

# Proposed Platform Approach V1



## What do we mean by platform?

Platforms are most commonly talked in the context of digital businesses such as Twitter, Facebook and Amazon. Essentially they provide the technology platform for others to communicate or trade on. Bar providing this platform they actually do very little if any of the content and services offered. The user value is in the ecosystem that organically grows from the availability of such a platform. Ebay would not be unique and as successful if only they themselves listed items for sale.

A mainly offline business that creates a similar ecosystem would be Selfridges.

### **SELFRIDGES&CO**

Selfridges is a department store that has designed itself as a retail platform for other successful businesses to sell their products. They use their trusted brand, buildings and digital infrastructure to attract and support those retailers. They offer scalable space so small innovative businesses can compete alongside large mainstream brands. And critically they only sell products themselves where there is no other business that could deliver the same offering.

So how does all this apply to Surrey County Council? What if we could redesign ourselves as a platform for service delivery rather than do most of it ourselves? Using the Selfridges model we could use our trusted brand and buildings to support partners deliver services out to our residents and businesses, then deliver the core services that only we can. To do this effectively we would need a platform strategy that incorporated buildings, commissioning/trading, data and digital platform approaches.

This proposal will try to show how it fits within the concept of public value and answer questions around the use of big data to support it.

It will also focus on the following key themes and why they are critical to the success of the proposal:

- Inter-operability
- Platform as assets
- Brand SCC and what needs to be done to develop/preserve/optimize that
- Our proposition to residents (and businesses)

## Public Value

Government can deliver value to the public in many ways however services, outcomes and trust are three of the most influential areas that define the value add to our residents.

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### Value created by services for residents

It is becoming increasingly rare that we have the unique responsibility to deliver a service without an external 'paid for' market offering running alongside it. Libraries would be one example of such a service, however for the most part there will be commercial offerings that offer value added benefits. In these areas user satisfaction is critical to public value.

User satisfaction is usually shaped by:

- Customer service: How people are treated and communicated with ranks only just behind quality and price of product in determining their satisfaction.
- Information: The information that is made available about the services people receive helps set expectations around that service provision and thus measure their satisfaction against those expectations.
- Choice: there is some evidence that enhanced levels of choice can boost user satisfaction even if it does not have a discernible impact on service outcomes.
- Fairness: residents value the service received by others as well as the service they themselves benefit from. Establishing the appropriate terms of access for services will be an important factor in satisfaction levels.<sup>1</sup>

### Value of outcomes

Outcomes are distinct from services but are seen as a critical measure of the government's success. An outcome of safer streets could come from a number of services successfully delivering their distinct part towards it, likewise a reduction in safety could impact the perceived value with all services despite it only being due to the poor delivery of one of them. What complicates things further is that public value can and is derived as a joint effort between residents and government. Government alone cannot deliver lower crime

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<sup>1</sup> 79% of residents agree with the statement "public services should be targeted at those with greatest need" suggesting that they are not just interested in their own needs being met. However, 77% reject the idea that services such as the NHS should only be available to the poor.

and better health: social norms of behavior are critical. For example, better diet and exercise is as critical to health outcomes as service delivery; however when making judgments about public value derived from outcomes in many cases the public still overestimates what government can and cannot do.

### Value of trust

Trust is a major factor in deriving public value. As a local authority we act as a steward for allocation of public funds, the trust to do this correctly is at the heart of our relationship with residents and businesses. Being open, fair and democratic in everything we do increases confidence in our decision-making skills.

### Using a platform and data to increase perception of Public Value

Making sure that services, bound together to deliver a common outcome, can work together seamlessly in the leanest possible way requires an understanding of our business architecture and data flows associated with them. Once we understand this we can build a platform that supports outcome focused service delivery whether is by us, or our partners, ensuring that customer and transparency sit around everything we do. Interoperability is at the heart of successful outcomes delivery.

One of the major challenges most county councils face is the lack of knowledge within our customer community of the number and scale of services we deliver across the county. The remit of the County Council is so vast that the scope of our work is a difficult thing to remember even for staff. Understanding and publishing the outcomes we are looking to achieve and the services we deliver to meet them provides information and transparency to our customers. To complete the picture we should publish regular performance data on what we are doing both internally and externally both at a service level and an outcome level. This would give a higher level of visibility of our activities and allow residents, businesses and staff to understand the things we do that provide value.

This would also force us as an organisation to take stock of how we're delivering on them. Doing this will have the knock on effect of allowing us and our potential partners to see where we are delivering value and where there might be opportunities for others to deliver better.

Opening up performance data is a great informational tool for our customers and potential partners but opening up our data in a wider context could see some of our duties and powers being delivered by a third parties that we have no relationship with. One example could be the power we have to provide transport timetable information. If we opened up real time data in an accessible format the app development community would likely build a

public transport journey planner without any additional investment from the County Council. If we added highways data to the same place an app could be developed that showed roadworks and gritting activities. Add in traffic information and we end up with a pretty comprehensive journey planner for Surrey; an app developers dream. We will have fulfilled our responsibility purely by opening up those sets of data.

Undertaking architecture exercise will inform not only how we build ourselves as a platform but also support and inform our options analysis work around trading and commissioning.

## **Inter-operability**

One of the key areas to get right when looking at delivering services through an ecosystem of commissioned partners and third parties is ensuring that systems and process are interoperable. Without this we will struggle to achieve the efficiency savings required and hamper the delivery of excellent services to our customers.

