

In Our View



Main feature:

How technology could help communities recover from Covid-19

Secure your data and minimise your risk

As the world has shifted to remote working, there has been a flurry of new threats, technologies and business models emerge in the cyber security space.

With the accelerated adoption of remote working solutions exposing gaps in once secure perimeters, adversaries have taken advantage of these immediate rollouts, impersonating legitimate users through credential theft and upping the ante with the ability to monetise ransomware attacks by publicly threatening to release victim's data.

Should this happen to you (and it will), to successfully recover from a cyber attack, it is critical to have a clear cyber recovery strategy in place which is aligned to the business needs and prioritises recovering the most critical processes and data first. You need to look at things such as:

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER - JUNE 2021

It's time to work on recovering from Covid-19



Welcome to our issue for President's Week 2021, which is focused on recovering from Covid-19. For more than a year we have worked to keep our organisations

operating in extraordinary circumstances, particularly by helping colleagues to work effectively from home. It is time to start thinking about what happens next.

Remote working is a good example. We can embed some of the more successful changes made over the last year and work to support colleagues who want to continue to work flexibly through helping them improve their skills and confidence. But we also need to find ways to lessen its negative aspects as well as decide how offices should operate in future.

Many local authorities used technology to support community collaboration during the pandemic, but Bristol has been exploring this for years. Robin Hambleton, emeritus professor of city leadership at the University of the West of England, discusses the city's work in this issue's main feature ([p16](#)). He will be talking about the ways in which local leadership can enhance cities and communities in his keynote address on the conference's second day, which I am looking forward to chairing.

This issue's Personal View is by Kevin White, who leads the Scottish Government's work on digital accessibility ([p28](#)). Kevin joined Socitm as a non-executive director in February and is chairing the first day of our conference, which includes Mike Manson, chief executive of ALGIM. Mike details how New Zealand's councils came up with new ways to support their communities during the pandemic on [p22](#).

This is the second President's conference to take place virtually and while it would be lovely to meet in person, the online format will let people from across the country and the world attend. I hope it will help you develop your thinking on how we recover from the pandemic.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Smith".

Sam Smith
Socitm president

President's Week 2021
information and registration:
socitm.net/events/presidents-conference-2021

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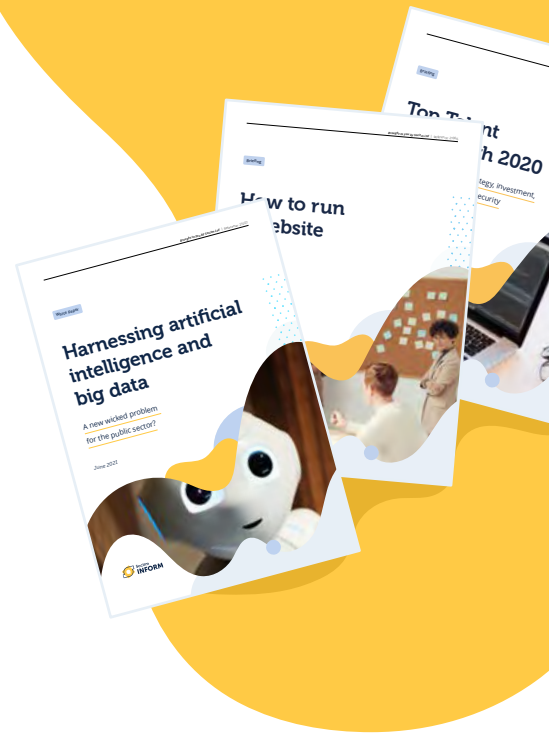
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Socitm Share events calendar

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White paper

[Harnessing artificial intelligence and big data](#)

This white paper explores whether harnessing AI and data constitutes a new 'wicked problem'. Using the lens of ten characteristics originally created by design theorists Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber it draws attention to the complexities and challenges of addressing social policy problems.



Briefing

[How to run a website](#)

This guide is for anyone who has some involvement with their council's website. You might be in a new job with responsibility for the site, an experienced web manager just coming into local government, or just starting out. It's a checklist for the wise, a starting point for those with less experience.



Briefing

[Top Talent Edinburgh 2020](#)

This briefing covers the first Socitm Top Talent programme to have taken place entirely online, between September and December 2020. As well as those in Scotland, the remote format allowed participants based as far away as the West Midlands to take part.



Report

[Cloud computing](#)

This report offers a practical guide for the public sector CIO and other public service business leaders into the realities of cloud challenges and opportunities of today. It lays out the issues and opportunities raised by cloud computing in the public sector and how best they can be tackled.



Report

[LOLA conference report](#)

Covid-19 has sped the adoption of digital technologies by several years and many of these changes could be there for the long haul. This report on our recent international LOLA Conference features examples of innovations and approaches that councils are taking around the world.



Policy briefing

[Our key policy themes 2021](#)

Socitm is a key influence in shaping and defining the policy underpinning public service delivery. Our voice speaks for members in the digital technology, data and information realm. Our five key policy areas are critical to delivering better outcomes for people in the places that they live and work.



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English councils forced to return to physical meetings

Local authorities in England are using sports centres, theatres and even parks for official meetings, after a legal judgement forced them to abandon remote digital meetings used during the pandemic.

On 8 May, Hertfordshire County Council lost a legal application to continue to hold council meetings remotely under the 1972 legislation that governs local government, following the expiry of a temporary Covid-19 regulation allowing these until the previous day. In a High Court decision, Dame Victoria Sharp and Mr Justice Chamberlain wrote that the existing law was clear that meetings must be held “at a single, specified geographical location” and that attending the meeting means doing so physically.

Although the hearing formally named the secretary of state for housing, communities and local government as the defendant, the government gave evidence in favour of allowing online council meetings to continue. However, the judgement said that primary legislation was required. Noting that Scotland and Wales have made such decisions through the Scottish Parliament and Senedd, the judges wrote: “In England, they are for Parliament, not the courts.”

The requirement to move back to physical meetings was opposed by the Remote Council Meeting

Partners group co-ordinated by the Local Government Association (LGA), Socitm and individual councils. “We stand with our colleagues across local government to register our disappointment with a court ruling not to allow online and hybrid council meetings beyond 7 May 2021,” said Nadira Hussain, Socitm’s director of leadership, development and research. “We will continue to provide our voice, evidence and resources to bring about solutions which give our members a choice of meeting formats.”

