Towards Better Service Delivery: A Comprehensive Redesign of Redbridge Council's Website Content

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Abstract

This study investigated the content design challenges of the Redbridge Council website, showing issues these create for operational efficiency and residents' access to online services. The project covers various aspects surrounding language, navigation, content management, accessibility, mobile optimisation, search functionality, and search engine optimisation (SEO).

Results indicated that content design issues are (a) negatively correlated with residents' ability to find information and complete tasks, (b) negatively correlated with overall resident satisfaction, and (c) positively correlated with the number of complaints and requests for assistance received by council staff. The research identified underlying causes, including a reactive approach to content management and fragmented authorship across various teams.

Recommendations were developed to address these issues, such as establishing a centralised content management team, implementing a new style guide, providing web author training and conducting a full overhaul of the current content. An implementation plan was proposed for this overhaul, focusing on sequential content area improvements. This provides a step-by step blueprint for other public services, particularly local authorities, wishing to transform their website’s content.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The London Borough of Redbridge (LBR) serves a diverse community of over 310,000 residents (Office of National Statistics, 2023). Our responsibilities include education, social services, housing, urban planning, transportation, waste management, environmental protection, and recreational activities. Governed by elected councillors from different wards, LBR sets policies, allocates budgets, and oversees service delivery. We engage with residents, businesses, and stakeholders to address local issues, drive economic growth, and foster community pride.

The Council website, redbridge.gov.uk, serves as the primary resource for anyone seeking information about the council and its services. The website was launched in 2016 along with several microsites and provides essential information and services. However, the content is outdated and scattered and does not serve our users' needs.

The review and rebuild of content will be critical to our new 'front door' model. The term 'front door' in the context of the LBR refers to the initial points of contact and channels through which residents access council services. The plan involves developing a tiered and targeted contact model, implementing a multi-channel strategy, and adopting a unified approach to data. The reasoning behind this model is to provide easy access to information, improve customer interactions, and ensure consistent service standards across the council.

Our long-term goal with the 'content project' is to deliver outstanding online services that are more straightforward, efficient, and user-focused, ensuring that every visitor can easily accomplish their task. Visitors come to our council website with specific goals or needs. To create effective content, we must understand their intentions and behaviours, ensuring they can access the information they need swiftly and effortlessly.

The content project includes assessing current content and how our residents interact with it, revamping all our current content, and developing a long-term and sustainable content strategy.

1.2 Motivation

Our website's main function is to provide residents with easy access to information and council services online. However, finding relevant content has become increasingly difficult due to a buildup of outdated and irrelevant material. This clutter, likened to a 'kitchen drawer' filled with unnecessary items, distracts from the useful information and services we offer, making it hard for residents to find what they need.

A significant issue is the inconsistency in the tone and quality of our content. We lack a unified voice, which restricts our ability to establish trust and strong connections with residents. It is important that we communicate in a clear, supportive manner, especially for those facing stressful situations, such as potential homelessness. Our content must be simple and easy to understand to help residents use the services they need.

The website does not adhere consistently to accessibility standards, Government Digital Service (GDS) principles, or the Council's style guidelines. Accessibility is not only a legal requirement but also crucial for ensuring all residents, including those with disabilities or limited English proficiency can access our services. As one of the UK's most ethnically diverse local authorities, we must prioritise clear, jargon-free language to accommodate our diverse community.

Another issue is that our content remains static and outdated, lacking updates based on user interactions and data. This makes it less useful over time and can drive residents to seek help through other channels like phone support and social media, placing additional strain on these services. Inconsistent and outdated content further erodes trust and transparency, which are essential for maintaining a reliable relationship with our community.

Moreover, the site features many 'decorative' images that do not add value and can slow down page load times, particularly on mobile devices. These elements detract from the overall user experience (UX) rather than enhance it.

To address these issues, a comprehensive content overhaul is necessary. This will streamline the website, improve accessibility, and ensure that the information is up-to-date and relevant. By making these improvements, we can better serve our residents, reduce the pressure on our internal resources, and restore trust in our digital services.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The project is focused on the following aims and objectives:

- The redesigned website aims to offer a user-friendly platform where residents can easily find information and access services. By decluttering content and improving information architecture, we aim to create a more intuitive and efficient user journey.
- Improving online content means residents can handle interactions with us online. This shift towards self-service means reducing enquiries through more traditional channels (e.g. calling the Contact Centre), alleviating pressure on service departments.
- The new content strictly adheres to accessibility standards, ensuring that all residents, regardless of their abilities or language proficiency, can access council services. This commitment to inclusivity is essential for serving our diverse population effectively.
- A unified tone and voice across the website is important for building trust and providing clear communication. Ensuring content is accurate, up-to-date, and relevant helps to maintain reliability and usefulness.
- Improving the website's Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) make our pages more visible on search engines, helping residents find relevant information more easily. This process involves optimising content and metadata to improve search rankings.

- The project aims to make the content creation process more efficient. This can be achieved through training subject experts (individuals working in specific service areas), a new style guide and a long-term content-governance plan.

1.4 Report structure

For this report, we will examine the issues with the current website, exploring how they impact residents' ability to access information and services, and identifying the underlying causes of these problems. We will investigate how the content project can address both organisational goals and the diverse needs of LBR residents. To build a strong foundation for this work, we will first review existing research on the principles of content design and its importance, the necessity of digital service excellence in the public sector, and the implications of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) for e-government services. This review is essential to understand best practices and theoretical frameworks that will inform our approach and highlight knowledge gaps that need addressing.

The report will then outline a research design tailored to address these gaps, detailing the combination of methods to be used, along with ethical considerations, potential limitations, and mitigation strategies. Next, there will be a discussion on findings from both secondary and primary data sources. Secondary data will include insights from pair writing and interview sessions, while primary data will be drawn from GovMetric feedback, Google Analytics, Recite Me data, benchmarking, and ‘pop-up’ user research. Next, there will be a critical analysis of the research, suggestions for further exploration, and the study’s relevance to the broader context of digital service design. The report will make actionable recommendations and present an implementation plan to ensure meaningful improvements to the website.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Content design: what it is and why it matters

Content design is a specialised field within digital design that focuses on creating user-centred, accessible, and efficient digital content. Originating in the late 1990s, content design initially encompassed basic technical skills such as CSS, HTML, and typesetting for the web (Bruton, 2022). Over the years, it evolved into a broader discipline that incorporates user experience principles (Ibid.). In fact, leading companies like Google and Airbnb prioritise content designers within their design teams (Stevens, 2023). For them, content design is not merely an afterthought or an additional task once the product is finished; instead, it is a fundamental part of the design process from the very start (Ibid.). As Sarah Winters, the founder of Content Design London and a pioneer in the field puts it, *"content design is a way of thinking"* (Sarah Winters, 2019).

The discipline is more than 'just words'. Through user research, it begins with understanding what users truly need. Instead of asking *"How should I write this?"* the focus shifts to *"What format will best meet this need?"* This might include text, images, charts, links, calendars, or Q&A sections, depending on what serves the user best (Winters and Edwards, 2024). On government platforms, the tendency has often been to publish information from an institutional viewpoint rather than focusing on user-friendliness (Government Digital Service, 2016). The latter approach ensures content can be understood and acted upon (Ibid.).

Content design plays an important role by providing users with clear, concise, and digestible information. One of the challenges users face online is cognitive overload, where too much information can lead to choice paralysis and disengagement (Ellis, n.d.). Content design strategies like 'chunking' (breaking information into smaller sections) and progressive disclosure (gradually revealing information) can mitigate cognitive load (Ibid.). These methods allow users to process information more easily, which enhances their engagement and satisfaction with digital products.

Consistent language and tone, meanwhile, helps users feel more comfortable and familiar with a brand, building a seamless experience that improves brand loyalty and retention (Podmajersky, 2020). Good content design does more than passively communicate. Designers *"invent and craft their audience"*, actively shaping user perceptions and transforming the user experience into a cohesive journey (Portmann, 2022). In an era where users are overwhelmed with digital content, authentic communication is crucial (Pepper Content, 2023). Consumers are drawn to brands perceived as genuine, and authenticity helps build lasting connections (Ibid.). Content design helps build this authenticity by prioritising transparency, consistency, and alignment with brand values, which leads to increased user trust (Ibid.).

Content design is central to creating accessible and inclusive digital experiences, which ensures all users, including those with disabilities, can engage with content on equal terms. It should accommodate users with various needs, such as visual impairments, neurodivergence, or language difficulties, creating an equitable digital experience (Vinney, 2023). This is particularly significant in a diverse society where 22% of the UK population has some form of disability (Nomensa, 2022). Accessibility features such as adjustable font sizes, alt text for images, and colour contrast adjustments ensure a wider audience can access digital content effectively (Pun, 2016). Clear, straightforward language benefits users who may struggle with complex terminology, including non-native speakers (Campbell, 2023). In New Zealand, the government recently made plain language a legal requirement for public services, recognising its importance in improving accessibility (Ibid.).

2.2 The imperative of digital service excellence in the public sphere

Digital transformation in the public realm is increasingly crucial. Millions of citizens interact with government services every week to handle essential tasks, from registering life events to applying for benefits like Universal Credit (Central Digital & Data Office, 2022). We have had some great digital success stories in the UK, including the 'GOV.UK' platform, which *"epitomises the seamless integration of digital technologies in public services"* (Salesforce, 2024). Over the past 25 years, 11 national digital strategies have

been introduced (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2023). However, successive governments have struggled to achieve lasting transformation and systemic digital integration (Ibid.).

One of the primary drivers for digital transformation in public services is the promise of efficiency and cost savings. It has been estimated that that fully digitised government services could unlock as much as $1 trillion annually in economic value worldwide through productivity enhancements and reduced operational expenses (Dilmegani et al., 2014). Digital services reduce the need for physical paperwork, postal communications, and in-person interactions, leading to substantial savings on logistical and administrative costs (Mack, 2023). Digital automation, meanwhile, minimises routine manual tasks, which accelerates service delivery and reduces the burden on government employees (Nayeem, 2024). There are also opportunities to minimise failure demand by simplifying eligibility criteria. By providing clear information, users can easily assess whether they qualify for a service, need an alternative, or should refrain from applying altogether (Ibid.).

