LocalGovDigital

Digital Service Standard assessment

Greater London Authority

Talk London - 7/6/18

About the service

https://www.london.gov.uk/talk-london/

Talk London is the Greater London Authority's citizen engagement platform. It exists to create long term relationships with Londoners who want to discuss the ongoing work of the Mayor of London, London Assembly and City Hall.
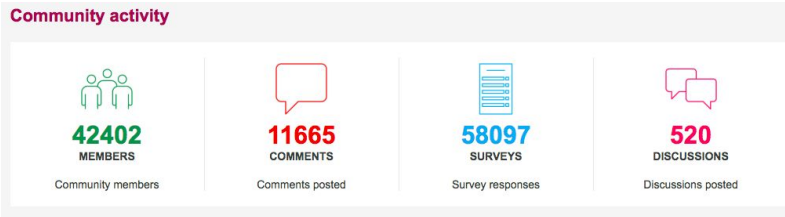
Assessment summary

Standard	Met/Not met	Score (>0 = met)
1. Understand user needs	Met	4
2. Have a multidisciplinary team	Met	5
3. Use agile methods	Met	4
4. Iterate and improve regularly	Met	4
5. Evaluate appropriate tools and systems	Met	4
6. Evaluate user data and information	Met	5
7. Use open standards	Met	4
8. Test the end-to-end service	Met	3
9. Make a plan for being offline	Met	4
10. Make sure users succeed first time	Met	3
11. Build a consistent user experience	Met	5

12. Encourage everyone to use the digital service	Met	4
13. Identify performance indicators	Met	4
14. Do ongoing user research	Met	2
15. Test with senior manager	Met	1
Overall result	**Met**	**56**

Total score (Min met 15, max 75):	56
Main strengths:	Talk London is an effective site for enabling Londoners to participate in discussions and surveys to help develop policy in the GLA. It was created, using a good understanding of user needs, by a multidisciplinary team using Agile methods. It conforms to London.gov branding and style guidelines. It has a user base of ~43k users which continues to grow, showing that it is succeeding in its mission.
Main weaknesses:	Talk London has not yet been been fully implemented 'as a service' and has instead been developed as a series of 'product updates'. This is a recognised constraint of the project and has not had a significant impact on effectiveness. More regular user research and usability testing is needed.

Visuals

Community activity

42402 MEMBERS	**11665** COMMENTS	**58097** SURVEYS	**520** DISCUSSIONS
Community members	Comments posted	Survey responses	Discussions posted

New

Impact | Economy, skills & work | London Skills Strategy consultation

Skills for Londoners Strategy is now published
12/06/2018
How you helped shape the first post-16 skills and adult education strategy produced by a London Mayor. **Find out more >**

⬦ Pinned 💬 Health | Environment | London Food Strategy consultation

Food waste and recycling

Published by **Talk London** | *Official Representative*
10/05/2018

226 Comments
Last comment 18 hours ago
To what extent do you think about the environment when making food choices?

Log in or **register** to take part in this discussion

Assessment participants

- Lead assessor : Martin Chaney - Senior Manager for Digital Transformation
- Design assessor : Arjun Mahadevan - Designer
- Technical assessor : Shrut Morjaria - Delivery Manager
- User research assessor : David Durant - Senior Business Analyst
- Wendy Lewis : Product Owner for Talk London
- Kinda Youssef : Delivery Manager for Talk London
- Chris Daniels : Product Owner for London.gov at the time of Talk London development

Talk London background

Talk London is the Greater London Authority's Londoner citizen engagement platform. It exists to create long term relationships with Londoners who want to discuss the ongoing work of the GLA. The Talk London team is part of the organisation's Opinion Research team, which sits within the Intelligence and Analysis Unit. There are a number of methods that the Opinion Research team use to gather public opinion, with Talk London as a key component. Other methods include commissioning representative polls via YouGov, and qualitative methods led by in-house researchers e.g. focus groups with Londoners.

The site was created to replace an existing discussion site developed by a 3rd party organisation and was brought in-house as part of a microsite integration project..

The previous site had 38,000 users. Following the creation of Talk London there are now more than 43,000 registered users. The site hosts a large number of ongoing discussions across a broad range of policy topics. These are both "challenges for London", started by the site admins, and open topics created by Londoners.

In addition, the site facilitates regular surveys. There is the ability to gather opinions from specific demographics. The membership list of Talk London is also used to invite Londoners to focus groups for extended discussions on relevant topics.