The LGA said that a survey had found that 83% of its members would be very or fairly likely to hold council meetings online or in a mixed hybrid way after the pandemic is over. “The current flexibility has been paramount in allowing access for both councillors and the public into council meetings,” said LGA chairman Cllr James Jamieson, noting that many councils have seen significantly increased public participation in online meetings.

“Councils want the flexibility to continue to meet in this way and continue their business, especially in times of emergency such as when flooding occurs or if there is significant traffic disruption due to weather conditions,” he said.

With local authorities legally required to hold annual meetings within 21 days of elections, many

moved these to larger venues to allow councillors and others attending to stay distanced from each other. Stoke-on-Trent City Council used its King’s Hall, which can accommodate up to 1,300 people as a theatre, Swindon Borough Council met in a local school and Oxfordshire County Council used its Spiceball leisure centre in Banbury.

Cambridgeshire County Council held its first face-to-face meeting since the pandemic in an aircraft hangar at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford, West Northamptonshire Council used a rugby club stadium and Salford City Council used empty office space.

Many councils had to hire venues, with Derbyshire County Council spending £4,000 on a room at a Chesterfield hotel, with new leader Cllr Joan Dixon calling the shift a “logistical nightmare” and “absolute madness”. On 19 May, Buckfastleigh Town Council in southern Devon registered its disapproval by officially meeting al fresco in the town’s Victoria Park.

[Read more](#)

High Court judgement:
bit.ly/3uk7no0

LGA commentary:
bit.ly/3ffSpeD

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Councils need to consider cybersecurity of smart places says NCSC



Image of London street
by Free-Photos via Pixabay

Smart place technology is becoming an “attractive target” for attackers, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has warned local and national authorities.

In recently-published guidance, NCSC recommended a set of cybersecurity principles for what it calls connected places. It defines these as environments that use sensors and Internet of Things technologies to collect and analyse data, both in delivering services and in improving citizens’ quality of life.

NCSC, the cybersecurity division of intelligence agency GCHQ, said that the systems used within connected places process sensitive data and control critical operational technology. “Unfortunately, this makes these systems an attractive target for a range of threat actors,” the guidance said. It detailed 14 principles organised in three groups focused on the understanding, design and management of connected places.

At a session of the CyberUK Online event on 11 May, NCSC specialist Dean said that connected place services have the potential to transform the way authorities govern and operate the built environment. “It’s also equally important that we identify, understand and mitigate the associated risks,” he added, particularly around the personal or sensitive data that such services collect and store. “We

really have to protect this high-value information from a range of hostile actors,” he said.

Authorities controlling connected places need to consider reputational risks if the data is lost, stolen or misused, as well as legal risks from breaking privacy and in some cases health and safety legislation. Critical

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“We need to make sure we do everything that we can to minimise disruption and ensure that safety is never compromised”

Dean, NCSC

services in particular need to be made resilient and hard to disrupt by cyber-attack, Dean added: “If a connected place is compromised, there will be potential impact on local citizens. We need to make sure we do everything that we can to minimise that disruption and ensure that safety is never compromised.”

He added that authorities can improve preparedness by making designated people responsible for connected place security and reducing exposure to threats, including through

technical measures such as firewalls, switching off unused services and managing access.

“One key challenge will be understanding what infrastructure you have, how it is connected and being aware of the interdependencies that exist,” Dean added, as well as considering suppliers and the risks involved in holding data.

Nadira Hussain, Socitm’s director of leadership, development and research, told the same CyberUK Online session that public sector IT leaders are expecting a rapid increase in the use of Internet of Things devices for remote monitoring, smart buildings and adaptive civic infrastructure.

“We expect to see a renewed focus on the civic digital infrastructure and connectivity to stimulate local economies and to improve the quality of life of citizens,” she said.

Read more

NCSC Connected Places Cyber Security Principles: bit.ly/3udYNHt

CPNI security guidance for smart cities: bit.ly/3wuBHxP

CyberUK Online Smart places session: bit.ly/3oLFB2U



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Covid-19 showed value of relationships for Irish councils

Strong relationships with suppliers and colleagues have been vital for Irish and Northern Irish local authorities during the pandemic, two heads of technology told Socitm's first Share Ireland event on 20 May.

Rory Hopkins, head of information systems at Kildare County Council, praised suppliers that understood their customers and stood ready to help during the crisis: "It's a key resource," he told the event.

"If the vendor knows your business, gets under your skin a wee bit, gets to know what your problems and pain points are, then when the chips

are down they can really help out," added David Kelly, digital portfolio manager at Belfast City Council.

But he added that suppliers should be more willing to adopt open authentication models so customers could log-in once rather than needing separate passwords for different services. "Software vendors love to build their own customer portals," he said.

Kelly said that Belfast had benefitted from retaining in-house coding capacity, although it no longer sells software to other local authorities as it once did. In the last year,

the city council used internal development to develop a new customer hub built on Microsoft Dynamics. "We've been able to turn stuff around really quickly," he said. "It's a great asset to have."

“

"If the vendor knows your business... then when the chips are down they can really help out"

*David Kelly,
Belfast City Council*

NI health workers' shift to home working didn't boost efficiency

Northern Ireland's health and care services experienced an "order of magnitude" increase in demand for homeworking technology in spring 2020, but the shift to hybrid working does not seem to have affected staff efficiency, the event heard.

"Staff have welcomed the change. Efficiency doesn't appear to have been impacted negatively or positively," said Dan West, chief digital information officer for health and care in Northern Ireland. "Given there isn't a really big efficiency win here, there is a question



about how you justify the investment in infrastructure, cybersecurity and other things."

Northern Ireland built its own versions of digital Covid-19 services including a contact tracing app, a test registry, a public health intelligence system and a vaccination management platform that handles online booking. West was appointed two years ago to define a new digital strategy, but said: "The last 14 months have been about running around with my hair on fire." With the pandemic in retreat it is now possible to plan ahead, however.

Both agreed that good relationships with other staff have been important, such as when working to strengthen home workers' cybersecurity by running mock phishing attacks. Kildare told staff it planned to send such emails, which look like malicious attempts to get users to click on links or attachments, and stressed it was not a test. It then sent the mock phishing emails to one department at a time to avoid overloading the IT service staff.