The private sector has led the way in demonstrating the efficiency gains that digitalisation can achieve. Companies have leveraged end-to-end digitisation, agile project management, and product-centric designs to optimise operational efficiency (Central Digital & Data Office, 2023). For the government, which spends £400 billion annually on public services, making these efficiency gains is especially significant (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2023); given constant budget constraints, embracing them is not just a matter of convenience, but a necessity to maintain service delivery.

By adopting a citizen-centric approach, governments can shift from rigid service models to more personalised interactions. Features like unique digital IDs and ‘tell us once’ systems simplify access and reduce repetitive data entry, creating smoother experiences (Bertrand & McQueen, 2023). Digital platforms enable 24/7 access to services, ensuring that even those in remote or otherwise underserved areas can connect to resources (Dennis, 2023).

Another significant aspect of digitalisation within the public service sphere is its benefits regarding resilience and adaptability. The COVID-19 pandemic served to highlight this.

Many governments had to transition key services to digital platforms almost overnight. This accelerated shift exposed both the opportunities and limitations of government digitisation. The UK government's digital infrastructure was unable to accommodate to the increased demand in benefits, call centres were overwhelmed and websites crashed (Eggers et al., 2021). Yet, the move to digital platforms for telehealth, virtual courts, and education exemplified how government agencies could leverage technology to maintain essential services despite physical distancing and other disruptions (Ibid.).

Resilience-building in digital government involves creating flexible and adaptive systems that can respond effectively to disruptions. Strategies like cybersecurity enhancements, AI-based threat detection, and robust Identity and Access Management (IAM) systems are essential for safeguarding public trust and ensuring the security of public services (Nayeem, 2024). Moving forward, governments are advised to plan for continuous disruption by investing in adaptive technologies and preparing playbooks for various contingencies, helping agencies remain agile and responsive to future challenges (Keegan, 2023).

Leveraging data to inform policy decisions is an imperative part of digital service transformation. Governments that use data proactively can anticipate citizen needs, tailoring services based on data insights in much the same way that companies like Netflix personalise user experiences (Eggers et al., 2021). Data transparency also enhances accountability, as governments can make informed decisions that are easily shared with the public, promoting trust through measurable outcomes (Reading Room, n.d.).

Despite the above, digital service excellence in government faces several challenges that require careful navigation. Legacy IT systems present a significant hurdle; these outdated infrastructures are often incompatible with modern technologies, delaying integration and innovation (Salesforce, 2024). Siloed data and fragmented systems across departments impede information sharing, causing inefficiencies and inconsistent user experiences (Ibid.).

It is important to recognise that, despite efforts towards digital inclusivity, many citizens still lack the necessary digital skills or access to effectively engage with online services

(Haldrup, 2018). Public organisations must ensure digital channels are complemented by alternative methods to maintain accessibility for vulnerable populations (OECD, 2022).

Finally, resistance to change within public services is a notable issue. Employees can feel unprepared or threatened by the shift to digital-first operations, slowing adoption (Salesforce, 2024). Overcoming this requires the development of enabling measures, such as comprehensive training programmes and diversification of human resource profiles (European Committee on Democracy and Governance, 2021).

2.3 Technology Acceptance Model: implications for e-government services

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is one of the most widely used frameworks for understanding user acceptance of information technology (IT) (Lee et al., 2003). It has been widely utilised to study user acceptance across various systems and technologies, including software applications like word processing, spreadsheets, and e-commerce platforms (Carter and Belanger, 2005). TAM argues that two core factors, Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), determine an individual's attitude toward using a system, which subsequently influences their behavioural intention to use that system, and ultimately, their actual system use (Ibid.).

Perceived Usefulness (PU) refers to the extent to which a person believes that using a particular system will enhance their performance or help them achieve specific tasks (Davis, 1989). In simple terms, it answers the question: "Will using this system make my job or tasks easier or more effective?" Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), on the other hand, refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system will be free from effort (Ibid.). This construct addresses how user-friendly or intuitive the technology is perceived to be. If users believe that a system is easy to navigate and does not require significant effort or technical knowledge, they are more likely to use it.

One of the key insights of TAM is the relationship between PU and PEOU. Specifically, when a system is easy to use, it is more likely to be perceived as useful (Carter and Belanger, 2005). This is because if users do not face obstacles or challenges while

interacting with a system, they are more likely to see it as capable of helping them perform tasks effectively (Ibid.)

In the context of e-government, TAM shows us that citizens are more likely to use platforms that efficiently provide essential services, like paying taxes or applying for permits, and are easy to navigate. User-friendly interfaces, for example, ensures smooth access to information and tasks, thus driving adoption (Davis, 1989).

TAM also highlights the role of external variables in influencing PU and PEOU. External factors could include demographic variables (such as age, experience with technology, and gender), which may affect how individuals perceive the usefulness and ease of use of the digital services offered (Marangunic and Granic, 2014). For example, younger or more tech-savvy individuals might find digital platforms easier to use and more useful than older or less experienced users (Kheshin and Saleeb, 2020). This implies that when designing e-government services, it is important to account for diverse user needs and technological competencies to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

Nevertheless, it is worth being aware of TAM's limitations. One key issue is its reliance on subjective measures like behavioural intention and social influence, which can be difficult to quantify in observational research (Malatji et al., 2020). It has been argued that the model does not account for societal norms, individual characteristics, or values, which are important in shaping technology adoption (Ibid.). TAM was initially developed for individual use, not for organisational contexts where factors like policies and task rules are important (Ajibade, 2018). This is of course a key limitation at LBR, where adoption is influenced by institutional policies and culture. There have been attempts to address this limitation within modified models, but it is unclear whether this has been fully achieved (Ibid.).

2.4 Conclusion and knowledge gaps

While the literature provides a robust theoretical foundation, there are significant gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed in the research. In general, many of the concepts discussed are challenging to measure in practice. They often rely on subjective factors

such as perceived ease of use and usefulness, which can vary across different user groups. There is a lack of granular insights into LBR's current user base and their specific needs. Existing research assumes a generalised user profile, but LBR's demographic diversity, encompassing differences in digital literacy, socio-economic status, and language proficiency, necessitates tailored strategies.

Equally, there is room for exploration in terms of the application of digital service excellence principles within the context of a local government like LBR. Many studies provide frameworks or guidelines for e-government services, often focusing on efficiency, transparency, and cost reduction. However, these models are typically based on large-scale national governments or organisations and may not fully account for the specific needs of smaller, resource-constrained local authorities.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, assessing TAM has highlighted why redesigning LBR's website is essential. TAM suggests that users are more likely to engage with a system that they perceive as both useful and easy to use. By improving the website's content and design to make it clearer and easier to navigate, the redesign will enhance both its perceived usefulness and ease of use, directly encouraging more users to adopt and interact with it.

The chapter on content design is particularly relevant, as it establishes the core principles that should guide the redesign process. Content design is not merely about updating a website's visual elements or information structure; it is about creating user-centred, actionable content that meets the specific needs of the target audience. For LBR, adopting these principles mean designing content that is both accessible and effective in addressing the diverse needs of its residents. This chapter sets the foundation for the research ahead by emphasising the strategic importance of user-centred content.

The review of digital service excellence in the public sector shows the importance of redesigning LBR's website to align with broader digital organisational goals. By recognising the challenges and opportunities inherent in digital government, the review connects the website redesign to key objectives, such as reducing demand, improving access to services and promoting equity. These principles again help us understand how

the redesigned website could meet the varied needs of LBR residents, enhance the user experience, and contribute towards a more inclusive and efficient digital eco-system.

Chapter 3: Research design

3.1 Research questions

The research will endeavour to answer the following questions:

1. What are the issues with the current website, and how do these impact residents' ability to access information and services?
2. What are the underlying causes of the current website's issues?
3. How can the content project address LBR’s organisational needs?
4. How can the content project ensure the website meets the diverse needs of LBR residents?

3.2 Research approach

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach tailored to the specific needs of the project, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative methods provide measurable insights, offering data-driven evidence on user interactions, performance metrics, and engagement trends. Qualitative methods add depth, exploring the underlying reasons behind user behaviours and attitudes, and looking at best practices through benchmarking. These approaches allow for a nuanced understanding of user experiences, ensuring that decisions are informed by both hard data and human-centred insights.

3.3 Research methods

3.3.1 Quantitative methods

- **Google Analytics (GA)** will be used to gather data on user behaviour and website performance. This will help to identify high-traffic pages and problematic areas.

Key data includes page views, engagement times, bounce rates and referral sources. These metrics will help identify high-traffic pages, problematic areas of the website, and user preferences.

- **GovMetric** is a customer feedback and analytics tool that helps organisations measure satisfaction. Key data includes satisfaction ratings, comments, and volume of feedback. These metrics will help highlight areas where residents face challenges, where we should prioritise improvements, and how we can enhance overall service delivery.
- **Recite Me** is an accessibility tool on our website that provides customisable features like text-to-speech, translation, and styling options to make the platform more inclusive for diverse users. Looking at a Recite Me report will help us to understand the accessibility needs within the borough.

3.3.2 Qualitative methods

- **'Pop up' user research** will be delivered in a local library. Various established user research techniques will be used, such as card sorting and prototype. This research will help us understand usability issues, content gaps, and areas for improvement in the website's structure.
- **Benchmarking** will be conducted to compare LBR's website with other local authority sites. We can learn from other councils', rather than 'reinventing the wheel'. This method will also use quantitative elements, such as comparing 'readability scores'.
- **Pair writing and interview sessions** with web authors and service area experts that other team members conducted will be analysed for secondary data. These sessions looked at the accuracy and relevance of content, how we can develop user-friendly language and tone, and address specific service area issues empathetically. Semi-structured interviews complemented the pair writing sessions, providing deeper insights into departmental needs and resident concerns.

