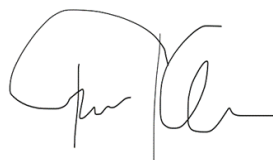


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| LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN | WARDS: |
| REPORT TITLE Update on progress of digital accessibility improvements across the digital estate | |
| REPORT OF Chief Experience and Information Officer | |
| FOR SUBMISSION TO Disability Oversight Panel | DATE 25/11/2024 |
| <p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to share the approach to making digital products accessible and the progress that has been made in the past twelve months.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>‘No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Louise Brown Head of Digital Products and Services London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG Email: louise.brown@camden.gov.uk</p> | |
| <p>RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>That the Committee notes the report.</p> | |

Signed:



Date: 19th Nov 24

1. Purpose of Report (and Reason for Urgency)

1.1 An update on progress of the digital accessibility and inclusion strategies following up on a report last year which outlined our approach to digital accessibility and the plans that were in place for 2024.

1.2 If the report is being considered as a late urgent item, then you must also set out clearly here why the report is late and why it cannot wait for a future meeting of the Committee.

Background to the report

Last year the Camden.gov.uk redesign plans were presented to the Disability Oversight Panel showing progress made in digital accessibility, specifically in content design and the new templates that would change the look and feel of the website in 2024.

This year the legal digital accessibility compliance standards were raised so that from October 2024, any public sector website needs to comply with WCAG 2.2 guidance apart from in exceptional circumstances. Appendix 1 gives more explanation and detail of what digital accessibility means with links to the guidance.

This report details the progress we have made to date and where we hope to make further progress in the coming year both from the Digital Products team and the Digital Inclusion team, as well as some notes about further assistance given to staff which we hope will benefit residents in future.

2. Progress made to date – major milestones

2.1 April 2024 camden.gov.uk April 2024 camden.gov.uk design launched with accessibility improvements to templates and improved instructions for residents in how they can use tools built into their own devices and phones.

We used automated and manual tests to ensure that the site was compliant with accessibility law (see Appendix 1) and an external accessibility expert to review the code used to create the pages to ensure we were aware of the detail of compliance.

<http://www.camden.gov.uk>

<https://www.camden.gov.uk/using-our-website>

2.2 June 2024, following a cabinet office notification in May, the Adult Community Learning booking site relaunched with improved accessibility and an updated accessibility statement. This involved providing an audit for the external company who build the site, and further guidance to them on how to improve the code with which the site was written

<https://www.webenrol.com/camden/?page=home>

2.3 We have engaged with Digital procurement teams and are now providing contractual guidance to ensure that all renewed and new contracts with external providers are aware of their obligations to make their digital services accessible.

2.4 June 2024 we reorganised our digital design team – in order to better support digital accessibility and more ongoing research with citizens (including disabled citizens) we have reorganised the team and created new roles of UX Designers which incorporate both of these skills. These roles are now being hired (ads in October and November 2024) after consultation.

2.5 July 2024 we sent out a brief to three expert agencies for their help in three areas:

- research on testing the new website with disabled residents which requires specific skills e.g. with non-verbal users
- guidelines and training for teams
- assistance with auditing

Those companies responded in August and September. As we have not had the team members on board to manage the work it is currently on hold whilst we hire these roles.

We have also been in touch with Camden Disability Action (CDA) and discussed how we might use their contacts for this research.

2.6 September 2024 we relaunched a redesigned Local Offer website and further updates were made to the Families website both of which significantly improved their digital accessibility.

<https://localoffer.camden.gov.uk>

<https://families.camden.gov.uk>

2.7 Many other areas of the site have had their content improved in line with best practice, for example, Leaseholder Services. As well as improvements on the webpages, guidance has been produced for how to write clear and more inclusive letters (Appendix 2).

<https://www.camden.gov.uk/leaseholders-and-freeholders>

2.8 In October 2024 the team completed manual accessibility tests of Unpaid Carers site Mobilise which will feed into the renewal of its contract.

2.9 In October 2024 the accessibility statement on Camden.gov.uk was updated to reflect an evaluation of the sites under the WCAG 2.2 guidelines.

<https://www.camden.gov.uk/accessibility-statement>

3. Future plans

3.1 By the end of 2024, we plan to launch two forms that are part of the Camden Accessible Transport System (CATS) as online forms as well as paper forms: Apply for a Green Badge and Apply for a Substitute Badge. Apply for Disabled Person Freedom Pass will be the one following this early in 2025. Content on Camden.gov.uk for this whole area is also being updated to ensure plain language and clear signposting.

3.2 **Research** – once our Lead UX Designer is hired (interviews in the next two weeks), we hope to get our external agency chosen and started with specific training for our team, likely working with Camden Disability Action (CDA) to recruit Camden

residents as part of our testing

3.3 Public design system for external companies

We have also been developing, as part of our design system, guidance on shared standards for how digital content can be made accessible on a public website that we will be able to share with all partners. This will be shared more widely in late 2024/early 2025.