Hopkins said that only two people, not including himself, knew who had clicked on the mock emails and the warning emails made it clear the exercise is about collaboration: "We tell people it's really from a learning perspective," he said.

Belfast has run similar exercises and Kelly echoed the importance of presenting it to staff as a chance to learn about risks: "The worst thing you can do is fall for it and not tell us," he said.

Make procurement support accessibility, says Scottish lead

Procurement practices need to change if public bodies want to improve accessibility, including through recognising its importance, moving away from box-ticking and improving staff awareness, Share Ireland heard.

Kevin White, head of digital accessibility for the Scottish Government, said that laws in both the Republic of Ireland and the UK were clear: “Broadly speaking, these say make your stuff accessible,” he said. There is also a solid set of digital accessibility standards to follow, but he added: “The trouble is, we still end up with inaccessible solutions.”

Kevin, who recently joined Socitm as a non-executive director, said that ideally the public sector would refuse to buy inaccessible systems in the way it rejects those that are insecure: “We wouldn’t want to buy a product that was 60% cybersecure or 40% data protected.” But at present, accessibility is often given just a few percentage points in a procurement’s assessment scoring.

He said that the knowledge required to assess accessibility was rare, meaning that some procurements take a tick-box approach, such as by requiring that a product meets certain standards. He added that this provides “a big misplaced sense of security we’re doing it right”. However, those involved with procurement need to develop a broader understanding of accessibility. Developing better relationships with suppliers, both before writing the tender and

after appointment, is also helpful although the former can be constrained by compliance rules.

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“We wouldn’t want to buy a product that was 60% cybersecure or 40% data protected”

*Kevin White,
Scottish Government*

One specific way to improve procurement involves helping staff to ask better questions and recognise good answers. University of Canterbury and education technology service Jisc have explored using more open questions such as “please tell us about any standards that the product or service has been designed to meet,” which can help develop a better understanding of a supplier’s approach. “These have started to shine a light on better ways of doing this, but we’re not there yet,” Kevin said.

[Personal view, p28](#)

Shetland’s ‘scorched earth’ website rewrite and rule setting

Shetland Islands Council has transformed the accessibility of its website by moving to a new content management system (CMS) and rewriting its material, James Sawkins, the council’s ICT web analyst, told the event.

The council has imposed rules within Jadu’s CMS on text colour and size, as well as insisting that images have ‘alt tags’ with written descriptions and limiting the use of tables. Service departments maintain their own content, but a director insisted on a “scorched earth” policy under which it all had to be rewritten for the new site following training, rather than copied across.

Silktide’s accessibility ratings for Shetland’s site, provided through Socitm, have risen sharply with compliance with the W3C’s WCAG AA standard increasing from 15.7% in September to 95.6% in April. Sawkins said that the council had targeted AA compliance, but added: “I wish we’d aimed a little bit higher.” It now wants to meet the AAA standard across the site.

New Shetland website:
www.shetland.gov.uk

[Read more](#)

[Recordings of Socitm Ireland: socitm.net/events/share-ireland-2021](http://socitm.net/events/share-ireland-2021)



Nations and regions news

Scotland

Falkirk Council has introduced a fully-digital emergency telecare service for elderly people, the first council in Scotland to do so, in advance of the 2025 switch-off of analogue telephone lines.

bit.ly/3woIHMA

Wales

Monmouthshire County Council has moved to a cloud-based version of its human resources software, which provides employee experience functions, automation and integration with other systems.

bit.ly/3v7whbR

Northern Ireland

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council has replaced an on-premise system used by its two predecessor councils with financial software-as-a-service, with payroll planned to follow later this year.

bit.ly/3bEbpRR

Republic of Ireland

Longford County Council has launched six wi-fi hotspots for the Eduroam educational network in town centres and libraries, the first Irish local authority to do so, allowing students and researchers free and secure internet access.

bit.ly/3f71xSD

Yorkshire and the Humber

Hull City Council has opened the Hull Data Observatory, organising information on the city on crime, the economy, education, the environment, health and population, including data on individual wards.

data.hull.gov.uk

North-west England

The **Greater Manchester Combined Authority** will take targeted action to get under-25s, over-75s and disabled people in the city region online, following a manifesto pledge from recently re-elected mayor Andy Burnham.

bit.ly/3ytdpGk

West Midlands

The **West Midlands Combined Authority** has awarded a contract for an improved real-time information system, which will take data from 30 bus operators.

bit.ly/3f6ORv5

East Midlands

Derbyshire County Council has established a library of health apps, assessed by the Organisation for the Review of Care and Health Apps, with staff able to make recommendations for their clients.

bit.ly/2RyPnJe

East of England

Essex County Council has commissioned a managed care technology service including telecare, assistive technology, remote monitoring and apps, along with a countywide monitoring and response service.

bit.ly/3hHnRUE

South-east England

Hampshire County Council has involved six other local authorities in a framework deal for bus real-time passenger information systems, although participation may depend on funding applications.

bit.ly/3yDMxnc

South-west England

Connecting Devon and Somerset, an organisation set up by local councils to build broadband infrastructure in commercially underserved areas, has started laying fibre cable in Woolston in South Somerset.

bit.ly/3f7yj6d

London

Southwark Council is working on a tool that will collect affordable housing data on planning applications so it can check compliance when built.

bit.ly/3yvdx88

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staying connected, lunch
delivery, stopping threats,
more bandwidth, uptime,
productivity, dashboards,
helpdesks, teamwork and
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Main feature

How technology could help change places

Local collaboration supported by technology helped people through the pandemic and could now be used to help communities recover

As vaccination rates rise and Covid-19 retreats in most areas, many are considering how communities can recover from the pandemic, including those attending this year's President's Week. For local public services, such recovery could be boosted by how Covid-19 and its restrictions have reconnected many people to the qualities and potential of the places where they live.

"Covid-19, absolutely appalling as it is, has had this upside of showing how effective local communities can be in solving problems," says Robin Hambleton, emeritus professor of city leadership at the University

of the West of England in Bristol. This has been most obvious in the way that voluntary groups have helped vulnerable people but also applies to local authorities, which among other things have established new support services and helped to organise volunteers.