3.4 Ethical considerations

In the case of GA, our data is anonymised, reducing privacy concerns. We have a clear privacy policy on the website that informs users about data collection practices (London Borough of Redbridge, n.d.). Similarly, the GovMetric and Recite Me data is aggregated and anonymised, eliminating privacy concerns related to personally identifiable information.

When conducting benchmarking against other local authority sites, it is important to respect copyright and intellectual property rights. Any use of other councils' content or design elements should be for analytical purposes only, with proper attribution given if necessary. Using secondary data from the pair writing and interview sessions with web authors also raises ethical considerations. The data may contain sensitive information about LBR processes and challenges, necessitating responsible handling and consideration of potential impacts.

Regarding the user research, it has received approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Informed consent is a primary ethical focus. All participants will receive an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, tasks, potential risks, data usage, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Participants provided both written and verbal consent before engaging in the research.

The research design ensures that no personal data will be retained, and all collected information is anonymised and securely stored. The process complies with relevant data protection regulations, including GDPR, and all data will be deleted within a 6-month period. The study addresses potential participant discomfort by allowing them to pause or stop at any time during tasks, mitigating possible frustration.

3.5 Limitations and mitigations strategies

Method	Limitation	Mitigation strategy
Google Analytics	Lack of access to demographic data.	Supplement with Recite Me report to learn about diverse needs.
GovMetric feedback	Feedback likely to disproportionately reflect the views of highly dissatisfied users.	Combine qualitative methods to provide context.
‘Pop up’ user research	May not represent a fully diverse resident sample.	Analyse data with an awareness of potential sampling bias, ensuring findings are contextualised properly.
‘Pop up’ user research	Researcher bias.	Regularly reflect on personal biases during data analysis and ensure findings align with observed patterns.
Benchmarking	Focussing on competitors may limit innovation.	Use benchmarking as a guide, not a limit.
Benchmarking	Requires considerable manual resources to collect and analyse data.	Focus on relevant metrics.
Pair writing and interview sessions	Expert bias (prioritising professionals’ views over residents’ experiences).	Balance with user-led data.

Chapter 4: Research findings and analysis

4.1 Pair writings and interview sessions

In total, 4 pair writings with web authors and service area experts, involving semi-structured interviews, were carried out.

One issue identified is the reactive nature of content updates. Content changes are often driven by complaints, service disruptions (e.g., recycling trucks out of service), or other immediate events. This reactive approach limits the ability of content editors to take a proactive stance in identifying user problems, utilising data like GA, or exploring innovative ways to meet user needs.

"…as a department you're trying to foresee problems before they happen. You try and reduce the impact. But obviously quite a lot of [content editing] is [done in] retrospect." - Interview B

The reliance on reactive updates creates a cycle where service disruptions lead to complaints, which then necessitate content creation or edits. This further exacerbates the difficulty of maintaining a structured and user-centred approach to website content.

Content authorship on the website is fragmented, with authors balancing web updates alongside other responsibilities. While some dedicate only 1-2 hours weekly to web content, emergencies often shift their focus to full-time content editing temporarily.

Publishing workflows vary, with most authors submitting updates to the digital team for moderation, a process generally viewed as efficient. Authors sometimes bypass formal processes to expedite changes by contacting teams directly. Coordination between systems remains a challenge, with authors unable to access certain areas for timely updates, due to their publishing rights.

"…so, there's certain parts of it I can't access [to update that area of the website], which is obviously annoying if I need to make quick changes to it. I have to contact someone else." - Interview C

Complaints heavily influence content updates, creating a reactive feedback loop. Issues are reported through emails, customer contact centres and social media, prompting urgent updates. Despite alerts being added to the website, some residents fail to notice, leading to repeat complaints. This reliance on complaints emphasises the need for

better systems to track and pre-emptively address issues.

"…So, you then get the same email from several different people, all with different tones of anger… I've already put an alert on [the website] saying there's an issue…" - Interview C

Authors struggle to incorporate data effectively into their workflows. While some expressed interest in using analytics or feedback from tools like GovMetric, many were unsure how to access or apply these insights. Testing content before publishing is rare due to time constraints, and iteration often occurs on live systems based on complaints and calls.

"…it would be nice to see the feedback that has come from GovMetric and analytics for our pages [about] Council tax and business rates…" - Interview D

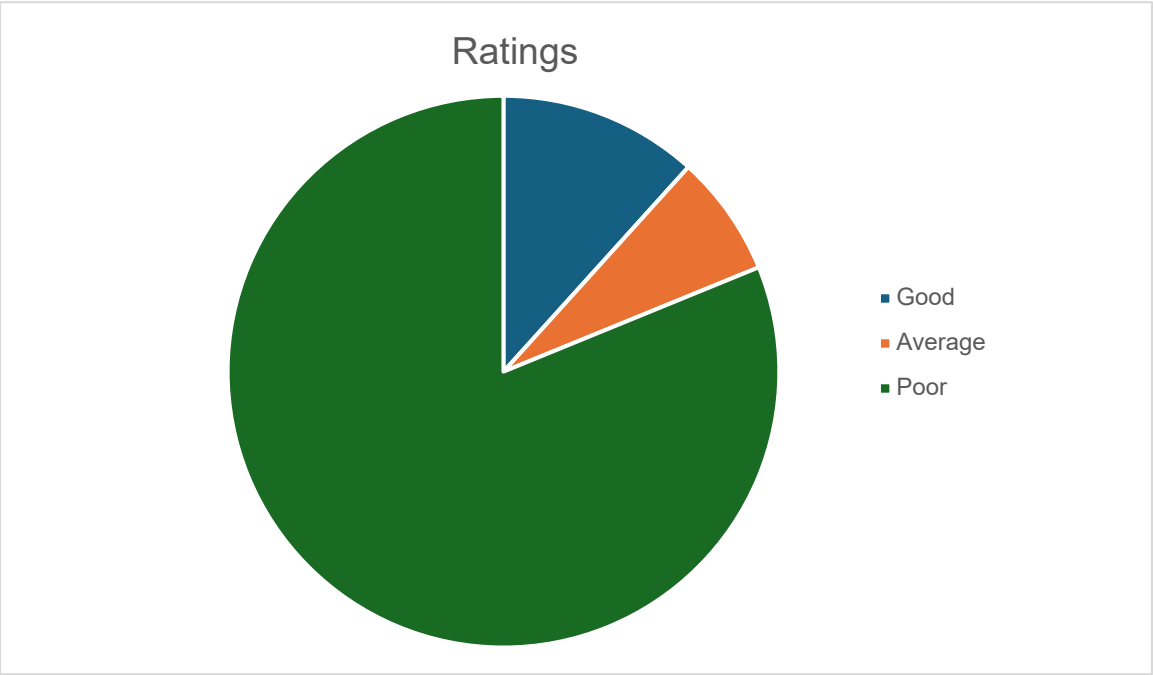
Content responsibilities are divided among teams, granting authors autonomy but creating challenges in maintaining consistent user experiences. This responsibility division can result in duplicated or missed content connections and delays in updates, particularly for changes affecting multiple areas, such as price adjustments. Participants acknowledged the drawbacks, citing inconsistent user journeys and increased complaints.

"…[Residents] do screen grabs and say, 'well, this is live on your website'. But we're telling them [that part of the website] hasn't been refreshed. But obviously the onus is on us to make sure that the content is correct…" – Interview B

Authors face technical challenges, such as formatting and design issues, and seek better tools and support to address these problems. Mobile and tablet optimisation was highlighted as an area of focus, with some authors using browser previews to check responsiveness. However, broader testing practices remain limited.

4.2 GovMetric feedback

I took a sample of 1450 recent GovMetric feedback submissions. Each entry shows the URL, rating ('poor', 'average' and 'good') and comment the user left.



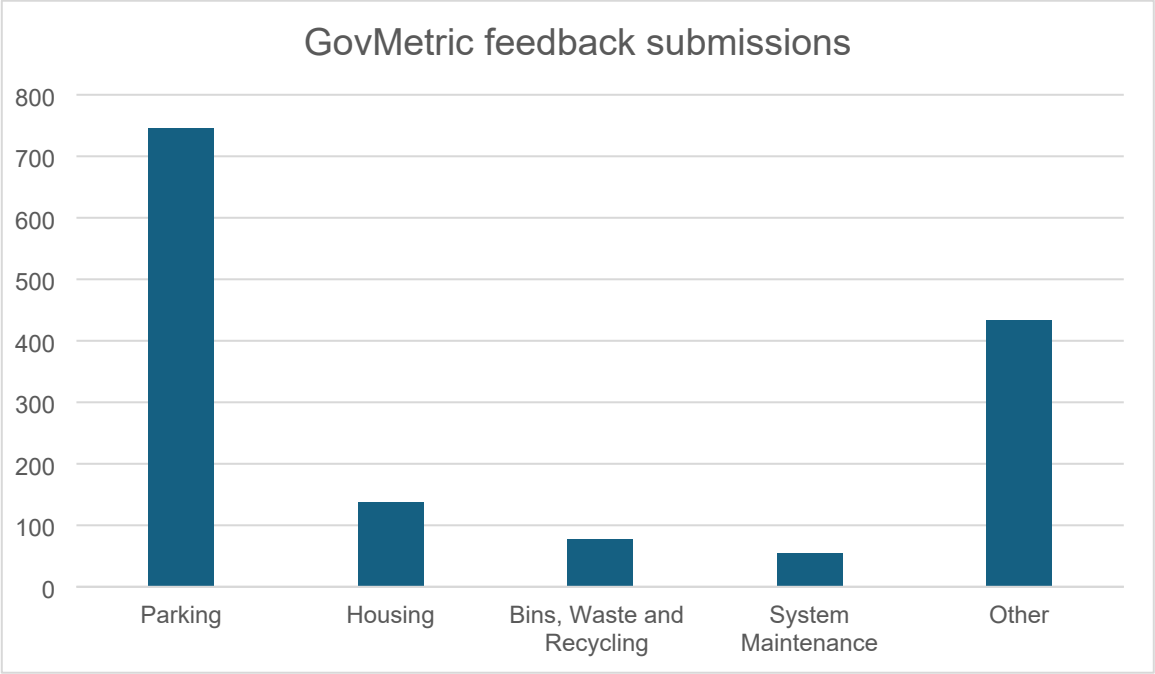
There were 169 'good' ratings (12%), 103 'average' ratings (7%), 1,173 'poor' ratings (81%) and 5 void submissions. The distribution indicates the vast majority of users are dissatisfied with their experience. However, this must be balanced with the assumption that residents are more likely to provide feedback if they are unhappy.

