

A photograph of a hand holding a silver smartphone, positioned in front of a laptop. The laptop is open, showing its keyboard and screen. The scene is set on a light-colored wooden desk. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the hand and the devices.

Customer Access Strategy

2018 – 2021

Contents

Foreword	1
Executive summary	2
Modernising our Customer Services Offer	3
Digital by Design	4
Fair and equal access to and control over the services	5 - 6
Customer needs will be resolved at first point of contact	7
Customer feedback drives service improvement and policy and procedure changes	8
Customer requirements will be fulfilled in the most cost-effective way possible	8
Ensuring access for all – Swindon’s Digital Inclusion Approach	9
Barriers to digital inclusion	10
Who is at risk of digital exclusion in Swindon?	11 - 12
Diversity Impact Assessment	13
Designing inclusive digital services for Swindon	14
Next Steps	15
Appendix 1	16
Appendix 2	17
Appendix 3	18

Foreword

I am delighted to share with you the Council's Customer Access Strategy 2018-2021 because it represents a real change in the way we interact with you.

We know, because we've asked residents and residents' groups, that the way the Council currently enables you to interact with us is not responsive enough in the digital age. So this strategy sets the Council on a path to improve that. From now on we'll be putting more and more services online, using simple and responsive design, so that you can get in touch with us at a time that suits you. Whether that's 3am or 3pm you'll be able to do what you need to do at the Council with a few taps on your smartphone or clicks of your mouse.

Our contact centres, whether face to face or on the phone, will be on hand during the working week to help those for whom online processes are not so easy and our well-trained staff will guide you through whatever it is you want to do. And we'll be offering training and support opportunities across Swindon for anyone who wants help to become a little more digitally confident.

I'm proud of this strategy because it will improve the service that the Council offers to residents and offers support to those who need it most.

Cllr Keith Williams

Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services



Executive summary

Swindon Borough Council is transforming the way it interacts with its customers. This Customer Access Strategy outlines how and why we are doing that and our ambition for the quality of experience we want our customers to have. It explains how we will ensure that every customer is able to transact and communicate with us regardless of their confidence, capability and access to online communication and service delivery.

We want our customers to have the best possible experience when they use our services; at a time when the resources available to provide those services is reducing. So we must find new ways of delivering services to our customers in ways which meet their needs and permit us to make the efficiencies required of the Council.

We aim to give customers more control over when and where they can contact us by making our services more convenient and accessible. We will ask those customers who are able to contact the Council online to do so through an online account and support those who are less able to do so through assisted online channels, so that we save our most expensive methods of support for the most vulnerable of our service users.

We are committed to providing services which are:

- Accessible
- Convenient
- Cost effective
- Reliable
- Simple to use
- Right first time

This document outlines how we will deliver that for the residents of and visitors to Swindon. It uses a range of data, customer feedback data, transaction volume data and national trends. Its implementation will take a number of years and the focus at this stage is to make the case for change so that we can then work with services and residents to improve the customer service we offer.



Modernising our Customer Services Offer

There is a need to ensure that the way Swindon Borough Council delivers its services keeps up with the way our residents and customers want to receive them. Currently too many of our services rely on residents being in a position to visit or call us between the hours of 9am and 5pm which is inconvenient for many of our residents.

Residents are increasingly comfortable using the internet for online transactions and for many aspects of their lives. We know from research¹ that 80% of Swindon residents can and have regularly used the internet to perform online transactions. Digital technologies allow people to manage their finances, book holidays or order takeaways and shopping at a time which suits them.

The aim of the Customer Access Strategy is to achieve the public sector version of this, allowing our customers to engage with us in ways which are more convenient and simpler for them to use. In terms of how residents currently contact the Council, we receive 500,000 calls to the contact centre per year with a not inconsiderable 69000 visits per year to the Council by our residents to complete the tasks they require.

The main principles of the customer access strategy are as follows:

1. Services will be 'Digital by Design' where possible – with greater use of electronic and social media to report service issues and communicate with residents.
2. All customers have fair and equal access to services and greater control over how they receive and access those services – there will be increased access to online services mainly through the customer's own use of the web, but for those customers who cannot do this additional access and support will be available including making use of community facilities and support. We aim to provide a choice of services available at times and locations to suit the customer.
3. Customer needs will be resolved at the first point of contact – via trained staff who are enabled to make decisions in order to ensure problems are fixed.
4. Customer feedback drives service improvement and policy and procedure changes – via feedback from our customers
5. Customer requirements will be fulfilled in the most cost-effective way possible as long as this does not contradict any of the points above.