Collaboration should be at the heart of this rediscovered localism, Hambleton says, and some have already made much progress. Bristol's mayor Marvin Rees, who was re-elected in May, had already set up a City Office at a 'city gathering' event in July 2016 involving more than 70 partner organisations. While the City Office

is based within the council's City Hall it is answerable to a group of city leaders drawn from key public, private and voluntary sector organisations in Bristol. In January 2019 the office published the first One City Plan, which aims to make Bristol in 2050 "a fair, healthy and sustainable city". This collective plan is revised annually, making it a method for continuous forward planning and civic collaboration.

The City Office organises twice-yearly city gatherings with participants drawn from public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Some are held in City Hall but some are deliberately held at 'neutral'

venues such as We The Curious, an interactive science venue, and Bristol City FC's Ashton Gate ground. The most recent city gathering, held online in March, involved more than 400 partners. "It's trying to step outside local government buildings to meet in spaces that might be more appealing to other people the city council wants to work with," says Hambleton, who has been actively involved in this effort to strengthen collaborative governance. He adds: "Sometimes you have to disrupt things to make things happen."

Technology can help in establishing collaboration, particularly with the third sector. In 2017, Mayor Rees launched Can-Do Bristol, a searchable online platform for volunteering. The city council is the project's founding partner but the website uses its own URL, does not have council branding and includes volunteering opportunities in neighbouring local authority areas. More than 4,000 Bristolians signed up to the platform. Some other local authorities have similar systems, including those set up specifically to co-ordinate volunteers helping people to cope with Covid-19.

Bristol is also using collaboration to tackle unequal access to digital technology, with One City Bristol forming a digital board whose work will include tackling digital exclusion. A separate project, Connecting Bristol, has for several years linked the city council with University of Bristol and other partners to work on smart technology, autonomous vehicles and energy storage.

Sustainable solutions

Sustainability is a key element of many local collaborations, including Bristol One City. Discussion of working remotely, a technology-reliant process, has focused on how to make it function as a necessity, but it is increasingly being considered as a route towards making organisations and communities more sustainable.

This includes environmental benefits, including reduced carbon emissions, air pollution and road congestion from commuting, but is also seen as a way to boost the economies of non-urban areas.

Many of these plans include shared offices so staff have options beyond either working from home or returning to a central office. The Welsh Government announced last



"Covid-19... has had this upside of showing how effective local communities can be in solving problems"

*Robin Hambleton,
University of the West of England*

September that it is aiming for at least 30% of employees in Wales to work remotely and is exploring how it can help set up a network of community-based remote working hubs. "Home working will change how we use our town centres and high streets," said Hannah Blythyn, Wales' deputy minister for housing and local government. "We want to explore new opportunities for these areas, driving footfall by moving away from a purely retail model to one focused on a more diverse range of activity and opportunities."

In February, the Northern Ireland Civil Service announced plans for 10 remote working hubs across its area,

with the aims of reducing commuting times and carbon emissions while promoting regional economies. And the Republic of Ireland government has integrated remote working into its rural development plan, which says it "has the potential to be transformative for rural Ireland". It has a focus on revitalising rural town centres through setting up around 400 remote working hubs, with plans to invest where it needs to create a cohesive national network. It is mandating public sector employers to move to 20% home and remote working.

With less time spent in the office, many employers both in the private (see p19) and public sectors are planning to focus their workplaces on collaboration, with local authorities being no exception. "We're looking at what is the job that needs to be done, where do people want to do that job and what is going to work for them," Pam Smith, chief executive of Stockport Council, told a session at Socitm's Share National event in April. It will reduce its office space which will save money, but she said the greater benefits will come from working in dynamic ways that make the most of technology. Quoting a colleague, she said: "Technology has freed us up to care."

Smith added that the changes raise issues about how flexible offices can be, particularly as work patterns are likely to continue to evolve for some time after they fully re-open. But one aspect looks particularly promising, which is allowing council offices to be used for collaboration by those working across the public and third sectors, which Smith described as "many lanyards, one purpose".

Urban living

Such plans may sound like they would damage cities, but Robin Hambleton says flexible working could suit urban areas too. "There was some rhetoric, early on during Covid-19, that cities are finished because they bring people together

and people don't want to do that anymore," he says. "I think that's nonsense." People have chosen to live in cities for 8,000 to 10,000 years and have often adapted, he adds. "Cities will come through this very effectively, but they won't look just the same."

Flexible working would fit with the emerging concept of the 15-minute city, developed in places such as the German city of Freiburg im Breisgau, where people can spend most of their time in their neighbourhood rather than having to travel to the centre. Post Covid-19, Hambleton believes people will want to return to human interaction while retaining

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"Home working will change how we use our town centres and high streets"

*Hannah Blythyn MS,
Welsh Government minister*

what has worked better during the pandemic: "We're not going to live [entirely] in our own homes," he says, "but we're probably not going to all rush back to the tall office blocks in the centre of town." People tend to be more creative when they are in the same room, but in many jobs this is only needed part of the time. Cities could work well for those working in a hybrid fashion, with some time spent remotely at home or in a shared office and some time in the same space as colleagues.



Image of Bristol City Hall by stux via Pixabay

Some urban local authorities are planning to make themselves more attractive for living as well as working, particularly if offices become smaller. The City of London is arguably the most work-focused local government area in the UK with fewer than 10,000 residents, compared with more than 100,000 in the 19th century before the advent of commuting. Its corporation recently announced plans to explore new ways to use vacant space, including low-cost long-term lets for cultural and creative industries, as well as creating at least 1,500 new homes by 2030.

Technology is an important element of the corporation's plans, including making the area a testing ground for data-driven technologies; facilitating data sharing with public, private and academic partners on work and travel patterns and the use of streets and public spaces; and a pilot of small 5G cells that if successful will be used to provide fast internet connections using the technology across the City by the end of 2022.

"Firms have told us that they remain committed to retaining a central London hub but how they operate will inevitably change to reflect post-pandemic trends, such as hybrid and flexible working," said Catherine McGuinness, policy chair at the City of London Corporation. "The Square Mile must evolve in order to provide an ecosystem that remains attractive to workers, visitors, learners and residents."

Some of the changes that Covid-19 has made to people's lives are likely to melt away as soon as the pandemic is over. But it has let millions try living and working in new ways that often rely on technology, which at their best can encourage collaboration, reduce travel and increase involvement with their communities. Local authorities are set to play a major role in deciding whether these changes become permanent.

Robin Hambleton will be speaking at 12:25pm on day two of President's Week, Tuesday 8 June.