Our commissioning strategy and processes have to allow for fluid change between delivery partners to ensure we're getting best value for our customers. To do this we need to be clear on three things:

### **Process**

One of the benefits in taking a platform approach for the delivery of services is that so long as the 3<sup>rd</sup> party is providing value to our customers the County Council will have little need to intervene in the process it uses to deliver. This coupled with the publishing of performance data encourages innovation within the third party who will want to stay the best and continue to deliver the service on our behalf.

Contracts and SLA's will have stipulate process hand off points and governance processes to ensure the leanest possible delivery timeline.

### **Data**

Any data that allows the delivery of services through a third party whether collected by them or centrally by us must sit under the County Councils ownership and management. This will avoid migration issues when moving to a different provider. To do this we will need a data platform that allows different providers to plug in to the relevant data in order for them to do their job.

## Technology

From a technology point of view there are now standard ways to ensure interoperability, allowing the flow of data from one party's system to another. In a fully formed platform strategy the principles around this digital approach would likely contain the following;

- Open source (code) where possible
- Open standards for systems interoperability
- Use of common technology components to avoid duplication of data

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## How it fits with our 'One team' ethos and our values

Regardless of the culture, size, industry sector or office environment, one of the biggest battles facing organisations today is the creation of an effective team ethos. This is especially true when trying to engender a cross directorate team spirit with employees, who are individually rewarded for their achievements within the team or service they work in.

We should place more emphasis on rewarding teams for their cross directorate/service and partnership work in pursuit of better public value outcomes. The platform should be seen as an enabler to this join up, both in terms of seeing where benefits are being derived through performance reporting and through its ability to connect data and automate process where possible.

## Platform as assets

Our assets can be seen as people, digital/data and property. (People, platform, place)

People - Most of our delivery culture stems from the value we place on our self to serve the people and manage the resources of others. Along with this stewardship, there is an expectation from the public that in conducting daily activities, we will practice fairness and equality. Culture has emerged as one of the dominant barriers to effective commissioning between commercial and public sector bodies. There are many elements of this culture that we would expect our service delivery partners to adopt. We could solve this by creating a culture standards framework that 3<sup>rd</sup> parties sign up to and are measured against. This means that we need to very specific on what value is for each service and the cultural attributes it's delivery will be measured against.

We should also train and support our own staff on the acceptance of different business cultures and to deal with constant change. We will need to move from a culture of doing

more with less to one that accepts other people delivering value even if it is not exactly how we would do it ourselves.

Customers also sit under this 'people' header. Our customers provide us with insight into what is valuable to them, and through them we understand community need. Ensuring that we have the right engagement platforms in place is essential to make the most of them.

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Digital/ Data – We should build a digital platform that allows both ourselves and 3<sup>rd</sup> parties to deliver services in the most efficient way possible. This means ensuring interoperability and a flexible componentised architecture. For a useful plain English explanation of digital platforms follow this link; [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02\\_3UTqXmU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02_3UTqXmU)

Data is a huge asset we don't currently make enough of; both in terms of internal performance analytics and data we create through the delivery of services. Transport and highways data was one example given earlier but there are multiple other sets across the services that we could open up to see what the market does with it. One of the first things that would need to be done is to define our approach to data and understand where it currently resides (this should be part of the business architecture exercise).

Property – We're already working hard to make the most of our property assets but we lack the usage data to drive real efficiencies and to make them work harder to support those 3<sup>rd</sup> parties that are delivering services on our behalf. How do we ensure both staff and partners have minimal set up costs and are able to plug into our technology platform?

## **Brand SCC and what needs to be done to preserve and develop that?**

We strive to deliver as an organisation around core values

- Listen - We actively listen to others and expect to be listened to.
- Responsibility - We take responsibility in all that we do at work.
- Trust - We work to inspire trust and we trust in others.
- Respect - We are supportive and inclusive and committed to learning from others.

The councils brand strategy lays out how working towards these tells a story about us as an organisation:

'We can't and don't have all the answers. We are always looking at ways in which we can improve what we do, for new and innovative ways of working with working with people and organisations across the county and beyond. If something improves what we do for residents we will look at it. We have not limited ourselves



to a single way of offering services or tied ourselves to a single delivery mechanism or partner. If an idea means we can improve we will consider it.

We test ideas and take responsibility for changing and adapting them as we listen to and learn from residents, service users, partners and others who have an interest and role in a service. We respect the ideas and skills of others.'

To be able to achieve this effectively we have to create and manage a flexible platform that allows us to be open, listen and work innovatively.

By being public about our performance data we will increase our customers awareness of what we do and therefore perhaps promote a better understanding of the value we deliver across all services. However it will also mean we are more susceptible to public praise and criticism, especially during the first few months of scrutiny. To manage this we should release performance data in batches that we're confident about. We also should not delay in getting others to deliver services on our behalf where we can't deliver equivalent value.

Work undertaken by our Central Comms team is beginning to move us away from a County Council brand towards a Surrey public services brand. We could take this approach one step further and use our brand as a mark of quality across all 3<sup>rd</sup> parties that are delivering public services on our behalf. For 3<sup>rd</sup> parties, an association with the brand brings guarantees to customers around quality and professionalism and therefore makes it a desirable thing.

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