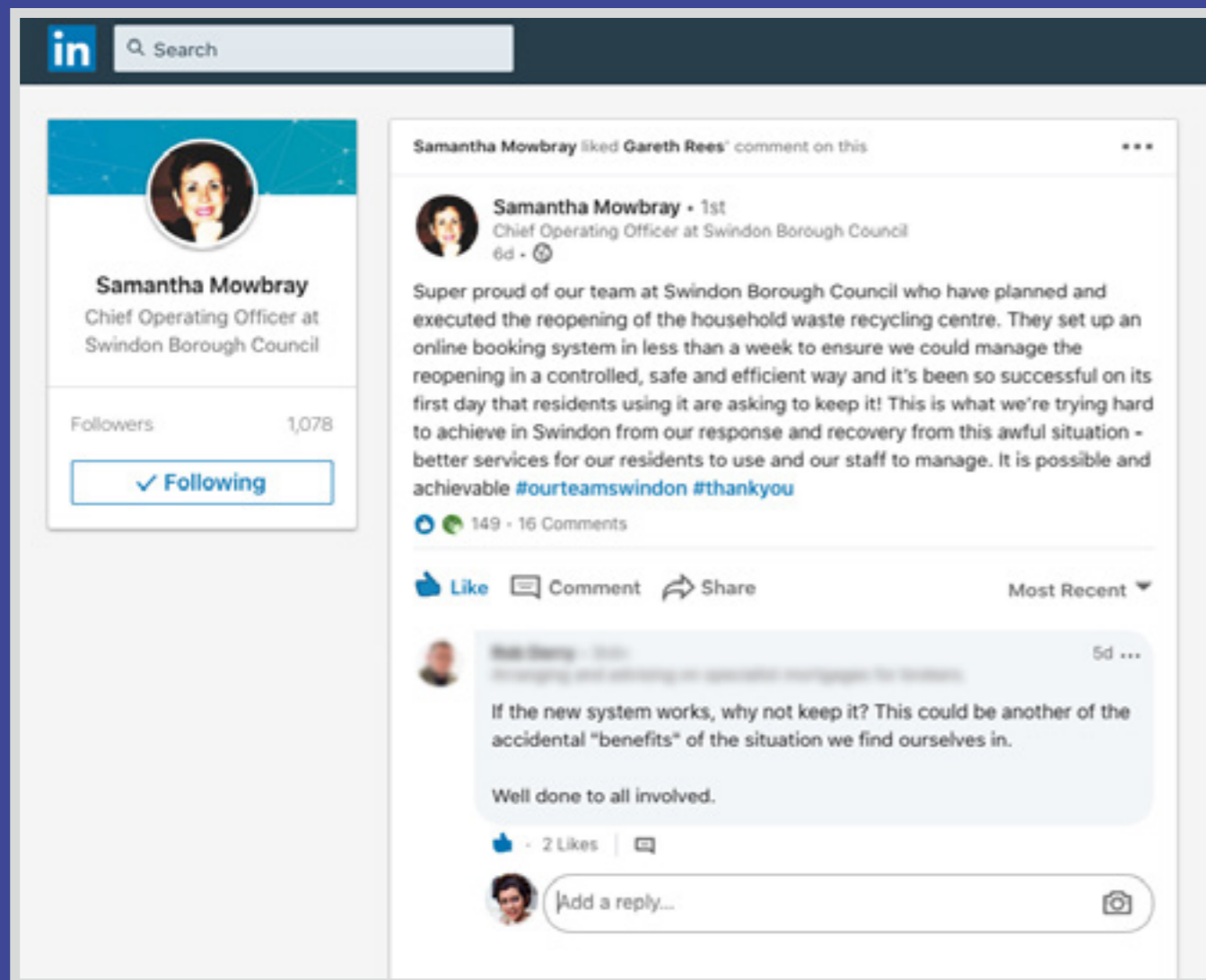
Organic Channel Shift has been substantial.

As Councils Reset, they'll have to decide what role digital plays as part of their overall strategy. We expect online services to be at the heart of how Local Government serves its communities going forward, due to both necessity and because it is the channel of choice for the vast majority.

“ It's the longest time most Councils have been in a Gold command, major incident mode and as they move into renewal and RESET, the pace of decision making has flowed, supported by councillors and members.