Read more

Bristol One City:
bristolonecity.com

Can-Do Bristol:
candobristol.co.uk

Welsh Government plans on remote working:
bit.ly/3eFnZCh

Government of Ireland Rural Development Policy:
bit.ly/3hoxJT4

Robin Hambleton article on Freiburg:
bit.ly/2QdNO2O

City of London development plans:
bit.ly/3bnsWgT

No longer banking on a desk in the office

How financial and consultancy firms plan to offer staff more flexibility post-Covid



HSBC will move two-thirds of its UK call centre staff to permanent home working, offering them £300 a year to cover higher utility bills. Globally, the bank plans to cut its office space by 40% over the next few years. This has included turning the executive floor of its Canary Wharf headquarters into meeting rooms and collaborative spaces, with senior staff including chief executive Noel Quinn sharing hot desks in an open plan office.

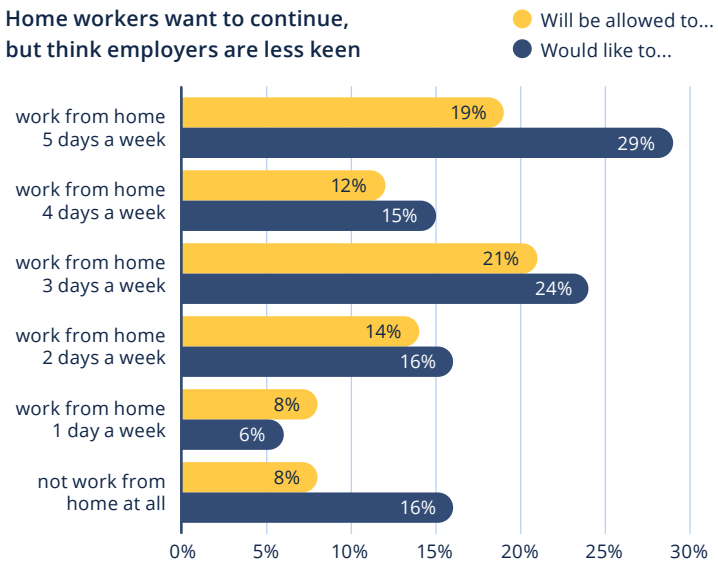
reut.rs/3eEPiwp
bit.ly/3oaOYZA

Lloyds Banking Group is planning to reduce office space by 20% over the next two years, after 77% of respondents to a staff survey said they want to work from home for at least three days a week. Chief executive António Horta-Osório said that hybrid working could help it attract a wider range of staff including younger workers.

bit.ly/3fioHEm

Nationwide Building Society is consolidating three sites in its headquarters city of Swindon to reduce office space, but plans to test hybrid working and develop its plans over time. It has said it will let staff work from wherever they want in the UK, invest in wi-fi and 'Teams-enabled spaces'

Home workers want to continue, but think employers are less keen



Source: Ipsos Mori research with 807 people aged 16-75, working at least one day a week at home in January 2021, for Nationwide Building Society: bit.ly/3w5TgEh

to assist hybrid working and advertise non-branch based jobs without a location.

bit.ly/3w7vpUN

PricewaterhouseCoopers UK staff will be able to work flexibly on the expectation that they spend between 40-60% of their work time in either the firm's offices or client sites, and will have more freedom over when they start and finish work.

pwc.to/3y9cv1l

Revolut said it will allow its more than 2,000 staff to spend up to 60 days a year working abroad, as long as

they had the right to work in that location. The online bank is reconfiguring offices so that 70% of the space is used for collaboration, including meetings and training.

bit.ly/3eHMgHZ

But **Goldman Sachs** plans to bring its staff back into its UK offices in June, arguing that collaboration and innovation work better when people work in the same locations. Chief executive David Solomon has previously called remote working "an aberration that we are going to correct as quickly as possible".

bloom.bg/3tJlFOL

Sources: media reports and company statements. Adapted from a forthcoming report on work's shift from place to person, which will be available on Socitm's Resource Hub: socitm.net/resource-hub



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How New Zealand's councils used technology to tackle Covid with kindness

The country's local authorities rushed in new systems to support communities during the pandemic, says **Mike Manson**, chief executive of ALGIM

New Zealand is a country of five million people located at the bottom of the world surrounded by water. Our nearest neighbour is Australia, some three hours' flight time away. Every country has its own story of Covid-19, but this is ours.

On 28 February 2020, New Zealand's first confirmed case was reported. On 21 March, the government announced a four-level alert system, with level three restricting our movements and level four a total lock-down with the goal of eliminating the disease. On 23 March, prime minister Jacinda Ardern said: "Now is the time to act. That's why Cabinet met today and agreed that effective immediately, we will move to alert level three nationwide. After 48 hours, the time required to ensure essential services are in place, we will move to level four."

Her message was 'Be kind, stay home, save lives', so we united as a team of five million and away we went. Our full lockdown would last from 26 March to 13 May, the strictest lockdown seen in the history of New Zealand.

Awards for unprecedented times

ALGIM (the Association of Local Government Information Management) wanted to celebrate what local authorities in New Zealand did during that lockdown through their leadership, innovation, collaboration and teamwork. We set up an awards programme that looked at supportive teams, fast-tracked projects, new initiatives and people's choice awards.

These were unprecedented times and we wanted to celebrate some of the partnerships between central and local government, as well as local government finding itself in new roles, taking responsibility for things it hadn't had to before such as the welfare of its community, ensuring the elderly were OK and that people had food and supplies.

Among the fast-tracked projects we considered were Tauranga City Council, which implemented an e-learning module from SAP in two weeks, when it would normally take six to 18 weeks. Kaipara

District Council implemented Microsoft Teams and transformed its organisation using the tools and features deployed, also over a two week period using the iWorkplace tool. Tasman District Council sped up its implementation of new electronic document and records management and geographic information systems as well as Microsoft 365, all at the same time, all during the lockdown period.

We also saw some really innovative local authorities, with Taranaki Regional Council winning our people's choice award for creating a programme called Backyard Biodiversity. Its environmental educators didn't like to sit behind desks during lockdown, so they grabbed cameras and filmed 11 videos in their back yards covering birds, lizards, insects, predators and plants, making information an education and having lots of fun, to help households with families who were looking for things to do during lockdown. It went viral and conservation groups from New Zealand, Australia, Germany and the UK followed and shared the videos

throughout the lockdown period. Australia has also adopted some of them for its education programmes.