¹Research commissioned in 2017 by Lloyds Bank

Digital by Design

By 2020 Swindon Borough Council will be a 'digital first' council. By this we mean that we will be developing services for our customers and residents where the channel of choice for those universal services will be online.

Online services must therefore be of high quality and be safe and secure to fulfil user needs so that people prefer to carry out transactions online rather than by phone, post or in person.

There are a number of benefits to effective digital services for both service users and service providers as well as the wider Swindon populace.

For residents there are benefits to not having to visit the council to do what they need to do. For those on low incomes this is important given that currently we expect those in receipt of benefits to visit us every time their circumstances change, to provide evidence of entitlement.

Services can be also accessed at any time of the day or night from the convenience of the customer's home or place of work. The service will be more interactive and this will ensure customers know how their matter is being progressed rather than having to contact us to chase things up.

For the Council there are a number of significant benefits. Our digital first approach will mean that we have better access to information which will help the Council to improve service delivery. By making it easier for customers to contact the Council and find out about

Council services, we will have a better understanding of what matters to our customers and our customers will be better informed about the service we offer.

We know from data and research that fulfilling a customer's request accurately is what matters most to them and increases their satisfaction with the Council. Therefore, if we were only to look at contact methods and the way customers access our services, we would not deliver the quality of service we are aiming for. We will systematically review how we interact with our customers throughout their contact with the Council to make sure that information is transferred accurately and efficiently from customers to the teams that deliver the final outcome.

There is a full programme of re-designing Council services planned from November 2017 to March 2020. As each service re-design goes live we will review the customer service approach to each service to ensure that it is maximising online channels and new technologies and supporting the customer service outlined above. We will aim for continuous improvement during this period and beyond and, by monitoring customer interactions and using customer feedback, we will make successive and iterative changes to improve customer experience.

As our online services become more established across the Council and more familiar to our customers we will consider whether there are services which can become online only.

Fair and equal access to and control over the services

For those for whom online channels present a challenge, an 'assisted digital' service will be available where our customers and residents are supported to complete their transactions digitally.

This will mean that regardless of the channel that customers choose to use to contact us, they will be guided through a digital process to resolve their query.

Online

All of our universal services will be available to customers at all times on the Council's website. All customers will be able to register for "My Account" which will allow them to view the services they receive from the Council, request new services and complete their requirements in their own time.

Customers will be able to track the progress of their request at any time when it suits them to do so. They'll also be able to make online enquiries regarding their request.

We will explore the opportunities offered by web and video chat to help those customers who may not regularly use council services or who may require help navigating our website.

Phone

If a customer lacks the confidence, skills or facilities to contact us online and prefers to contact us using the telephone, then well-trained customer service operatives will be on hand to take them through the digital process required to ensure that they get done what they need to.

They will be either guided to complete the process themselves online or the online process will be completed for them by operatives on their behalf.

During this conversation customers will be supported and encouraged to use online channels to contact the council and signposted to assistance should they wish to learn more about how to use online services.

A new telephony system with deeper and more responsive use of IVR (interactive voice response) options will help customers to get more effectively to targeted messages or to an operative who can fulfil their requirements as efficiently as possible.

Face to face

As mentioned earlier, our access strategy is 'digital by design'. Face to face contact for universal services will be seen as a last resort if customers cannot engage with us through another channel or their query is complex. This will allow us to ensure that face to face service is available where it is most needed.

There are currently a number of different face to face receptions on the main Council campus for customers to use as well as a reception service at Waterside. Currently customers are able to use these face to face services at any time between 9-5pm and they do not have to have an appointment.

It is intended that we will shift from having five face to face reception areas on the Council campus down to two: one at Beckhampton Street and one at Clarence House. It is intended that the reception at Waterside is closed to customers and residents. These changes will take effect from late 2018.

The customer receptions will encourage customers to access Council services themselves online and, for those for whom this is a challenge, staff will be on hand to support and advise customers through the process.