The keys to this have been close communication, good relationships and having the right digital tools to deliver. These relationships and tools will be critical in new policy development. It's essential we don't slip back to the way things were.

- Suraj Kika, Group CEO of Jadu.



3.

Fundamental Accessibility

The design and provisioning of websites, products and digital environments that are accessible, friendly and usable for everyone, including individuals who have disabilities or impairments, is more important than ever.

As digital channels have become the primary point of contact (and sometimes the only option) for vital services, the importance of accessibility has been brought into stark contrast.

“At this time, it’s so important to think about accessibility when creating services as we’re physically prevented from visiting offices or council buildings as an alternative.

- Graham Rees-Evans, Digital Accessibility Specialist at Shaw Trust Accessibility Services

[Shaw Trust Accessibility Services](#) reported that, with less people able to get into the workplace to answer phone queries, phone services are being reduced. Therefore some organisations are providing online only services at the moment. A huge problem arises when users are unable to access that online service. There is potentially no alternative available.

It has also been confirmed that the law requiring public services to be accessible by the **23rd of September 2020** is not changing. Not even the Coronavirus can push that deadline back.

Ensuring compliance even whilst working at great speed, is vital. Councils have spun up services at speed during Response and Recovery and work that would normally take months has been condensed into days.

It is important that Councils audit these services to ensure they are accessible to the intended users. Particularly those in high demand, those that will remain online and those that will be modified to perform digitally from now on.

During the pandemic, Braintree District Council has continued the redesign of its website, placing accessibility at the core.

“Accessible pages and transactions have a higher take up amongst those that don’t necessarily ‘need’ the accessibility element - it just makes it easier and better for everybody. Once you’ve established that point, why couldn’t you focus on accessibility?” says Jonathan Lagden, Digital Services Manager at Braintree District Council.

Braintree District Council ensured its redesign stayed on schedule and is preparing to meet the September 2020 deadline. This is happening amidst the crisis while new challenges, services and processes are arising. The Council is focusing on accessibility ‘to provide a ‘better user experience’ for everyone.

Now, more than ever Councils must ensure digital services are genuinely accessible to all. Websites and digital environments must be friendly and usable for individuals of all abilities, both for ethical and for legal reasons.

Read more about accessibility requirements:

jadu.net/understanding-accessibility



LISTEN: Braintree District Council talks about placing accessibility at the very core of its website redesign amidst a global pandemic and Shaw Trust Accessibility Services addresses whether local government is doing enough to meet September accessibility deadlines.



Final Word and Further Content

In extraordinary times, extraordinary things are being achieved. In many cases, Local Government has moved mountains to meet the urgent needs of those it serves. That should be recognised and celebrated, but only briefly. The challenges continue.

The need for speed has sparked innovation, both behind the scenes, digitally and in the community.

The long term 'ask' is that councils continue to encourage the community support. Local Authorities can support, encourage and champion communities to support each other and deliver digital services to facilitate that.

A crisis that has separated us physically, has ironically brought the Local Government community together in other ways.

One consistent, amidst all of this, is the need for accessible digital services. Deadlines and requirements aren't changing and this pandemic has shown just why they're so vitally important.

Ensuring sites and services are available to all who need them, should be the ultimate goal of any Local Authority.



Bookmarks

Find out more about how Low Code Platforms are driving 'Local Government as a Platform':

jadu.net/local-government-as-a-platform

Keep updated on how Channel Shift and local digital service is now in 'RESET':

jadu.net/channel-shift

1. COVID-19 Community Toolbox

In response to the ongoing Coronavirus crisis and the new challenges it is creating for Local Government and Higher Education sectors - we have created a global initiative to provide support with digital tools. A toolbox. It includes Low Code assets, as well as links to Podcasts and webcasts: jadu.net/library/ToolBox

2. Low Code Business Case

Low Code tools have, and will continue, to be essential for quickly responding to changing needs. Jadu has developed a document to support the development of business cases for Low Code digital platforms, based on case study data from public sector organisations: 'Benefits realisation: Digital Platform for Website, Forms and Cases' is available upon request: jadu.net/request

3. Jadu COVID-19 Community Podcast

Jadu has started a Podcast series, interviewing public sector and higher education users and leaders about their experiences before and during the pandemic. soundcloud.com/jadu-5/sets/jadu-covid-19-community