Users need to register in order to use the site. In order to do so they must supply a certain amount of demographic information. This has recently been reviewed to be fully GDPR compliant - for example by moving to collect only the first part of their postcode as the full version isn't required. At the moment this login system is not joined up to the others used on London.gov so Londoners using more than one service on the site may have to sign up multiple times and maintain several passwords. This is planned to be fixed in the future by the introduction of a single-sign-on feature.

Londoners can optionally add areas of interest to their Talk London profile but segmentation is currently mostly limited to personal characteristics only (e.g. gender, ethnicity, etc).

Londoners who have registered for the system can elect to receive automated notifications whenever new discussions and surveys are added to the system.

An important part of the site is the "Your Impact" section which is linked from the home page and individual topic areas. This contains information from GLA policy teams on changes they have made to their work following feedback from Londoners via Talk London. Follow-up emails are sent to Londoners who took part in surveys or discussions to point them to this area of the site to show the impact of their involvement.

Detailed assessment

For the overall rating, 1 indicates the minimum level of compliance to the standard, and 5 the highest. Again, these are not terribly scientific scores, but the aim should be to identify where improvements can be made.

1. Understand user needs *Research to develop deep knowledge of who the service users are and what that means for the design of the service - find out more*	
What was good?	• All user needs are derived from key service need : "meaningful engagement with Londoners that influences GLA work"

	● The user needs are stored in Confluence and shared with the whole team including the remote development group ● Needs start out as high level epics and are functionally decomposed and given acceptance criteria as part of the standard Agile development process ● A full set of epic level user needs in user-story format were developed collaboratively by the team following a significant number of workshops run by the development partner's Business Analyst. These were further improved by the use of 3rd party run user research and an audit of the existing site. ● User needs are prioritised by the Product Owner using the MoSCoW methodology ● A number of prototypes were created to get early user feedback including paper based, clickable demos and early software releases ● Feedback is regularly sought from Londoners who use the system via the system itself - this is used to update the needs backlog ● A user satisfaction survey is planned
What could be improved?	● A review of existing discussion sites or literature related to development of community sites ● Further active user research is planned to enable continual iterative improvement of the site. ● We encourage Talk London to consider automating user feedback surveys ● We further suggest that feedback from surveys, discussions on the site itself and other inputs for updates to the site are discussed in ongoing regular planned sessions. This will not only encourage a mindset of continuous improvement but will quickly highlight if such inputs are declining for any reason.

Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

2. Have a multidisciplinary team
Ensure a suitably skilled, sustainable multidisciplinary team, led by a senior service manager with decision making responsibility, can design, build and improve the service -
find out more

What was good?	● Talk London was developed by a comprehensive multidisciplinary Agile delivery team. ● Throughout the project this included: Product Owner (and Agile Champion), Delivery Manager, Business Analyst, Tech Lead, Data Migration Specialist, two back-end developers, one front-end developer, QA Specialist and User Acceptance Tester

	● At various times the following roles were also involved: DevOps team, Live Engineer, Analytics Specialist, Designer, Performance Tester, User Research Specialist, Content Specialist, PEN Test Specialist ● The service is periodically reviewed by the GLA Digital Projects Review Group
What could be improved?	N/A

Overall rating	1	2	3	4	**5**

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3. Use agile methods
Create a service using the agile, iterative and user-centred methods set out in the Government Service Design Manual - find out more

What was good?	● The project was commenced by an initial full Discovery piece lead by a Business Analyst which produced a comprehensive set of initial user stories ● The delivery of the service was completed in eight two week long Agile sprints ● A number of regular Agile ceremonies took place during delivery including: daily stand-ups (including remote developers and whole local team in one room), sprint planning, retrospectives, sprint reviews, show and tells ● The development made extensive use of a product backlog, sprint backlog and sets of developed sprint increments (used in sprint reviews and show and tells) ● The whole external development team came onsite to City Hall for each sprint's sprint planning and retrospectives ● The Lead Developer was on site at the GLA throughout the work ● In between times collaboration was ensured by video calls, Google Docs, Confluence, Jira and a dedicated Slack channel
What could be improved?	● When the initial delivery of the "product" was complete, due to the way the project was funded, Agile working came to an end. ● Due to public policy commitments the service was released to live early without going through a private beta phase. ● Approximately 50% of the Product Owner's time was spent managing the creation and ongoing maintenance of this digital service. This was mostly additional effort for the Product Owner.

Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

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4. Iterate and improve regularly

Build a service that can be iterated and improved in response to user need and make sure you have the capacity, resources and technical flexibility to do so - find out more	
What was good?	• The MVP delivery consisted of eight two-weeks sprints including constant updating of stories during that process • The Talk London team has been collecting a backlog of work and hopes to use this to inform future development phases • This backlog is periodically reviewed by the Product Owner and members of the original Agile delivery team • The ongoing support arrangements cover bug fixes and minor feature work, such as security fixes and package upgrades, but no new feature work.
What could be improved?	• Talk London will undertake user research as part of future project developments. Ideally, there would be a plan for regular, ongoing user research beneficial to ensure the service continues to meet user needs.

Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

5. Evaluate appropriate tools and systems *Evaluate what tools and systems will be used to build, host, operate and measure the service, and how to procure them, looking to reuse existing technologies where possible - find out more*	
What was good?	• Talk London uses a wide array of free open source products • Talk London was built on a foundation of Drupal 7, the same codebase as London.gov, so that developers with a common skill set could develop and support both • Additional Drupal modules were used - sometimes forked to allow tailoring for specific user needs • The technical team used a number of other open source tools to develop and test the service • The service is hosted in the cloud on AWS • The service uses the 3rd party Webpurify profanity filter • The service connects to Surveygizmo • Google Analytics is used throughout the service • Plans are underway to migrate the service to Drupal 8 along with the rest of the London.gov estate
What could be improved?	• Deployment is a process is not yet fully optimised. Plans are in place to increase automation and improve deployment processes.

Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

6. Evaluate user data and information
Evaluate what user data and information the digital service will be providing or storing and address the security level, legal responsibilities, privacy issues and risks associated with the service - find out more

What was good?	- The Talk London team have been conscious of potential data related issues from the inception of the work as the service works with a considerable amount of user generated data. They have consistently worked closely with the Information Governance team to ensure not just compliance with all appropriate legislation but also that they are working according to best practice ethical guidelines. - Reviews of data collection have lead to service changes such as now only collecting the outcode (first part of the postcode) instead of the full version as further location resolution is not required - Reviews of the use of data in the service have included all connected components such as SurveyGizmo - A full GDPR audit has been completed, following which a new Privacy Impact Statement and Privacy Policy were put into place - Data security is taken very seriously. Data is transferred at all times by SSL, ReCapture is used as part of user login and the system is regularly PEN tested.
What could be improved?	Talk London could complete an Equalities Impact Assessment to ratify existing processes and identify any potential areas to improve.

Overall rating	1	2	3	4	**5**

7. Use open standards
Use open standards, existing authoritative data and registers, and where possible make source code and service data open and reusable under appropriate licenses - find out more

What was good?	- Drupal and the extra packages used by the service are all open source - All demographic data collected by the service is done using Office of National Statistics data standards - There are no data streams into the service. All new data is entered either by users or admins.

	● Anonymised survey and consultation results are published on the London Data Store ● Estate features, items that can be used across more than one London.gov microsite, were factored out during development to facilitate future reuse
What could be improved?	● Ideally, the source code for Talk London would be released as open source.

Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

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8. Test the end-to-end service *Be able to test the end-to-end service in an environment similar to that of the live version, including all common browsers and devices - find out more*	
What was good?	● The technical standards for code creation were part of the development contract to ensure good quality code was created ● A full build pipeline was put in place with synchronised system environments for development, test and live ● As part of the Agile sprints during development the QA Specialist received the set of stories being worked on during that sprint, along with their related acceptance criteria, and created test scripts accordingly ● The User Acceptance Tester was active throughout the project including undertaking exploratory testing, executing a standard set of London.gov regression tests and constantly building and executing an ever-growing set of regression tests for Talk London ● Performance testing was undertaken in house ● Cross-browser testing across multiple versions was undertaken using the set prescribed by GDS ● Device testing was done manually on a variety of real devices
What could be improved?	● A significant amount of software testing at the is still undertaken manually. A good deal of this could be automated ensuring reproducibility and accuracy as well as a significant reduction in time taken to execute test sets, quicker time to deploy and allowing skilled testers to focus on writing new automated tests. ● Exploratory testing is still important - but only for defining new automated tests. ● Remaining manual tests should be fully documented in a standardised manner ● Consider automating cross-browser and device testing using a 3rd party service such a Browserstack or equivalent

Overall rating	1	2	**3**	4	5

9. Make a plan for being offline
Make a plan for the event of the digital service being taken temporarily offline, and regularly test - find out more

What was good?	• During scheduled downtime a "site offline" page is displayed • Talke London avoids planning releases of surveys and other content during scheduled downtimes • The site is monitored via Pingdom with the Product Owner automatically notified by outages • A manual SLA process is in place for unscheduled downtime • The service is not business critical so current measures are sufficient.
What could be improved?	• We encourage a state where there is no scheduled downtime for the system. For example, this could be achieved by a blue / green method of parallel deployment. (Update: work underway to implement this) • An automated SLA could be put in place for unscheduled downtime where more senior technical and responsible staff are informed the longer the site is offline.

Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

10. Make sure users succeed first time
Make sure that the service is simple enough that users succeed first time unaided - find out more

What was good?	• The Talk London team worked closely with both the in-house Design team and the outsourced partner team front-end developer to produce a site that conforms to all best web and service design standards and practices. • The site was designed "mobile first" to ensure it was usable on mobile devices • The site conforms to WCAG 2.0 standards for accessibility • The site underwent a variety of types of user research during development to ensure that users found it easy to use.
What could be improved?	• We encourage Talk London to specifically test the site with users who have a range of accessibility issues and a set of people with low digital skills • We encourage further, regular usability testing to support continuous improvement and identify issues

Overall rating	1	2	**3**	4	5

11. Build a consistent user experience

Build a service consistent with the user experience of government digital services, including using common government platforms and the Government Service Manual design patterns - find out more

What was good?	● Talk London was specifically built to be a subsite of London.gov and as such reuses a significant number of brand, style and service design features and components to ensure a consistent user experience between the main site and itself ● A few minor changes are included to provide a unique brand identity but in user research users never reported that they thought they were on a different site ● It was specifically decided to link to survey sites rather than include them in-line as that would break the consistent look and feel
What could be improved?	N/A

Overall rating	1	2	3	4	**5**

12. Encourage everyone to use the digital service

Encourage maximum usage of the digital service (with assisted digital support if required) - find out more

What was good?	● The site employs a full time community manager to encourage users of the site to continue to meaningfully contribute. ● Talk London is current aiming to sign up more Londoners from harder to reach demographic groups rather than push for mass growth ● The team is doing general promotion all the time including via social media, notifications to existing users, banners on London.gov main page or specific policy pages plus upcoming targeted digital campaigns and advertising, as well as inclusion in mailings from the Mayor of London ● The team is also encouraging policy groups to mention Talk London as part of communications with both their target group of Londoners and any 3rd party partners
What could be improved?	● We encourage Talk London to improve tracking their active publicity to see which methods deliver the biggest return on time / money invested

	● We encourage wider promotion internally to raise awareness of the value the platform provides ● Talk London stated that they were planning to have the site mentioned at upcoming events				
Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

13. Identify performance indicators
Identify performance indicators for the service, incorporating existing indicators and publishing to a performance platform, if appropriate - find out more

What was good?	● The site is well instrumented with Google Analytics ● The specific KPIs for Talk London are: activity level the same or greater as it was on previous site, overall growth in the number of users, overall increase in diversity, specific growth in particular demographics and physical locations of users and user retention. ● Talk London provides feedback related to use, including demographic breakdowns, to relevant policy teams in the GLA but only during periods when they are running active consultations.
What could be improved?	● We encourage Talk London to create a standard report on site use that can be shared internally and externally ● We suggest that an ongoing process is put in place to inform policy teams that a topic related to their area has been started by a member of the public so they can take on board what is discussed and decide if they wish to respond. ● We encourage much deeper use of Google Analytics to drill into specific usage of the site such as time-on-page, scroll-depth, etc.

Overall rating	1	2	3	**4**	5

14. Do ongoing user research
Put a process in place for ongoing user research, usability testing to continuously seek feedback from users, and collection of performance data to inform future improvement to the service - find out more

What was good?	● User feedback about the site is regularly collected via Talk London itself. ● User research on multiple devices pre-beta ● User insight, performance data and analytics are used to further update the outstanding backlog of potential new work.

What could be improved?	● We encourage further, regular usability testing and user research is conducted to support continuous improvement				
Overall rating	1	**2**	3	4	5

15. Test with senior manager
Test the service from beginning to end with appropriate council member or senior manager responsible for it - find out more

What was good?	● Awareness of the platform is good amongst senior managers ● Talk London is well regarded and championed				
What could be improved?	● Talk London are keen to do this but this has not currently been prioritised. The most senior known user at this time is the senior stakeholder for the service. ● We encourage the Talk London team to test the service with a senior member of staff, at least one senior person from the Mayor's Office and at least one member of the London Assembly.				
Overall rating	**1**	2	3	4	5