Comments tied to 'poor' ratings often cited challenges such as difficulty finding information and issues with form completion. Users also reported technical problems, including slow website performance, unresponsive pages, broken links, and pages failing to load. Many expressed frustrations over being unable to access their housing accounts and the lack of contact details, making it hard to reach the relevant departments. A content redesign would not address the underlying backend issues. However, it could greatly improve the accessibility of information, simplify form processes, and clarify instructions to enhance the user experience. Making contact details more visible could be an effective

part of the redesign, but it is crucial to ensure this does not overwhelm staff and that more complex or urgent customer concerns are prioritised.

Despite this, there was some positive feedback. Comments associated with ‘good’ ratings frequently praised the ease of use and clarity of information provided. For example, comments described how the website can be helpful for elderly people and that certain reminders can be useful.

Nearly half of the feedback (746 submissions) concerned the Parking area, with 90% giving poor ratings, more than the overall rate. Of these, 541 submissions specifically addressed penalty charge notices (PCNs). Users found the process cumbersome and reported issues with the application forms not working properly. They also expressed a need for better communication and support from the Council. While it is likely that residents are more prone to frustration with our website when already upset about paying a parking fine, the data clearly underscores the need to prioritise PCN-related content, and Parking content in general.

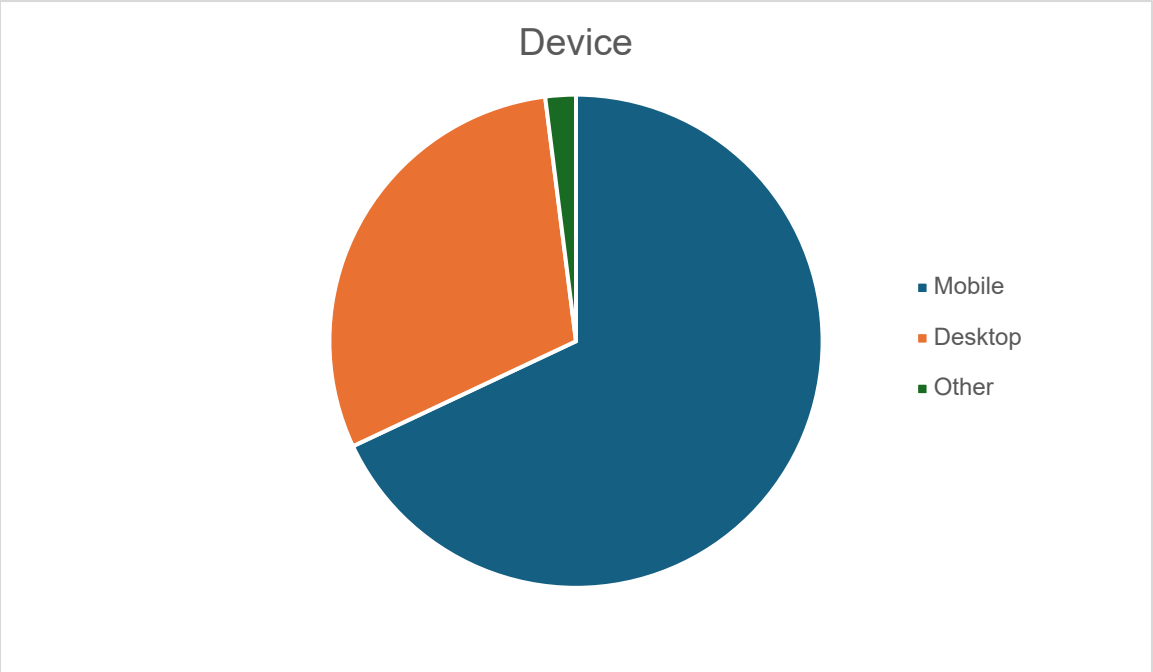


Other content areas that garnered significant feedback included 'Housing,' 'Council Tax,' and 'Bins, Waste, and Recycling.' Additionally, many submissions concerned 'System Maintenance,' where residents were redirected due to pages not functioning properly.

Although the content redesign cannot alleviate website errors, the data shows why improvements of these other content areas, like with ‘Parking’, is necessary.

4.3 Google Analytics and Recite Me data

GA data reveals that mobile devices account for 68% of user traffic, while desktop users make up 30%. This highlights the importance of ensuring our content design is optimised for mobile devices. Currently, some tables do not configure well on mobile phones, necessitating changes to improve mobile compatibility.



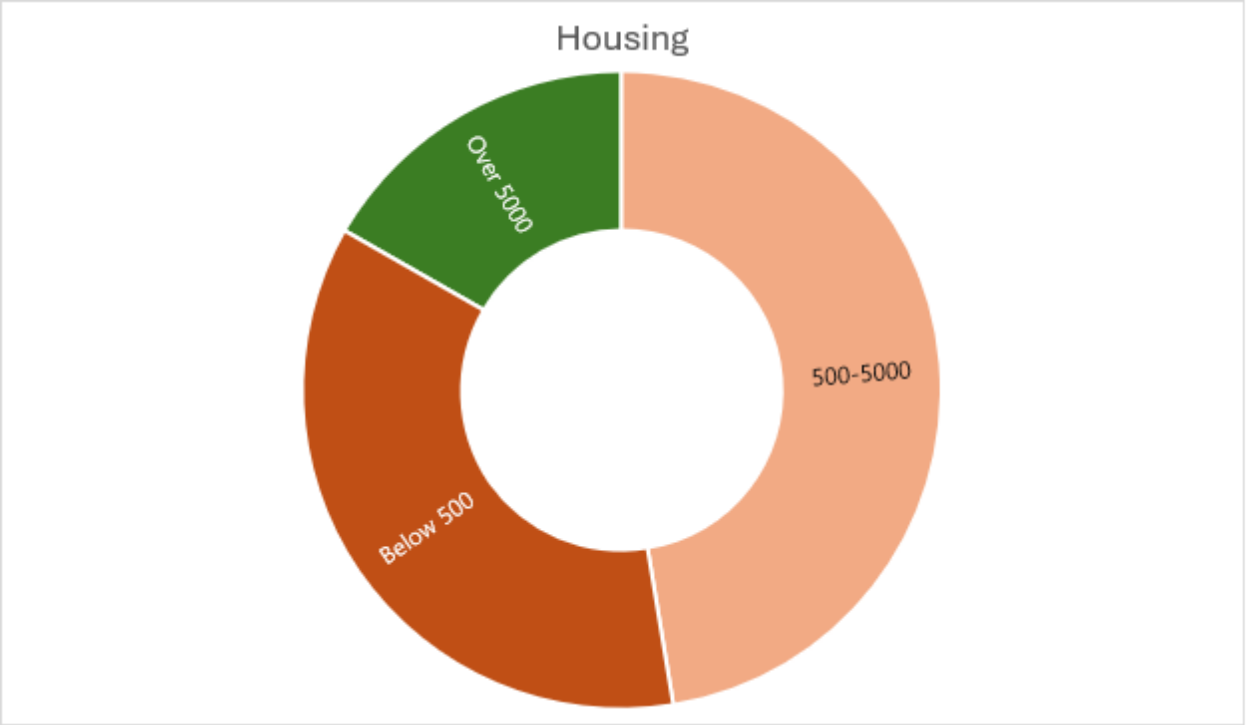
Organic search (accessing the website through unpaid search engine results) is the primary traffic driver. It contributes to 61% of total traffic. Direct traffic (28%) and referrals (9%) follow, while organic social media contributes minimally (0.1%). This demonstrates the importance of effective SEO strategies within our content design, so that users can find the content they are looking at through search engines. This is emphasised by the fact that 80% of user sessions do not start at the home page.

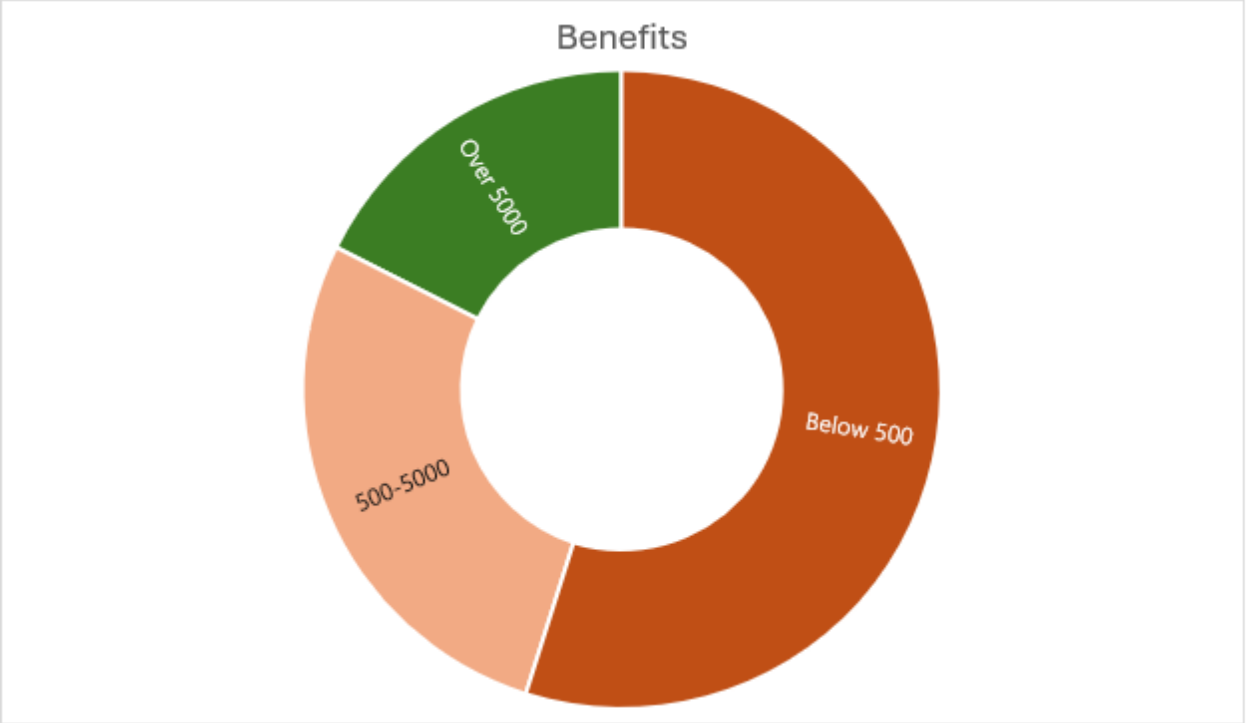
The website has an overall bounce rate of 35%. The bounce rate is the percentage of people who enter a website and then leave without viewing any other pages on the same site (Zelenzy, 2023). A good bounce rate is typically considered 40% or lower (C. Silva, 2024.). This suggests that residents may be finding what they need quickly. However, further analysis is needed to determine if the remaining visitors are fully engaging or leaving due to a specific issue, such as content quality.

