

Service assessment report

Service: croydon.digital community blog

Stage: alpha

Published March 2019

Assessing authority:	Croydon Digital Service, Croydon Council
Assessment date:	1 st March 2019
Panel members:	Annie Heath Janine Sheridan Jon Mellor Simon Asante
Service representatives:	Neil Williams Dave Briggs Angie Forson
Result:	Met

Assessment outcome

The service partially met the Standard because:

- The service used existing knowledge and experience to deliver a tried and tested service
- The service iterated effectively to deliver a minimal viable product (MVP) against a tight deadline, with the intention to continue iterating to improve the service
- Despite not working in a dedicated, fully multidisciplinary agile environment, the team used basic agile methods to deliver the MVP.

Main strengths:	The service being rolled out is a tried and tested one, delivered by a team of people experienced in providing this type of service.
Main weaknesses:	Short timescale for implementation was led by an upcoming event, which determined the level of adherence to the service standard possible. Service developed mainly based on the experience of the team but not always tested.

About the service

Description

Neil Williams was recruited in October as the new Chief Digital Officer for Croydon Council. An expectation was set at the outset that part of the role was to have a strong community facing element and to lead the council to do more with the tech community of Croydon.

The creation of a new blog, as a shared platform for the tech community of Croydon, was a natural first step to making this happening. An event at which the Chief Digital Officer was presenting was identified as the appropriate launch opportunity, and therefore determined the timescale in which the alpha was to be delivered.

Service Users

Key users were identified at the Croydon tech community (digital business), national and worldwide government bodies who can provide validation and feedback on what we are doing at Croydon, the Croydon Digital Service team, internal Croydon staff, prospective employees and suppliers.

Detail

User needs

The service team described the blog as a quick win tool for fostering culture change within the Croydon Digital Services team and Croydon's tech community. As the service team was using a tried and tested platform for the blog, there were existing design systems and tooling that could be used. The service team had gathered user requirements through informal conversations and feedback with the identified users rather than through formal user research carried out for the purpose of the blog. There was a recognition from the outset that this version is an alpha and will need to be changed – part of which will require more extensive user research to test the assumptions and knowledge gathered for the alpha.

The team are gathering feedback from users and feeding this into a backlog for the beta.

Team

To ensure a suitably skilled multidisciplinary team was in place and able to deliver the alpha to a tight deadline, existing staff took on the responsibilities required. The panel were impressed with the team's ability to deliver quickly and adapt to the roles for this project whilst continuing with the business as usual roles, which differ.

Roles which were not filled were a user researcher and data analyst, and the product manager role was light touch. The team recognised these gaps and a conscious decision was made to develop the alpha without these skills, acknowledging their need when developing the beta.

Some members of the team were not based in Croydon at the time and Trello was used effectively to facilitate the work. Use of the Trello board also enabled the members to feel as a "team" despite not being a dedicated team for this purpose.

A structured agile method with formal ceremonies was not used, however the agile knowledge of the team members meant techniques were applied. User stories were

defined, a backlog used to prioritise based on the benefits to the user community, and MVP was identified and an iterative process used. The current alpha is the fifth iteration.

Design

The team had experience in developing and delivering blogs previously and used this knowledge to develop the alpha. The blog has been based on the GDS blog with tested design patterns and an interim content designer was used to improve on the patterns.

The council's communications team were involved in selecting a suitable tool – which was Wordpress and due to the short timescale and low cost, the team decided to host on Wordpress.com. This meant standard themes had to be used and the intention is to review the platform and hosting options for development of the beta.

The team made some design compromises, such as with additional functionality to provide job alerts, in order to meet the timescales. The decisions on this were made based on the impact to the end user and priorities for the MVP. The intention is for these compromises to form part of the beta backlog.

Design improvement already identified above the functionality compromises consciously made include the ability to submit an article first time, the quality of photos being used in the articles and the look of text on images.

The team have deliberately kept the design of the site different to the Croydon Council website, as this is a collaborative blog created to support grassroots community activities (continuing from where Croydon tech city left off, under the banner of Croydon.Digital).

Analytics

By using a tried and tested product, the team have been able to benefit from existing functionality around analytics. Data has shown that traffic to the site is growing and engagement on social media, in particular Twitter, supports this. When developing a beta, a Privacy Impact Assessment will also need to be considered around any data that is collected.

The number of internal users creating blog posts has been increasing and engagement with the team successful. Going forward, plans will need to be in place to set goals based on the data gathered in alpha and monitor regularly.

Recommendations

Next steps

To build the beta, a dedicated multidisciplinary team will be set up. The team must ensure:

- A full multidisciplinary team is in place, using agile techniques
- The gaps identified in alpha form part of the beta backlog
- The tool used is re-evaluated
- Formal user research and UAT is carried out

Digital Service Standard Points

Point	Description	Result
1	Understanding user needs	Partially met
2	Do ongoing user research	Partially met
3	Have a multidisciplinary team	Met
4	Use agile methods	Met
5	Iterate and improve frequently	Met
6	Evaluate tools and systems	Met
7	Understand security and privacy issues	Met
8	Make all new source code open	N/A
9	Use open standards and common platforms	Met
10	Test the end-to-end service	Not met
11	Make a plan for being offline	Met
12	Make sure users succeed first time	Not met
13	Make the user experience consistent with Croydon.gov.uk	Met
14	Encourage everyone to use the digital service	Met
15	Collect performance data	Partially Met
16	Identify performance indicators	Not Met

Point	Description	Result
17	Report performance data on the Performance Platform	Not Met
18	Test with the lead Member	Met