Other new initiatives included Ashburton District Council, which ran an ‘open for business’ campaign to restart the businesses in its region, putting purchasers of goods and services in touch with vendors; and Wellington City Council, which developed a contact tracing app well before the New Zealand government one was ready and implemented this in one week, designing it to be scalable, operating system agnostic and maintaining privacy.

Auckland Transport’s space race

The overall winner of ALGIM’s special awards was Auckland Transport for its rapid response to Covid-19. Under level four lockdown, public transport for essential services was needed, but passengers had to maintain two metre physical distancing while on a bus or train, so Auckland Transport had to show them how much room there was going to be before they got on. It delivered a solution in two days, so that on 26 March – the day lockdown started – passengers could see how full a bus was in real time.

People didn’t feel comfortable using public transport, with usage dropping rapidly. But 250,000 people were using Auckland Transport’s mobile app and the organisation already knew how many people were on each bus. It had a plan to introduce live occupancy information for trains, although it hadn’t implemented it.

As of 26 March, on the app each bus had a new icon showing customers how much space was currently available. Auckland Transport named the different levels to match the government messaging like ‘space available’, ‘likely nearing the limit of safe distancing’ and ‘likely not accepting passengers’. On 6 April, it added support for train occupancy; by 15 April, new rules

for school buses; in May, it added occupancy status to digital signs for buses with trains following in June; and in July it added this to audio platform announcements.

There was a problem getting digital signs working while staff were locked down in remote locations, so the organisation programmed digital signage then staff went to their nearest bus shelters to



“We wanted to celebrate some of the partnerships between central and local government, as well as local government finding itself in new roles”

Mike Manson,
ALGIM

check these were working. Overall, customer satisfaction increased by 13% and Auckland has been number one in the world for its public transport usage recovery rate.

Auckland Council, which won ALGIM’s all-of-council supportive team award, transitioned library staff into making 15,000 welfare calls to people in older age brackets, to check on them and make sure they had what they needed to survive in lockdown, with 388 people needing financial support or essential food parcels. 40 customer service staff were seconded into emergency management, where

they played a critical role in running the council’s distribution centre for food and essential supplies.

Far North’s extra miles

Far North District Council, which won our all of council effort award, really worked hard with its 400 staff scattered around the upper part of New Zealand’s north island. It is a growing district with 68,000 people spread over a large area, high levels of deprivation and a high number of over-65s. Everyone in the team of 400 was willing to go the extra mile, with a drought and a one in 500 year flood having occurred just before lockdown. It stretched them, but they came through with a can-do attitude.

The council carried out a digital transformation programme rapidly, with a team of five IT staff clearing 4,989 tickets and enabling 9,000 Teams meetings from the end of March to the end of June. It also set up virtual council meetings, with staff in some cases driving three hours to councillors to deliver iPads. There was more public participation than ever before in council meetings, part of an amazing effort from this local authority.

This is an edited version of Mike Manson’s presentation to the Linked Organisation of Local Authority ICT Societies (LOLA) conference on 27 January. He will be speaking at 11.50am on day one of President’s Week, Monday 7 June

Read more

Socitm report on January’s LOLA conference:
bit.ly/2SyHhJU

ALGIM’s 2020 special awards:
algim.org.nz/2020awards

Auckland Transport announcement of bus capacity feature:
bit.ly/3neTHsz

How to accelerate public sector transformation and deliver digital-first citizen services

1. Digital transformation accelerated

Digital transformation has accelerated quicker than anticipated in the last 12 months, with a recent Dynatrace survey finding 9 out of 10 organisations had accelerated their digital transformation in the last year. McKinsey notes that business adoption of digital services accelerated by the equivalent of five years in just a few weeks. As Jos Creese, former Socitm President notes, the public sector is no different. Both local and central government have been deploying new digital services in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, while the transformation of work has been profound. Most local and central government employees have been digitally enabled to work from home, to ensure critical public services continue to function at a time when they're needed more than ever.

"What would have taken years to achieve before happened in a matter of weeks in a number of public sector organisations. Barriers came down, fears were put aside, and change embraced. From local authorities to health trusts, we have seen innovation and transformation happen at speed."

Jos Creese, former
Socitm president

The ability to drive such profound digital change in such a short

space of time is now held up as an example of what digital transformation can achieve in the public sector. In fact, previous concerns about disenfranchising people or creating digital exclusion from adopting digital too fast, especially for minorities, in many instances has been disproved. Citizens have adapted well to new digital channels and don't want to see a return to the past.

There is a renewed focus on both improving public services and making cost savings through digital initiatives. Hybrid multicloud environments, that are both technology agnostic and flexible, will be critical to delivering the innovative services the public demands and the cost savings needed to balance the books.

"Cloud adoption in the public sector is on the cusp of major growth, partly to support more flexible and resilient business models in a post-Covid world, and partly to exploit emerging technologies such as 'low code' application development, AI and IoT."

Socitm, Cloud computing
report, February 2021

2. More demanding citizens and challenges to address

This increased pace of digital delivery is likely to prove permanent. Citizens are digitally interacting

with local and central government at levels never seen before. The reality is that now citizens are turned on to new digital ways of interacting with public services, few will want to go back to the pre-pandemic norm. This is positive progress, as the cost of serving citizens dramatically reduces online.

However, digital transformation in the public sector is about much more than increasing online interaction to reduce cost. Challenges such as supporting and reducing the number of troubled families, boosting health and social care integration, reducing crime by addressing the causes of crime, improving our environment, and reducing carbon footprint all require an integrated digital response.

This isn't simple and will require multiple agencies, authorities, and departments to work together to deliver joint digital solutions. However, with digital solutions spanning so many organisations, complexity will be unavoidable. Not only that but citizen expectations for these types of services are getting higher by the day. Slowdowns and outages simply aren't acceptable.

Yet stretched public sector IT teams are faced with the challenge of meeting these expectations, while delivering new innovations and working out how to get to grips with the multicloud environments they need to manage.

3. It's all about the cloud... but cloud gets complicated

Digital transformation in the public sector requires cultural and behavioural change, and a complete redesign of IT services to support remodelled digital delivery to the public. Cloud computing is an essential part of services redesign. It's not a new phenomenon; cloud services have been used by the public sector for many years now. However, as new cloud-native technologies are adopted and multicloud environments become the norm, complexity is increasing.