In February 2024, the Recite Me tool facilitated 6,563 page views from 1,163 unique users. Screen readers were used 8,708 times, translation tools 752 times, styling features 453 times, and reading aids 98 times, showing there are significant accessibility needs in Redbridge. While these tools are invaluable, it is essential they are paired with accessible content, so that people with accessibility needs can have the best user experience possible.

According to page views, the five top demand areas are Council Tax, Parking, Housing, Schools and Bins, Waste and Recycling. As such, it may be a good idea to conduct content transformations for these areas first. Notably, Housing has the highest average engagement time (2 minutes and 3 seconds), roughly double that of the other areas. It would be valuable to investigate why this has occurred.

Taking the Housing and Benefits sections as samples, a significant number of pages on the website receive very low levels of engagement. Over a 12-month period, 28 pages in the Housing area had fewer than 500 views, and the same was also true for 28 pages in the Benefits section. While some of these pages are essential because they include information that the council is legally required to provide, or because they promote valuable community schemes, there is an opportunity to review and consolidate the content. Many of these pages could either be removed or rewritten to be more concise and combined with thematically similar pages. Taking these steps would help to address the issue of the website feeling cluttered, making it easier for residents to navigate and find the information they need.





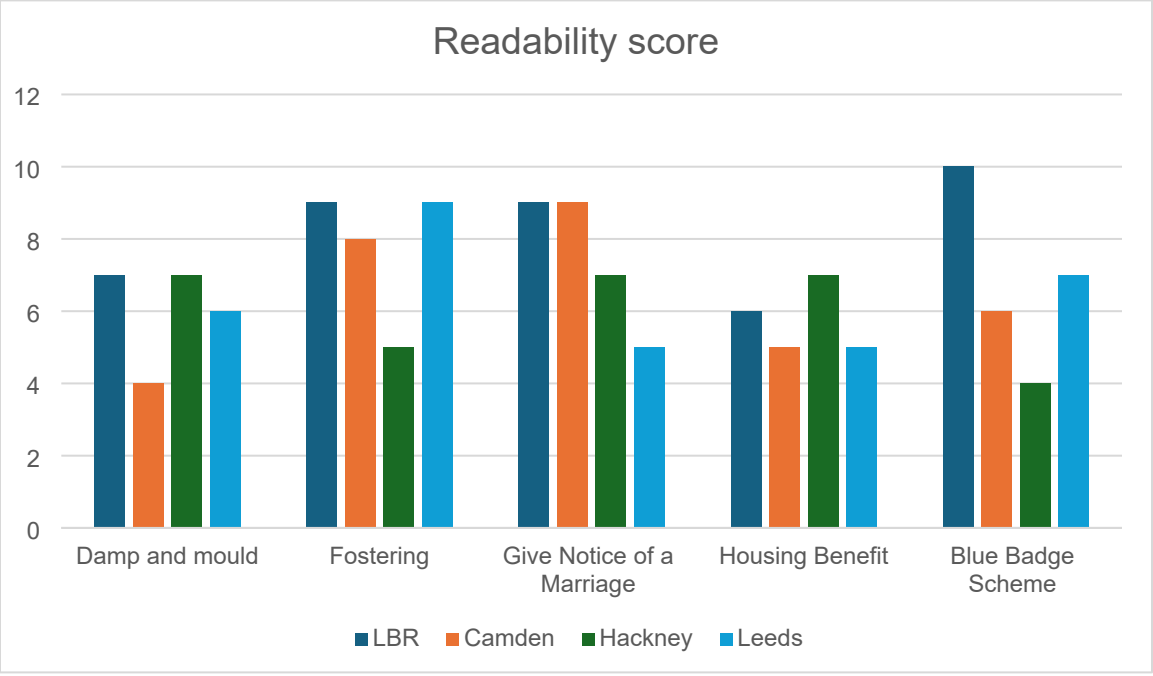
4.4 Benchmarking

To explore opportunities for improving our content, I compared our website with council sites widely regarded within the industry for their high-quality content. I examined the

websites of Leeds, Hackney, and Camden councils, all of which have undergone content revamps in recent years.

One area of analysis was the readability scores of these sites, assessed using the 'Hemingway' tool. This tool determines readability levels, with lower scores indicating higher readability. Five pages on the same subject, such as fostering, were compared across each council's website. LBR's mean score of 8.2 across the pages is significantly higher than the scores of Camden (6.4), Hackney (6.0), and Leeds (6.4).

The key difference between LBR's website and those of Camden, Hackney, and Leeds councils is that the latter use shorter sentences, avoid passive voice, prefer simpler terms, and organise content into shorter sections with clear subheadings. LBR often relies on organisational jargon that users may not understand. Even when other councils use such terms, like 'Blue Badge Scheme', they are considerably more likely to explain what these terms mean.



To explore ways of optimising our menu structure designs, a comparison was made with the menus of twenty other councils, focusing on the Council Tax and Bins, Waste, and Recycling sections. Councils generally prioritise expected high-demand areas at the top

of their menu structures, which LBR has implemented, although there is potential for more consistent application of this approach.

A trend across council websites is the promotion of digital services and self-service options, such as online account management, paperless billing, and digital forms for applications and reports. By emphasising these services, councils encourage residents to use more efficient and cost-effective channels. LBR currently falls short in this area and should make digital services more visible to drive adoption and improve operational efficiency.

Transparency was another key trend, with many councils providing clear, accessible information on how public funds are spent and how services are delivered. For example, Sutton Council and Kent Council offer detailed overviews for ‘what your Council Tax does’ for both respective boroughs. As raised in the literature review, practices like these help build trust and demonstrate the value of council services to residents.

When incorporating these best practices, LBR must maintain its local context and cater to the specific needs of its community. This is where user research will be integral.

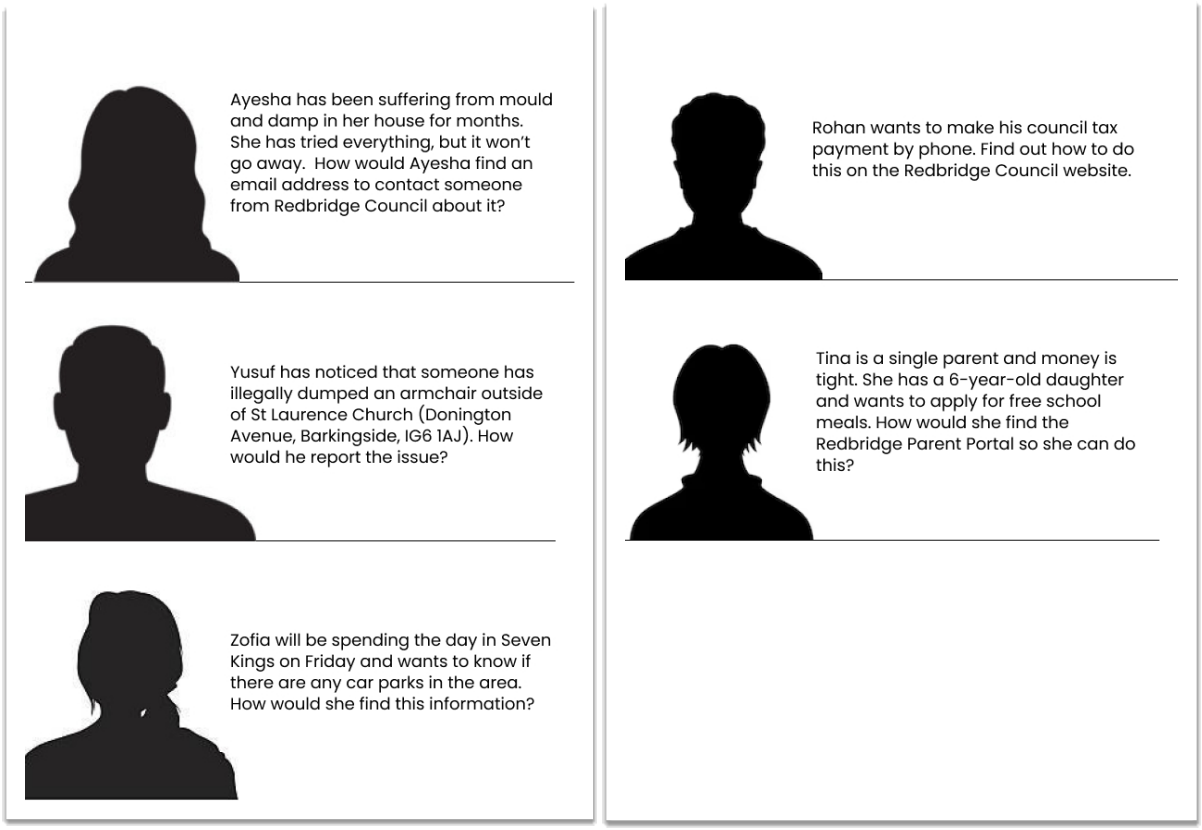
4.5 ‘Pop up’ user research

I conducted user research at a local library in Redbridge, engaging with six randomly selected residents following research-based recommendations (GOV.UK, 2020). The participants encompassed a broad age range (18 and older) and exhibited diverse levels of technical proficiency.