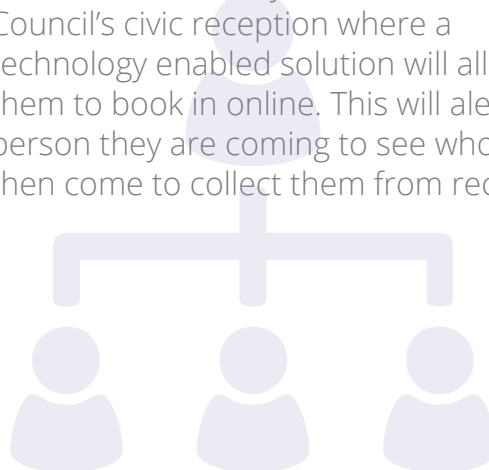
Customers who still require a face to face appointment for a specific service will be able to book an appointment online and be able to book in electronically on arrival (in a similar way to that used in many doctor's surgeries). This way of obtaining advice via scheduled appointments rather than by 'walking-in' is intended to become the usual model for non-emergency face to face visits.

We will also investigate whether there are services where appointments can be conducted via skype or video conferencing to allow our customers to talk to us from wherever is most convenient for them so that they do not have to travel to see us and can avoid the expense that may bring.

As part of the Council's re-design of its services, those services which currently require customers to come into the Council to present documentation for reasons such as proof of eligibility or entitlement will be encouraged to think about whether this can be done digitally to reduce the necessity of customers visiting the Council.

Similarly, as we redesign services we will ensure customers are able to pay for Council services online. This will remove the inconvenience to our customers of having to come to the Council to pay for services and allow the Council to fulfil its ambition to become a cashless Council by 2020.

The Council also has a number of business visitors to the Council and it is intended that they are directed to the Council's civic reception where a technology enabled solution will allow them to book in online. This will alert the person they are coming to see who will then come to collect them from reception.



Customer needs will be resolved at first point of contact

A key part of successful customer service is ensuring that a customer request is fulfilled at the first attempt, however our customers get in touch with the Council. Too often customers have to contact us more than once to achieve whatever they need from us. It is thought that two thirds of our current customer contact comes about as a result of not helping the customer to get what they want at their first attempt.

This can occur for a number of reasons including:

- Poor customer service – either from customer services or from the service that completes the customer's request
- Poor or late communication from the council to the customer which causes the customer to contact us again to find out what is happening with their enquiry or service request
- The Council's computer systems do not enable the request to be fulfilled in a reasonable time.

The re-design of Council services will use technology to improve the timeliness of communication with customers about their enquiry and improvements to the Council's computer systems will mean that residents will receive a more responsive service in future which sets out clearly the actions and timelines for resolving their issues.

Additionally, as part of the service re-design process, council departments will be encouraged to consider which service within the Council is best placed to deal with particular enquiries. Currently we have 1.5 million phone calls into the council each year with over two thirds of our calls going directly to departments rather than through the customer contact centre.

As part of service re-design, services will be asked to reduce the number of direct dial numbers into the council, so that customer interactions are dealt with online through My Account or via the Contact Centre if telephone contact is required unless there are very good reasons not to do so. In these exceptional cases customers will continue to dial a direct number to a specific department. This will enable the Council to fulfil requests more quickly and to have better information about the quality of service it is providing. This will also allow the Council to address enquiries in the most cost-effective manner, releasing staff time to concentrate on complex issues and/or service improvement.

Customer feedback drives service improvement and policy and procedure changes

A key part of this Customer Access Strategy is to ensure that we continuously improve our service to customers. We have recently changed our systems which will allow us to make better use of the data from our website usage to improve our web content and information provision.

Given that we still receive about 30,000 calls per month (although this is reducing year on year) information about Council services still needs to be much easier to find and accessible to more people.

A review of the existing website is underway and consideration is being given, as part of the service re-design project to ensuring that we are providing information in a way which suits our different customer needs and responding to their feedback in a timely way.

A key component of the service re-design process is to use the most up-to-date customer and service data to continuously improve services. We have recently increased the capacity of the Council's web team to ensure we are able to quickly respond to the feedback we receive, whether directly or indirectly from our customers.

Customer requirements will be fulfilled in the most cost-effective way possible

The changes to the Council's customer service offer outlined in this strategy will ensure that the Council is able to fulfil customer requirements in a way which is more effective and more convenient for the vast majority of our customers.

They are also cheaper for the Council and will contribute to the Council's requirement to reduce its costs by £30 million by March 2020.