For example:

Making documents accessible - <https://zeroheight.com/4c170debc/p/24f096-making-documents-accessible>

Making tables accessible - <https://zeroheight.com/4c170debc/p/322a30-making-tables-accessible>

3.4 Strategic priority for next two years

Accessibility is a part of our Citizen Experience priority for our Customer, Technology and Digital Data teams and will become part of our shared strategy.

4. Technology adoption team work

Tope Owolabi and Sareena Hasmat of the Technology Adoption team launched an accessibility process with their Digital IQ team in March. This process was specifically developed to assist our staff in their digital roles, utilising thorough research and case studies to ensure we were addressing their needs effectively.

Over the past nine months, the team have supported 37 members of staff. Each individual has presented us with a unique set of challenges, which has required further research and expansion of the team's knowledge on digital accessibility. This ongoing learning has been crucial in refining support and ensuring that the team continues to meet the diverse needs of our teams.

The knowledge they have will support future disabled people joining our teams (for the benefit of the council and our communities) and can also feed into the support for our Digital Accessibility and Inclusion strategies.

5. Resource implications

All additional roles and budget for accessibility support is covered within existing budgets. The new roles we are hiring mean that we would need fewer external auditing experts to be used.

6. Equalities impact assessment

The aim of this strategy is to improve the availability and usage of Camden's digital services for people with disabilities.

7. Environmental impact

None.

8. Risks and challenges

There are a number of sites across the digital estate created by external providers that do not meet the Public Sector Accessibility regulations. We believe we have the skills to audit and amend these to timeframes appropriate to the Cabinet Office team who are responsible for monitoring whilst we work through them to fix and update them either by rebuilding ourselves, removing the sites, or getting providers to fix the issues we discover.

9. Finance Comments of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

The Executive Director Corporate Services has been consulted and has no comments to add. The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no comments to add.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Explanation of digital accessibility and what it means for a local authority

Digital accessibility means making sure that websites, apps, and other online tools are easy to use for everyone, including people with disabilities. This could mean making colours more clearly contrasted so people can read it more easily, adding captions to videos so people who can't hear can still understand, or making sure webpages can be navigated with a keyboard instead of a mouse. The goal is to help everyone use our websites and online services without problems, no matter what their abilities are.

It's important for local councils to understand digital accessibility because we provide services and information that everyone in the community needs, like paying bills or getting help with important issues. If our websites and online tools aren't accessible, some people—like those who are blind, hard of hearing, or have other disabilities—might not be able to use them. This could stop them from accessing important services or information. By understanding digital accessibility, we can make sure everyone in our community is included and treated fairly. Most accessibility improvements also benefit everyone in the community - a lowered reading age also means text tends to translate more easily, and most people have been in a situation where it's been easier to read captions than listen to a video.

In the UK, there are several laws and regulations that govern digital accessibility for local councils, ensuring websites and online services are accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. The key laws are:

1. **The Equality Act 2010**

What it says: This law makes it unlawful to discriminate against people based on their disability. This applies to digital services, meaning local councils must ensure their websites and online tools are accessible.

Impact on teams: Councils need to actively consider how to make their services accessible to people with disabilities. This includes training staff and ensuring both them and citizens are able to use tools to do their jobs and receive support.

2. **The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018**

What it says: These regulations require all public sector websites and apps (including those run by local councils and charities who are largely funded by them) to meet certain accessibility standards. This means websites must be designed in a way that works for people with disabilities, such as screen reader compatibility, keyboard navigation, and easy-to-read text. Since October 2024, the minimum standard is now WCAG 2.2 and our teams are growing in their knowledge and expertise of how to monitor and implement these.

Impact on teams: Councils must check and improve their digital services to meet these standards. This includes regular accessibility audits, fixing any problems found, and providing an Accessibility Statement on our websites explaining how accessible their content is and what users can do if they have difficulties.

3. **The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

What it says: While primarily about data privacy, GDPR has some overlap with accessibility. It requires councils to ensure that individuals, including those with disabilities, can access their data.

Impact on teams: Teams need to ensure that people with disabilities can request, view, or edit their personal data without barriers, potentially affecting the design and functionality of data request processes.

Impact on Services

- Digital and Data Services: Our focus is on technical and content compliance, such as ensuring websites meet the accessibility standards outlined in the law, carrying out accessibility testing, and fixing any issues either in code or content (such as heading structure, reading age of text, alt tags for images).
- Comms Team: These teams are responsible for making sure that the content we share across other digital channels such as email and social media is easy to understand, readable, and inclusive. They must make adjustments like using plain language, providing alternative text for images, and ensuring that media is accessible (e.g., subtitles on videos).
- Contact Camden and other front door teams: CROs are trained to assist users with disabilities in navigating online services and provide alternative ways to access services if needed.
- Technology adoption teams: need to ensure that all employees can access and use the tools they need to do their work whatever their accessibility needs.

By understanding and applying these laws, we can avoid legal consequences, serve our communities better, and ensure that no one is excluded from accessing public services.