4.5.1 Usability testing

Participants were asked to complete a user journey on the current website while adopting the perspective of a fictional persona. For example: *'Ayesha has been dealing with persistent mould in her house for months. Despite trying various solutions, the problem remains unresolved. How would Ayesha find an email address to contact someone at*

Redbridge Council for assistance?' Participants were encouraged to 'think aloud' throughout the process, allowing their thought patterns and decision-making to be observed and understood. There were five user journeys, with each journey being used once, and one repeated.



Personas used for the usability tests

Most participants were able to complete their tasks successfully, although one elderly user required repeated guidance to navigate the process. Despite this, many participants encountered difficulties.

Tasks began on the homepage, where users were often unaware of the category tiles due to a large image dominating the screen. Scrolling down to access the tiles was necessary, but the oversized image hindered the visibility of this. Two participants specifically criticised the size of these images, suggesting they should be reduced for a more accessible layout.

Since the homepage tiles were not easily visible, five out of six participants began their tasks using the search bar, which often proved challenging. Many struggled to find relevant results and only succeeded after switching to the tiles. One participant spent significant time on the search bar before relying on tiles, while another found their information only after multiple searches and navigating irrelevant links. These challenges highlight a disconnect between user expectations and the search engine's functionality, emphasising the need for better keyword optimisation and more precise search results.

"[It was] frustrating but it could be my age." – Participant 1

When residents did use the tiles, they were generally more successful. Participants emphasised the importance of visual hierarchy and clear layout design. Features such as well-defined headings, concise information, and consistent placement of details were praised when present. However, confusing labels, such as 'Just moved into Redbridge?' diminished efficiency and left users uncertain about where to click.

4.5.2 User interviews

Participants were asked to share their overall experience with the website, highlighting what worked well, what did not, and any challenges they encountered while finding information or completing tasks. They were asked about the website's accessibility and suggested improvements to enhance the user experience.

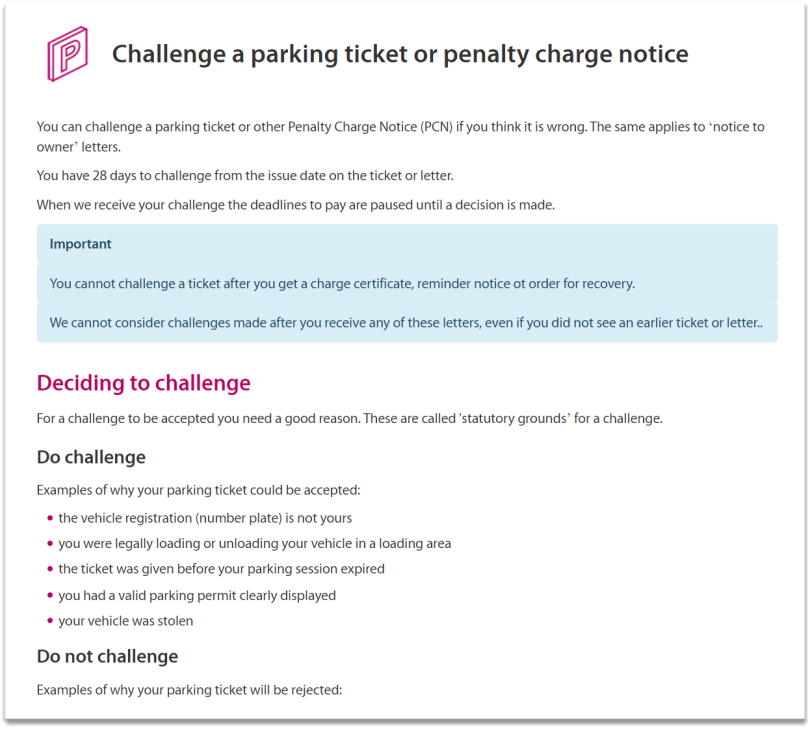
Participants found the website generally functional, but some struggled with specific tasks. One participant noted difficulty in finding information and again expressed frustration with the search function, mentioning that the keywords did not align with their expectations. The need for fewer clicks to complete tasks was a common request, with users feeling that the process could be more efficient and direct.

Participants discussed how clearer language and better organisation, such as the use of bullet points and numbering, could significantly improve the user experience. Another point was that the website would benefit from more options for assistance, including the availability of additional phone numbers and a chatbot to help filter enquiries.

Several participants raised concerns about the website's accessibility for non-English speakers and users with visual impairments, claiming it would be challenging for these groups to navigate. One participant said, *"I don't know how they would cope"* when asked about the website's suitability for users with diverse needs. None of the participants were aware of the Recite Me tool, showing a need for better promotion of this accessibility feature.

4.3 Prototype testing

Participants were presented with designs for new content pages, including 'Tell us about a change' (Council Tax), 'Apply to start primary school' (Schools), and 'Challenge a parking ticket' (Bins, Waste, and Recycling). These pages were created based on well-renowned content design principles. Residents provided general feedback on the pages, assessing whether they believed such pages would improve experiences on the website.



Part of the 'Challenge a parking ticket or penalty charge notice' 'to-be' design

Overall, participants found the pages to be user-friendly and easy to follow, with clear layouts. Many felt that the use of headings and well-organised information helped in making complex tasks more manageable. The inclusion of blue blocks to highlight important details was particularly appreciated. Participants mentioned that the font was easy to read and contributed to the clarity of the content.

"I don't see why anyone would struggle with that" – Participant 5

Some participants felt that certain elements required additional clarification. For instance, on the 'Tell us about a change' page, feedback indicated that the definition of an adult and a council tax reference number should be fully explained, rather than assuming prior knowledge. One participant raised a point about the 'What you need' subheading, again on the 'Tell us about a change' page, saying that it would be more effective if used throughout the page, rather than just once.

4.4 Card sorting

Participants received 32 cards representing existing homepage 'tiles' such as 'Housing', 'Health and Wellbeing' and 'Voting and Elections'. They organised the cards in the order they felt best suited the homepage, discarding any they deemed unnecessary. This exercise is extremely important, given that the homepage has received over 1 million views in the past 12 months.

Closed card sorting was used, where participants sort content into predefined categories, rather than creating their own categories as in open card sorting (GOV.UK, 2018). This approach was chosen because many people are unfamiliar with the full scope of council services, and predefined categories provided useful prompts that made the exercise more effective.

Practical services consistently emerged as top priorities. 'Housing', 'Bins, Waste and Recycling', and 'Council Tax' were frequently selected for prominent placement, reflecting their universal relevance to residents. 'Planning and Building', 'Schools', and 'Adult and Children's Services' followed closely, and 'Crime and Public Safety', 'Libraries', and 'Parking' was also frequently at the top of residents' menus.

Many participants identified tiles that they considered redundant or unclear. For example, ‘Pay for It’, ‘Apply for It’, and ‘Book It’ were often grouped together as confusing. Similarly, tiles such as ‘Roads and Pavements’ and ‘Our Streets’ were often perceived as overlapping. ‘Births, Deaths, Marriages and Citizenship’ was another category that many participants felt was not as relevant to the homepage and placed lower on the list or discarded entirely.

Some tiles, like ‘Redbridge Digital Voice’, ‘Just Moved into Redbridge?’ and ‘Redbridge in Action’ were discarded by several participants as they were seen as too specific or irrelevant for the main homepage. Many participants deprioritised ‘Voting and Elections’, suggesting that this tile may only need to appear on the homepage during election periods.

Participants noted that general information tiles such as ‘About the Council’ could be grouped together or moved to a secondary page. ‘Regeneration and Growth’ was mentioned by a few participants as important for community awareness but did not always rank highly within residents’ ordering of priorities.

Current ’tiles’ on the homepage

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Issues with the website and underlying causes

Resident feedback reveals a significant level of dissatisfaction with the current state of the website. Users frequently report challenges in locating essential information and completing forms, often finding themselves caught in inefficient and frustrating ‘loops’ that hinder their ability to accomplish tasks. Beyond these usability concerns, residents also encounter persistent technical issues, such as broken links, pages that fail to load, and slow performance. These challenges directly impact residents' ability to access essential services and systemic flaws in the website's UX design.

Although the accessibility tool Recite Me is available on the website to support users with additional needs, many residents are unaware of its existence, rendering it ineffective for a significant portion of the population. Furthermore, the website's content frequently falls short of established accessibility standards. Readability scores for the site are notably lower than those of comparable council websites, making it harder for residents to understand or engage with the information provided. This issue is exacerbated by the inconsistent application of established content design principles across the site. Many pages suffer from the use of organisational jargon that prioritises internal terminology over user-friendly language, making it difficult for residents to navigate or interpret the content effectively.

Navigation stands out as a major pain point for residents. The homepage's cluttered design exemplifies the broader structural issues affecting the entire site. The abundance of tiles on the homepage creates a visually overwhelming experience, with poor labelling and overlapping categories adding to the confusion. The internal search functionality compounds these issues, as it frequently produces ineffective or irrelevant results, further complicating the process of finding information.

A major underlying cause of the website's issues is its reactive content management approach. Instead of following a well-planned, proactive strategy, content updates are

generally driven by complaints, service disruptions, or urgent events. This reactive method limits the website's ability to anticipate and optimise content based on the evolving needs of users. Without sufficient foresight, the site is often left to address problems only after they arise. This not only disrupts the user experience but also limits the effective use of data and analytics tools, such as Google Analytics and GovMetric, which could provide valuable insights into emerging user trends and behaviour. By relying on this reactive approach instead of strategic planning, the website enters a cycle where content is updated primarily in response to external factors, rather than in a way that enhances the UX in a more proactive, efficient manner.