Ensuring access for all – Swindon's Digital Inclusion Approach

Local and national data tells us that a large majority of Swindon residents are able to use the internet to perform at least basic tasks and transactions. Nonetheless nearly 20% of the borough's population are described as digitally excluded and unable to do this. The Digital Inclusion Strategy sets out our high level plans as to how we can reduce this number as far as possible. This is important as our Customer Access Strategy aims that, by March 2020, 85% of council transactions are completed online.

Digital inclusion is about ensuring that residents have the ability to use the internet and other digital channels to do things that will benefit them in their daily lives. It's about ensuring that they are able to access services but, more importantly, about improving their digital skills so that they can play a fuller part in society.

As Swindon Borough Council moves towards a 'digital first' customer access strategy we must ensure that we do not disadvantage residents. This is why 'assisted digital' support forms a fundamental part of our Customer Access Strategy, ensuring that help is there for those who need to access and use Council digital services but cannot, for legitimate reasons, do so on their own.

The role of Swindon Borough Council staff, members and partners in delivering this strategy is very important. They need to be digital champions who can clearly articulate the advantages of a 'digital first' approach to customer access as well as supporting residents and customers to make this change.

Councillors, particularly, are community leaders with extensive knowledge of their local area and we must utilise their experience, knowledge and connections to find the best ways of being able to reach those groups and individuals who are digitally excluded.

There will need to be engagement and training to support our staff, members and partners to ensure they are able to advocate for the Council's approach and support residents to access services.

Barriers to digital inclusion

There are four main barriers to digital access:

User capability

Users may struggle to use online services due to a lack of digital skills, a lack of literacy, a particular disability or because the information presented is in a language which is not familiar to them.

Affordability

Affordable access to the internet and digital devices is still an issue for some people across the borough despite the proliferation of smart devices in use and 4G coverage available. Not only is access to the internet costly, but the equipment needed in order to get online can also be unaffordable and pose a barrier to digital inclusion.

Infrastructure

Insufficient access to broadband connectivity and coverage This is less of an issue in Swindon than in many other parts of the country due in part to the work of the Council to increase 4G coverage, particularly in rural areas of Swindon

Motivation and confidence

For some trust in online services is an issue, others lack confidence to use online technologies, while some simply prefer to use other methods due to their familiarity. These have resulted in a lack of digital skills, particularly amongst certain groups of the population, such as older people. The presence of any of these four factors can act as a barrier to digital inclusion.

Motivation and trust are perhaps the easiest to overcome and we therefore need to make sure that our digital services are what people really want and are easy to use, rather than something forced on them when other, more expensive to provide channels, are taken away. Support and digital education will need to be offered to people who face these barriers in order to help them gain the skills needed to overcome a lack of motivation or trust, allowing them to use digital services in the future. We need to give the users of our services positive reasons to go online, predominantly via an effortless way of accessing services as well as the skills to succeed when they get there.

Who is at risk of digital exclusion in Swindon?

The use of digital channels for communications, transactions and to access services has increased massively over the last 20 years. Even in the last six years smart phone usage has gone from 52% in 2012 to a projected 88% by the end of 2018².

Swindon residents are at much lower risk of digital exclusion than many parts of the country owing to high employment rates, higher than average median salary and high levels of broadband coverage.

The Tech Partnership which compares the likelihood of digital exclusion in different parts of the country suggests the likelihood of digital exclusion in Swindon is low and uses Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2017 to suggest that 79% of residents have the five basic digital skills required to use online services.

This means that nearly four fifths of Swindon's residents have the skills needed to interact with us digitally.

We need to provide them with services online so that our increasingly scarce resource is spent helping the other 20% for whom digital usage will either never be an option or who will need a lot of assistance and reassurance to use our digital services.

Customer insight research³ suggests that our digital inclusion activity needs to focus on four key groups:

- Older residents
- Residents with learning disabilities
- Residents who can only speak limited or no English
- Lower income families and residents for whom affordability is a barrier to accessing online services



²Deloitte Global Mobile Consumer Survey 2017

³Research conducted by the Council's Aspiring Leaders 2017 cohort

Older residents

2016 mid-year population estimates suggest that 20.6% of our 217,000 Swindon residents are aged over 60. This does not mean that they are all necessarily at risk of digital exclusion by any means but we do know there is less likelihood of digital confidence among this section of the local population. The lack of confidence amongst this group is usually based on a fear of 'doing something wrong' or that they are too old to learn new processes using technology. This may result in a sense of inertia⁴ and a tendency to prefer interacting with the Council through face to face contact or through the phone.