This complexity is driven by a range of factors. Firstly, multicloud environments are highly dynamic. Containers and microservices come and go in seconds. Secondly, they are hybrid, hence public sector organisations are now reliant on multiple technology environments, some of which they have no direct control over. However, a hybrid model is often what delivers the agility and flexibility the public sector needs. Public cloud alone in many cases wouldn't be fit for purpose, while staying wholly on-premises won't deliver the flexibility or agility to deliver digital solutions for the complex challenges the public sector faces.

And thirdly, digital service delivery isn't just spanning multiple clouds, it's utilising services and data from multiple parties. These third parties span both public and private sector organisations as well as a multitude of technology providers, modern platforms such as Kubernetes, and multiple cloud services. The challenge is that when something goes wrong – how do you know what is causing the problem when there are so many moving parts and providers involved in your service delivery chain?

61% of IT environments change every minute or less.

63% of CIOs say the complexity of their cloud environment has surpassed human ability to manage.

69% of CIOs say Kubernetes has resulted in too many moving parts and too much complexity for IT to manage manually.

Dynatrace CIO Research, October 2020

As IT teams look to drive improved outcomes for citizens, they are being stretched more thinly than ever as organisations increasingly rely on these dynamic, more distributed architectures for digital delivery. IT teams are faced with a volume and velocity of data from across their multicloud environments that's beyond human ability to handle. There are simply too many moving parts for IT teams to make sense of it all using traditional methods that involve an array of disconnected monitoring tools and manual processes. The situation has been compounded in recent years as public sector organisations have adopted hybrid cloud services in a piecemeal fashion, leading to a patchwork of incoherent platforms.

4. The need for continuous and automatic observability

Observability in and across multicloud environments is critical, as it's these environments that

power digital services. The challenge with the cloud comes down to a simple concept: you can't manage what you can't see. It may be a simple concept, but it's a far more difficult thing to solve, given the complexity and size of dynamic cloud environments. We're talking about potentially thousands of digital services and millions or even billions of dependencies that might change in milliseconds. That's a lot of data to process in real-time to identify and remediate any issues before they impact the citizen experience.

[A recent Dynatrace study](#)¹ of 700 global enterprise and public sector CIOs found that the average organisation has full observability into only 11% of its application and infrastructure environments. Around the same number (13%) have end-to-end observability into application and website user experience.

"What this means is that over 80% of IT infrastructure, services, applications, and data traffic are not being effectively monitored or managed, simply because of the complexity, scale, diversity, location, and lack of tools."

Jos Creese, former Socitym president

5. Time to automate

Part of the problem here is scale. The sheer volume of data can be overwhelming for many, which makes it almost impossible to drive the critical insights needed to deliver world-class customer experiences. Manual instrumentation efforts of tools are too often piecemeal, time-consuming, and ineffective. Blind spots increase, which perpetuate organisational silos and further impact digital service delivery. Around half (49%) of those global CIOs say they have



limited visibility into how digital services are performing from a user perspective. The same number say IT and business teams work in silos.

“One in two CIOs say they have limited visibility into how digital services are performing from a user perspective”

**Dynatrace CIO Research,
October 2020**

As a result, organisations are increasingly turning to AI and automation to achieve end-to-end observability at scale. These efforts must begin with automatically discovering and mapping all the components and dependencies of the technology stack – from the underlying infrastructure to networks, hosts, processes, services, apps, and websites.

Next, AI tools can go to work learning what “normal” looks like, determining whether a problem is likely to impact citizens or civil servants, and then performing root-cause analysis to help IT teams understand what went wrong. These same insights can in time be used to optimise digital experiences, automate cloud operations, and free up the time of developers to focus on value creation rather than routine tasks.

6. A digital future

To drive sustainable digital transformation, public sector bodies across the world are embracing new ways of working. For example, county councils such as Worcestershire, which has launched 18 new digital services in under a year, and NHS trusts that are embracing new technologies to deliver remote healthcare innovation are driving better and more efficient public services.

To maintain productivity, meet citizen demands, and build more resilient delivery models, IT leaders need to transform the way their teams work – enabling them to innovate faster, collaborate more efficiently, and deliver greater value to the public.

Many IT departments consist of multiple siloed teams focused on designing, building, deploying, and running services for their organisation and the public at large. These teams often use multiple tools to monitor and manage everything from application and infrastructure performance to citizen experience. As a result, there’s no single, consistent source of truth or unifying language across the organisation, making it more difficult for teams to collaborate effectively. This siloed visibility also makes it difficult to achieve a true understanding of the impact IT is having on key outcomes and identify the investment value and risk behind digital innovation efforts.

Organisations need to find a way to consolidate their fragmented monitoring tools into a single platform that all teams can use to maintain real-time visibility into critical KPIs.

Utilising a more unified, collaborative operating model will be essential to the public sector’s ability to keep up with the accelerating pace of digital transformation in the years ahead. Whether it’s developers collaborating with ops, or ops with social care, or educational services with developers, equipping teams with a single, consistent source of truth about digital services enables everyone to get on the same page quickly. This gives everybody a single, unified language with precise answers at their fingertips, so digital teams can better understand the

impact their efforts are having on the citizens they serve. As a result, teams can make more data-backed decisions, so they can continuously deliver better outcomes for UK citizens through digital services.

This is where automatic and intelligent observability comes in – offering one source of truth to teams across the organisation. Moreover, this intelligence will provide the common language that unites teams and drives the collaboration needed to deliver public services that are fit for the next decade and beyond.

7. The Dynatrace difference

Dynatrace combines a unified data platform with automatic and intelligent observability at scale that delivers precise answers about the performance and security of applications, supplying this single source of truth CIOs are seeking. Whether it’s developers collaborating with ops, or ops with business teams, or the business with developers, everyone can get on the same page quickly, as the data they’re using to shape their perspectives are from the same source – not different data from different tools, with no connective tissue between them.

With answers at their fingertips, data-backed decisions, and real-time visibility into business KPIs, teams can continuously deliver better digital business outcomes across all channels, more efficiently than ever before.