Another key factor is the fragmented content authorship across various teams. Individuals responsible for updating the website have other tasks and responsibilities, reducing the time they can dedicate to regularly maintaining and improving the website. This leads to inefficiencies, with updates being delayed or missed altogether. Without a clear central point of control or a unified process, content updates tend to become disjointed, and we see inconsistent content design.

5.2 Recommendations: how the website can address organisational and resident needs

To address the current reactive approach to content updates and the fragmented system of authorship, adopting a more structured content management strategy is strongly recommended. This could include establishing a centralised content team dedicated to overseeing and coordinating all website updates. Currently, the process relies on one or two individuals reviewing web pages on an ad-hoc basis, which needs to be expanded and refined. Introducing a content calendar and regular review cycles would help transition from a reactive model to a proactive one. This approach would enable planned updates, timely seasonal content, and the ability to anticipate and resolve common issues before they result in resident complaints.

A new style guide should be created to enhance consistency and elevate content quality across the Redbridge Council website. This guide should draw inspiration from best practices used by high-performing council websites such as Leeds, Hackney, and Camden, while incorporating established content design principles. Clear rules for explaining technical terms and council jargon should be included. The guide should align with the design principles tested during the user research; the designs received positive feedback for being user-friendly, easy to navigate, and effective in presenting complex tasks through clear headings and subheadings.

There should be comprehensive training for web authors. Authors should learn to use tools like GA for data-driven decisions, and Hemingway to check their content's accessibility, and the new style guide should be taught to them. Regular evaluations and refresher courses should be conducted, with mandatory retraining for underperforming authors.

Mobile optimisation is a top priority, with over two-thirds of user traffic originating from mobile devices. This includes redesigning non-mobile-friendly elements and embracing a 'mobile-first' design approach. Equally vital is enhancing search functionality, as organic search drives 61% of traffic, with metadata optimisation an important part of this. The accessibility tool Recite Me needs greater promotion to increase awareness among residents. Authors should minimise organisational jargon and ensure their content never exceeds a Hemingway score of six. Broken links are unacceptable because they not only frustrate our residents, but undermine the credibility and professionalism of the website. There needs to be a full audit of our broken links, and they should be fixed.

In terms of how to build trust among residents, LBR should incorporate more transparent information about council operations. This includes creating an easily accessible section detailing how public funds are spent, providing regular updates on council projects and initiatives, and highlighting success stories.

The homepage redesign should focus on resolving usability issues highlighted during testing and card sorting. Reducing the size of the dominant image will allow residents using a computer to see the tiles below without scrolling, enabling them to choose between using the search function or navigating the website directly. The number of

categories should be significantly reduced, avoiding any overlap. Improvements are also needed in the ordering of categories. This should be done continuously in line with user needs.

Improving forms is as, if not more, important than improving the overall site content. The negative feedback about form completion, coupled with the growing trend of other councils advancing their self-service, underscores the urgency for enhancement in this area. Forms should be easy to complete, featuring intuitive dropdown menus, only essential questions, and tailored designs for specific user journeys, rather than consolidating multiple forms into one. This will be especially helpful for staff, as it will reduce the considerable time they spend assisting residents with challenging forms, and in collating required information. This will allow staff to focus their attention on more complex and urgent situations that require their expertise.

The content overhaul should focus on high-demand areas. We should focus the top five areas first: Council Tax, Parking, Housing, Schools, and Bins, Waste and Recycling. Parking content should be given highest priority due to the significant negative feedback it has received.

It is also imperative we address the issue of clutter on the website. We should conduct a thorough review to identify and remove unnecessary or outdated content. This process should involve collaboration with service areas to determine the continued relevance of information, benchmarking against other councils' equivalent content, and analysing page engagement through GA. Pages with fewer than 500 views over 12 months, in particular, need to be assessed.

5.3 Implementation plan

Following the recommendations, a Gantt chart has been prepared to visually depict the timeline and deliverables for the content project:

In the first month, we will focus on setting clear objectives within the team. We will identify individuals from service areas to collaborate. These individuals will play a role in

consulting on the content, as their input will help in determining which content to retain and for fact-finding issue. They will be responsible for signing off on the content before it goes live. During this month, we will develop the required resources and establish the project budget. The main factor to consider here will be the budget and number of personnel involved, as the project will not demand many other resources. A core team of around four individuals, including a project manager, will be appropriate.

In the second month, we will undertake a comprehensive audit of broken links and then fix these links. Building on insights gained from our research, we will redesign the homepage and create a style guide. This style guide will serve as the cornerstone for our web author training, which will commence in the third month and continue indefinitely, even after the main project concludes.

The overhaul of content areas will follow, starting with those that are most in demand. For each area, we will completely rewrite the content, including associated forms. This phase will involve extensive data analytics, benchmarking, and the use of tools such as Hemingway to ensure content clarity and quality. We will adhere to the practices outlined in the style guide and eliminate unnecessary content based on our analysis. Collaboration with the IT department will be needed to manage page redirects for existing pages. Each content area will only go live after receiving sign-off from the assigned service area lead. By rolling out content areas throughout the project, rather than waiting until the end, we can demonstrate progress iteratively.

As we develop the content, we will test it with residents and adjust based on their feedback. This process, much like the web author training, will continue beyond the main project's timeline, albeit on a less frequent basis.

Throughout this project, we will develop a content governance plan to ensure that content can be managed sustainably over the long term. We will engage in discussions with senior leadership to emphasise the importance of content management. These conversations will help leaders communicate to web authors that editing and maintaining content is a vital part of their role. We will create a detailed content calendar and establish regular review cycles to keep content up-to-date and relevant. The governance framework will

clearly define approval workflows, content ownership, and escalation procedures, ensuring a structured and efficient approach to content management.

5.4 Research limitations

The research approach aimed to mitigate potential risks (see above) to ensure comprehensive and reliable findings. However, several limitations remain that could impact the depth and applicability of the results. For example, while the number of participants was appropriate for most activities for the ‘pop up’ user research, the card sorting exercise would have benefitted from a larger pool of participants. A larger participant sample would better capture the diverse preferences and needs of LBR residents, making the findings more representative. With only six participants, some nuances, such as redundant or unclear tiles, may have been missed.

It is important to note that while the Hemingway score (used as part of the benchmarking) is a valuable tool for assessing readability, it has its limitations. The tool was chosen as a practical solution due to the challenges of comparing accessibility across content from different councils. Hemingway evaluates text based on factors like sentence length, complexity, and adverb usage, providing a basic readability measure. However, it does not consider aspects like cultural relevance. While the scores offer a helpful starting point, they should be taken with a ‘pinch of salt’ and viewed in conjunction with the manual benchmarking conducted.

The research methods surrounding user behaviour were unable to capture demographic factors. LBR’s GA and GovMetric data lack demographic details, limiting our understanding of how different socioeconomic or cultural groups interact with the website. Similarly, for ethical reasons, personal data from the ‘pop up’ research was not collected, further limiting insights into how different user groups engage with the site. While Recite Me data offered valuable insights into accessibility needs, the lack of detailed demographic analysis remains a significant limitation in understanding the diverse needs of residents.

5.5 Future work

Following on from the previous point, future research should focus more deeply on the relationship between content design and accessibility needs within digital public services. As communities like Redbridge become increasingly diverse and reliance on digital platforms for government services grows, this area demands more attention.

While the literature review shows the importance of content design in creating accessible and inclusive digital experiences, as well as the role of digital services within the public sphere, a notable gap remains surrounding the interplay specifically between content design and digital service accessibility.

It would be valuable to conduct studies on how various user groups, such as non-native English speakers, individuals with cognitive disabilities, or those with limited digital literacy, engage with public service content. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to investigate what the long-term impacts of poorly designed content are on vulnerable populations. This might include analysing how unclear or inadequate information affects access to vital services like healthcare, education, and social support.

5.6 Contributions of the study

Having benchmarked other councils' websites, it is apparent that many local authorities have neglected their content design. As many of the patterns identified are likely relevant to other digital public services, this study sheds light on why individuals across the country may face challenges accessing these services and examines the underlying factors contributing to these difficulties. The study offers practical recommendations that governmental bodies, particularly local authorities, can adopt to address these challenges. In fact, the implementation plan provides a step-by-step blueprint for how they can transform and refine their content strategies, helping to foster long-term improvements to their user experiences.

This study, particularly through user research but also other research methods, provides strong evidence supporting theories explored in the literature review section ‘Content design: what it is and why it matters’. It validates the importance of clear, accessible language and an empathetic tone, as well as the need for concise, digestible content. By aligning real-world findings with theoretical concepts, the report reinforces the value of simplicity and user-focused design in digital services.

For LBR, the report offers a structured path to modernise its online presence. Implementing these changes will not only improve user satisfaction but also reduce operational inefficiencies. In establishing a strong ‘front door’ for residents to engage with council services, the content project promotes consistency in service standards across all channels. Adopting the study’s recommendations, meanwhile, positions LBR as a leader in local government digital services, showcasing its ability to adapt to evolving resident needs while setting a benchmark for other councils to follow.

5.7 Summary

To conclude, this report underscores the essential role of content design within local government. Through a diverse range of research methods, it reveals how treating a website as a ‘dumping ground’ for information, and neglecting its maintenance over several years, leads to issues that significantly undermine residents' ability to access services and information. Some of the most important problems identified include poor navigation, poor language, and inadequately designed forms. At the heart of these problems lie a reactive content management approach and the absence of a centralised and unified process.

LBR resultantly require a comprehensive content overhaul, starting with high-demand areas and the homepage. Priorities must include mobile optimisation, building trust through transparent information, and increasing awareness of accessibility tools like Recite Me. However, the redesign itself is only the first step; sustaining high-quality

content design demands a long-term strategy. Components of this strategy must include a new style guide, structured training for web authors, strong support from senior stakeholders, a content calendar, and a governance framework to ensure continuous consistency and improvement.