Lower income families and residents for whom affordability is a barrier to accessing digital services

Of the people in the UK without basic digital skills, 44% are on lower wages or are unemployed⁵. Mobile-only households are concentrated among those with low income due to the unaffordability of other equipment used to access digital services. This can lead to barriers when trying to access council services online Appendix 3 shows the areas of Swindon where Experian data suggests residents may have a lower than average preference for using digital channels. The majority of these areas are also the areas of highest social deprivation in Swindon.

Residents with learning disabilities

Swindon's Joint Strategic Needs assessment identifies that there are 4000 adults in Swindon with learning disabilities ranging from mild to severe. In addition, according to the 2014 Dementia UK report, there are 2300 people aged over 65 living with dementia in Swindon who may find digital access difficult. It is important to note that for some residents with learning disabilities, digital services may actually make their interactions with the Council easier. For some, like residents with autism and some communication disabilities, current traditional channels can present a barrier to engaging with the Council.

Residents who tell us they are unable to speak English well or at all

At the last census in 2011, 2296 people described themselves as speaking English only a little or not at all. This represented approximately 1.5% of the Swindon population at that time. Appendix 2 shows where those who self-diagnose as being unable to speak English well or at all were living in 2011.

⁴https://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/computers-andtechnology/140_0809_introducing_another_world_older_people_and_digital_inclusion_2009_pro.pdf?dtrk=true

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digitalinclusion-strategy>

Diversity Impact Assessment

This strategy support's SBC's delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and in particular the duty to advance Equality of Opportunity. Our assessment, as demonstrated throughout this document, is that increasing the number of customer interactions through online methods will generally create a positive impact. However, we have clearly identified four areas where there may be adverse impact: Older residents, Residents with

learning disabilities, Residents who can only speak limited or no English, Lower income families and residents for whom affordability is a barrier to accessing online services.

Mitigations to these adverse impacts have been identified, and will be used on implementation of each part of this strategy, and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure access to customer services at SBC is improved in line with this strategy.



Designing inclusive digital services for Swindon

In recent years there has been much debate over what 'digital by default' and 'digital by design' mean for local government services. Swindon Borough Council's approach to digital transformation is founded on the principles of customer inclusion and support. Those who can use online services as a matter of course do so and those for whom a digital approach is more difficult are supported to complete their transactions using either 'assisted digital' or more traditional channels.

To realise our 'digital first' goals as outlined in the Customer Access Strategy the Council must:

- i. Make digital services as intuitive, easy and responsive to use through fully automated self-service
- ii. Design and deliver a variety of 'assisted digital' support mechanisms for those for whom online is not their first choice of channel for any of the reasons outlined earlier

The high level plan for achieving point (i) above is outlined within the Customer Access Strategy.

Some of the ways in which we will assist those who find it hard to access digital services are outlined below:

- We will provide, where it is appropriate to do so, assistive technologies such as web chat and automated telephony to support customers to use our online services;
- The Council's contact centre will continue to be the main source of support for customers who find online services difficult. Anyone who lacks confidence to use digital channels will be supported over the telephone to do so while those who cannot access digital channels, either permanently or temporarily, will have their customer enquiry logged digitally on their behalf by customer service operatives;
- We will make as much use as possible of pictures and diagrams on the web to help those for whom English is not their preferred language;
- We will make digital services as simple and accessible as possible via devices such as tablets/iPads and smartphones
- We will make best use of new or existing council, partner and community facilities such as libraries, voluntary organisations, Citizens Advice Bureau and other partner agencies and community organisations where varying levels of support to access services online can be provided at convenient local venues
- We will provide training for frontline staff (both council and otherwise) to ensure that they are confident users of the technology that we want service users to switch to.
- We will work with private sector and other partners as appropriate to deliver training to develop digital skills.

Next steps

This Digital Inclusion Strategy is intended as a high level explanation of the Council's approach to ensuring all customers can access its services, taking us to April 2020. Once this strategy is adopted, a more detailed plan will be drawn up to address the needs of the different customer groups outlined above who may require support to access and/or use digital channels.