References:

¹ *New research shows CIOs need greater cross-team collaboration to drive digital transformation:* bit.ly/3woc7KL

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A career climbing towards accessibility

Socitm's new non-executive director on why he has made accessibility the focus of his career



Kevin White

Head of digital accessibility for the Scottish Government

Kevin has worked in user-centred design and digital accessibility lead roles for the Scottish Government since 2016. He started his career as a software engineer, before a degree in psychology led him to shift into user experience and accessibility.

He worked for public sector clients as a consultant, then an increased focus on accessibility led to two years with the W3C and becoming an organiser of Accessibility Scotland (accessibility.scot).

In February 2021 Kevin joined Socitm as a non-executive director, with responsibilities for equality, diversity and inclusion.

Q. How did you become a specialist in accessibility?

I started work as a software engineer and tended to work on front-end interfaces more than back-end components. This work was really enjoyable but over the years I found the human/technology interface much more interesting. At the time there weren't many user-centred design courses so I studied psychology with the Open University and drew on many of the aspects of perception and cognition to help in the design process.

Creating digital products that are usable by disabled people interested me as a worthwhile challenge. This started when I was working on early versions of Blackwell's Online Bookshop in the late 1990s. As I started doing user research working with disabled people I found that my technical background helped me understand how accessibility issues were caused and the impact they had. Having come from that technical background I was able to explain issues much more readily to teams and to help find accessible solutions that met business needs.

In 2015, I was hugely privileged to join the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative to work on some of its resources. Working with some of the most knowledgeable people in the world on accessibility was tremendous. I learned a huge amount and found that I did know a wee bit about this topic after all.

Around 2017 I and a few others with a strong interest in accessibility began Accessibility Scotland. One of the key aims was to create a local event that was properly inclusive and brought together designers, developers, disabled people and interested organisations to share and learn more about how to improve digital services.

My initial role in the Scottish Government was to lead user-centred design activities as part of its digital transformation work. Given that public sector services should be usable by all, accessibility and inclusion were key elements to this.

Working on accessibility within the Scottish Government is an amazing challenge with potentially opportunity to improve how we provide digital services across the public sector in Scotland so that we are not excluding anyone.

Q. What does your work for the Scottish Government involve?

You could look at accessibility in two ways, technical and cultural. The technical side of things involves creating code and content that meets the standards and does not cause barriers for disabled people. Technical accessibility is relatively speaking pretty straightforward. Digital products and services are a long way from being accessible by default but we largely know how to do this.



Image of Kevin climbing at Craig More near Crieff

Creating a culture which can deliver accessible products is a bit more challenging. For example, when procuring a website or app it is easy to say what standards it should meet. However, the procurement team needs to know what this means, those assessing the tenders need to know what a good response looks like, those carrying out user acceptance testing need to know about the technical standards to test against and what that looks like and deployment teams need to appreciate how the new product supports assistive technology so they can provide appropriate guidance.

My role is to try to create the culture. Initially this has involved a lot of the technical activities; reviewing websites and documents, creating guidance and training, convincing service owners that accessibility needs to be a priority. As the accessibility team grows the goal is to do more to change awareness about accessibility and develop capacity and capability across the whole organisation.

Q. How can accessibility become part of the culture of government?

I don't think this question should or can be confined to government whether that is national or local. In many cases the public sector works in partnership with the private sector. If the private sector is not engaged with the accessibility agenda then public sector organisations will struggle to bring about meaningful change. With that in mind, I think building a culture in all levels of government or indeed any organisation has some key features.

Being clear about what you consider accessibility to be is probably a good first step. For me, digital accessibility is about ensuring that digital services are not built in a way that would introduce barriers to disabled people. Some people have a broader perspective what accessible means and might include things like translations. These are really important but I would say that this is about 'inclusion' rather than 'accessibility'.

This leads to the first big challenge in changing the culture, which is that accessibility is a technical discipline that many people need to have awareness of and responsibility for, but don't necessarily have the technical awareness to be able to deliver.

Training is a big part of this but scale is also a huge challenge, not just in terms of numbers of people but also changing ingrained approaches. For example, my children have been taught how to use Microsoft Word at school but not how to use it to create accessible content. They would have taken that learning into the workplace where it would need to be unpicked and put back together with the accessibility knowledge. This extends to developers and how they are trained as well.

I think another key point for organisations is to stop thinking about accessibility as something that can be bolted-on. Products can be created accessibly or inaccessibly. It is a quality of the work that goes into the creation process, not a feature. This means that thinking with accessibility in mind needs to be a part of everything we do, not just part of what we deliver.

Q. What does your work with Socitm involve?

My work with Socitm is at an early stage. My hope is that I can provide a voice that encourages people to think about their work and how what they do might enable more diverse and equal access to services and work environments. We don't have a choice when it comes to public services, we can't have someone else pick up our bins or submit planning applications to other organisations. This means that we, as public service providers, must go that extra mile to understand diverse perspectives and create services that do not create barriers.

Q. What do you enjoy doing outside work?

Given half the chance I would spend too much time reading, particularly sci-fi and fantasy, or playing role-playing and board games. I am possibly just a walking techie stereotype! For the past six or seven years I have run a role-playing group for a local autism charity.

That sort of sedentary activity, while great for my mental health, would be rubbish for my physical well-being. To counter this I enjoy climbing with my younger son and am lucky enough to live close to a huge indoor climbing centre. I have also got into power-lifting as a result of my older son's interest. Mixing up reading and physical activity, I have an allotment which I wrestle with most weekends while listening to audio books to distract me from my war on weeds.

Kevin White will be chairing day one of President's Week, Monday 7 June

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Local and national events calendar

June 2021		
Date	Event	Location
7 th -10 th	President's Week – Post-Covid recovery	Virtual
18 th	Share Local – North-west	
25 th	Share Local – South-west	
29 th	Share Local – Midlands	
July 2021		
Date	Event	Location
6 th	Share Local – East	Virtual
7 th	Share Local – Yorkshire & Humber	
14 th -16 th	Share National – Ethical use of emerging technologies and data	
16 th	Share Local – North-east	
September 2021		
Date	Event	Location
9 th	Share Local – London & South	Virtual
10 th	Share Local – Scotland	
	Partner day	Physical (tbc)
17 th	Share Local – North-west	Virtual
23 rd -24 th	Share National – Covid recovery	
30 th	Share Local – Midlands	Physical (tbc)



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- Digital and IT strategy development



Smart sourcing

- Insourcing, outsourcing and multi sourcing
- Shared services
- Commercial and Procurement support