While further research is needed to explore the relationship between content design and demographic factors, both in Redbridge and more broadly, this report makes a valuable contribution to addressing gaps in academic literature and serves as a practical guide for other public organisations seeking to transform their content.

Indeed, with limited resources, a small team, and a focused 12-month timeline, LBR and other similarly sized organisations can revolutionise their website. With public services facing mounting challenges from budget constraints to an aging population, transitioning to a largely self-service model, underpinned by high-quality content design, needs to be recognised as an inevitable step forward. The success of initiatives such as these will be pivotal in ensuring that public bodies can be responsive, inclusive and effective in serving their residents.

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Chapter 7: Appendix

7.1 Ethical approval form

Section 1: APPLICATION DETAILS

1.1 PROJECT AND DATES	
Title	Towards Better Service Delivery: A Comprehensive Redesign of Redbridge Council's Website Content
Date of submission	2024-12-18
Start date	30/09/2024
End date	29/01/2025
1.2 APPLICANT DETAILS	
Applicant	Joe Wooden
Supervisor	Weizi (Vicky) Li
Please note that an undergraduate or postgraduate student cannot be a named Chief Investigator for research ethics purposes. The supervisor must be declared as Chief Investigator.	
Is the project being carried out in whole or in part to support a student degree? true If yes, support which student degree? Masters	

School	Henley Business School			
Department	Department of Business Informatics, Systems, and Accounting			
Email	j.f.wooden@student.henley.ac.uk			
Telephone	07725237662			
All other Applicants	Name:	School	Position	Email

Section 2: PROJECT DETAILS

2.1 PROJECT SUMMARY

Please provide a summary of the project in plain English that can be understood by a non-specialist audience, which includes a description of the background of the study (existing knowledge), the questions the project will address, the methods to be used and the key ethical issues.

Please note the lay summary should not contain references and be no more than 500 words.

The London Borough of Redbridge (LBR) is revamping its website to better serve its diverse community of over 310,000 residents. Launched in 2016, the website and its microsites have become cluttered with outdated and inconsistent content, hindering residents' ability to find relevant information and access services. This project aims to address these issues through a comprehensive content overhaul, ensuring the website becomes a reliable, user-focused "front door" to council services. The initiative will assess current content, redesign it for clarity and relevance, and implement a sustainable content strategy.

2.2 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

Please detail the primary research question this project will answer.

What are the issues with the current website, and how do these impact residents' ability to access information and services?

2.3 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION(S)

Please detail any secondary research question(s) this project will answer.

What are the underlying causes of the current website's issues?

How can the content project address LBR's organisational needs?

How can the content project ensure the website meets the diverse needs of LBR residents?

2.4 DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Please describe concisely what the study will involve, how many times and in what order, for your participants and the procedures and methodology to be used.

Note: Any questionnaires or interview scripts should be appended to this application.

I will employ a variety of user research techniques, including:

Usability Testing - Participants will perform tasks (no more than 2) such as locating specific services (e.g., council tax payment or housing assistance) on the website and provide real-time feedback. They will also review specific content and landing pages, offering their insights and suggestions.

Semi-Structured Interviews - Questions will include:

- Can you describe your overall experience using the council's website? What works well for you, and what doesn't? What challenges have you faced when trying to find information or complete tasks on the website?
- Do you feel the website is accessible and easy to use for people with different needs or backgrounds? If not, what improvements would you suggest?
- How well does the website meet your expectations when accessing council services? What are some areas where it falls short?
- If you could change one thing about the website to make it more helpful or user-friendly, what would it be?

Card Sorting - Participants will organise menu items and structures into groups they find intuitive, helping to inform a user-friendly information architecture.

Prototype Testing - New content layouts will be tested. Participants will provide feedback on the prototypes to refine the design and content further.

2.5 LOCATION

Please describe where the research will take place.

The research will take place at Redbridge Central Library - the environment is calm and quiet.

Please state whether an appropriate risk assessment/ local review has been undertaken.

Yes

Notes:

- Ensure specific risk assessments have been undertaken for non-University locations (for example; schools or participant homes). Please consult either your School Ethics Contact or UREC for guidance.

2.6 FUNDING

Is the research supported by funding from a research council or other external source (for example; charities, businesses)?

false

If "yes", please,

(a) Give details of the funding body;

(b) Confirm if the funder specifically stipulates review by the University Research Ethics Committee.

false

2.7 ETHICAL ISSUES

Please summarise the main ethical issues, including harms and risks, arising from your study and explain how you have addressed them.

1. Ensuring participants understand they can withdraw at any time.
Solution - Clear consent forms and verbal confirmation before participation.

2 - Protecting participants' personal data and feedback.
Solution - Anonymising data and securely storing it.

3 - Participants may feel frustrated during usability tasks.

Solution - Allowing them to pause or stop at any time.

4 - Ensuring all participants can engage, including those with disabilities
Solution - Providing clear instructions. Showing patience and understanding

2.8 DECEPTION

Will the research involve any element of intentional deception (for example; providing false or misleading information about the study)?

false

If "yes", please justify and append a description of the debriefing procedure.

2.9 PAYMENT

Will research participants receive any payments, reimbursement of expenses or any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research?

false

2.10 DATA PROTECTION

What steps will be taken to ensure appropriate secure handling of personal data? Give comprehensive details on the collection, retention, sharing and disposal of participant personal data.

Personal data means any data relating to a participant who could potentially be identified. It includes pseudonymised data capable of being linked to a participant through a unique code number.

For guidance on data protection please, see the Data Protection for Researchers Guidance document.

No personal data will be retained. The process will comply with relevant data protection regulations like GDPR. All data will be deleted within a 6-month period.

Will the research involve any activity that requires a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)?

false

If "yes", please append the "Pre-Screening Questionnaire for "DPIA Appendix A – Screening Questions".

2.11 INFORMED CONSENT

a. Will you obtain informed consent from, or on behalf of, research participants?

true

b. If “yes”, please describe the process by which they will be informed about the nature of the study and the process by which you will obtain consent.

c. If “no”, you are not obtaining consent, please explain why (for example; ‘opt-out’ methodology without the acquisition of consent)?

Please append all relevant participant facing information documentation for participants, parents or guardians. Please note, age-appropriate information sheets must be supplied for all participants wherever possible, including children. Assent should be obtained from children, under 16 years, in addition to the consent required from parents, guardians or carers.

All participants will be provided with an information sheet outlining the study's purpose, the tasks they will complete, any potential risks, how their data will be used and stored, and their rights (including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences). They will sign a consent form and provide verbal consent.

Section 3: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

3.1 PARTICIPANT NUMBER

How many participants do you plan to recruit?

6

Please briefly explain why the number is appropriate to answer the study’s research question(s).

It allows for the identification of common usability issues and patterns while ensuring diverse perspectives. It allows for in-depth results.

3.2 PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISATION

What age-range of participants will you recruit?

18 and over

Please list the principal inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria are:

- Redbridge residents
- Ability to provide feedback
- Experience using the Redbridge Council website

The exclusion criteria are:

- People with a conflict of interest (e.g. people employed at Redbridge Council)
- People with time constraints (avoid using people who will feel rushed or will be unable to complete the tasks)

3.3 RECRUITMENT
Please describe the recruitment process and append any advertising if used.
I will politely approach people visiting the library to see if they would be interested in getting involved with the research. I will describe the research, show potential participants the information sheet, and endeavor to get consent. I will ask the library to get consent to do this on their premises.
3.4 NHS AND SOCIAL SERVICES INVOLVEMENT
Will participants be recruited because of their status as NHS patients or Social Services clients, or identified through those services' records? false If "yes", please give details of current status of the HRA REC review.
Will the study involve adult participants unable to consent for themselves as defined by the Mental Capacity Act 2005 or other vulnerable adults? false If "yes", please detail the associated procedures as set out in the HRA REC application.

CHECKLIST

1. Issues of confidentiality and arrangements for the storage and security of material during and after the project and for the disposal of material have been considered.	Yes
2.The Participant Information Sheet includes a statement to the effect that the project has been reviewed by the appropriate Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.	Yes
3. The Participant Information Sheet contains the relevant Data Protection information.	Yes
4. The research involves archival research, access of company documents/records, access of publicly available data, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and/or other interview techniques	Yes
5. Arrangements for expenses and other payments to participants, if any, have been considered	Yes
6. Participants will be/have been advised that they may withdraw at any stage if they so wish	Yes
7. Arrangements for providing subjects with research results if they wish to have them have been considered	Yes
8. The arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent of this have been considered.	Yes

9. Information Sheets and Consent Forms had been prepared in line with University guidelines for distribution to participants	Yes
10. Arrangements for the completed consent forms to be retained upon completion of the project have been made.	Yes

7.2 Information sheet

Research Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in this user research study. Before deciding, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

What is the purpose of the study?

At Redbridge Council, we want to make the content of our website better for our residents. We want you to find our information easy to understand, and for anything you do on our website to be as simple as possible. This research will help us understand the website's issues, why they are happening, and how they can be addressed.

The research will be used as part of a dissertation for an apprenticeship programme at Henley Business School.

Why you have been invited

We want to design our website based on the needs of our residents. To do this, we need to talk to you and learn more about your needs.

What participation involves

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

- Perform tasks on the current website and share your real-time feedback
- Discuss your experiences using the website and offer suggestions for improvement
- Organise website menu items into intuitive categories to help improve navigation
- Review and provide feedback on redesigned content layouts

How much time will this take?

It will take around 30 minutes of your time.

Ethical approval

The research has been checked by the Henley Business School Research Ethics Committee and has been approved.

Data Protection and Privacy

- We will not keep any personal information
- All data will be deleted within a 6-month period
- Your responses will be anonymised
- Your data collected may be shared with third parties
- The research complies with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018

Your rights

- Taking part is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason
- You are free to skip any question or task that you do not feel comfortable answering
- If you decide to withdraw, you can request that your data be removed from the study up to 10 days after participation

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research or your participation, please contact:

Joe Wooden
UX Support Officer
joseph.wooden@redbridge.gov.uk