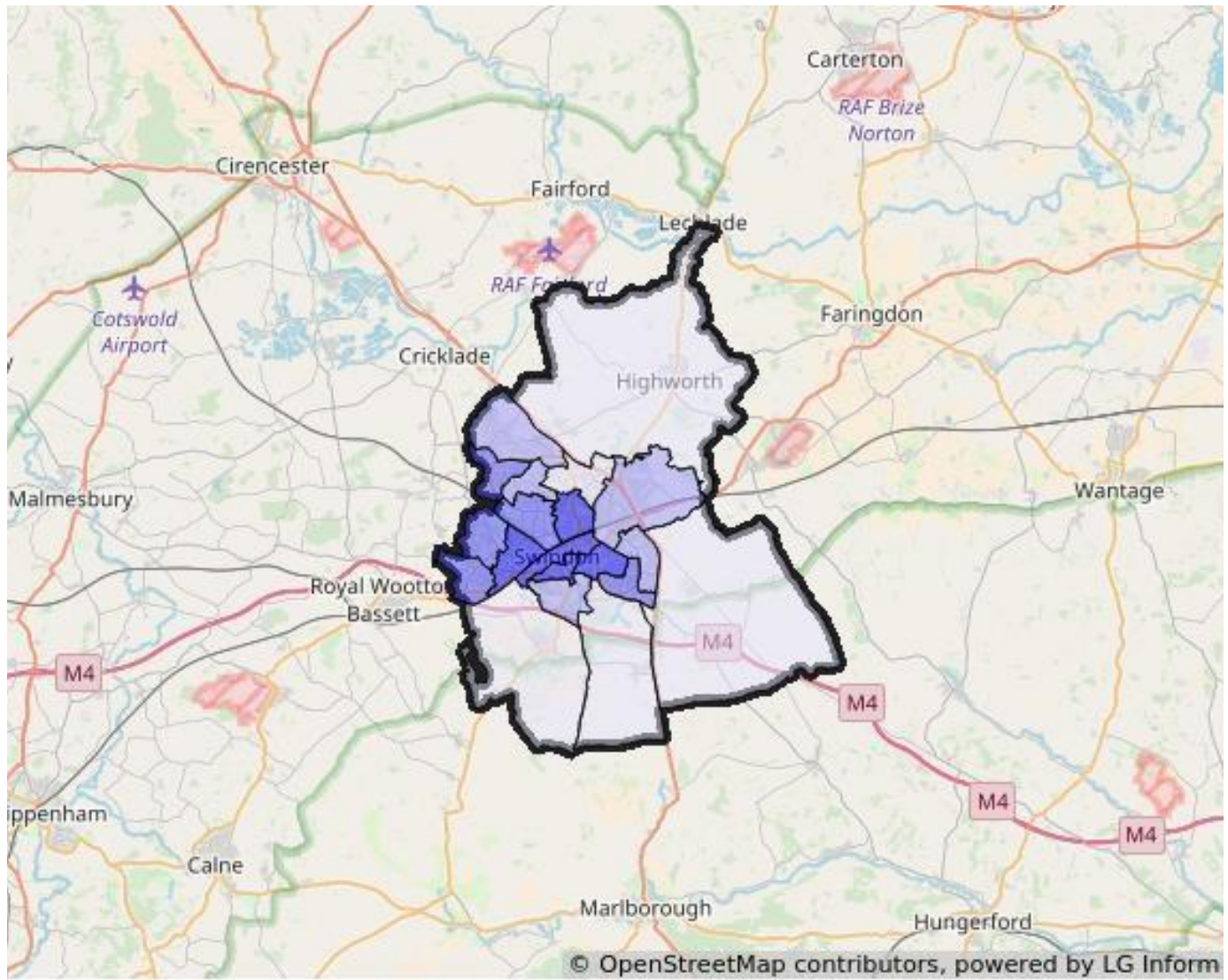


Appendix 1

Breakdown of Swindon residents by age		
Age group	Total	Proportion %
0-9	29561	13.6
10-19*	24631	11.3
20-29	25082	11.5
30-39	30869	13.8
40-49	32672	15
50-59	30007	13.8
60-69	21996	10.1
70-79	14037	6.4
80-89	7470	3.4
90+	1580	0.7
Total	217,905	

Appendix 2

(Source – 2016 Mid-year population estimates) Appendix 2 - breakdown of those who self-recognise as not being able to speak English well or at all. (Source: 2011 Census data)



Cannot speak English well or at all (number) (2011)

- $\geq 147 \leq 490$
- $\geq 68 < 147$
- $\geq 51 < 68$
- $\geq 8 < 51$

Appendix 3

2016 Experian data which outlines geographical areas where resident preference for use of digital channels is highest and lowest

