



Voices of experience

Leeds City Council

Citizen Experience Excellence 2024-25





Leeds City Council: Opening the door to a citizen-centric approach

Overseeing a major urban area comprising 33 wards and a population of 800,000, Leeds City Council is one of the biggest metropolitan councils in the UK.

A workforce of 12,000 staff keeps the wheels turning – and service levels are good, with councils in the region tending to perform above the national council average in KPMG’s Citizen Experience Excellence survey.

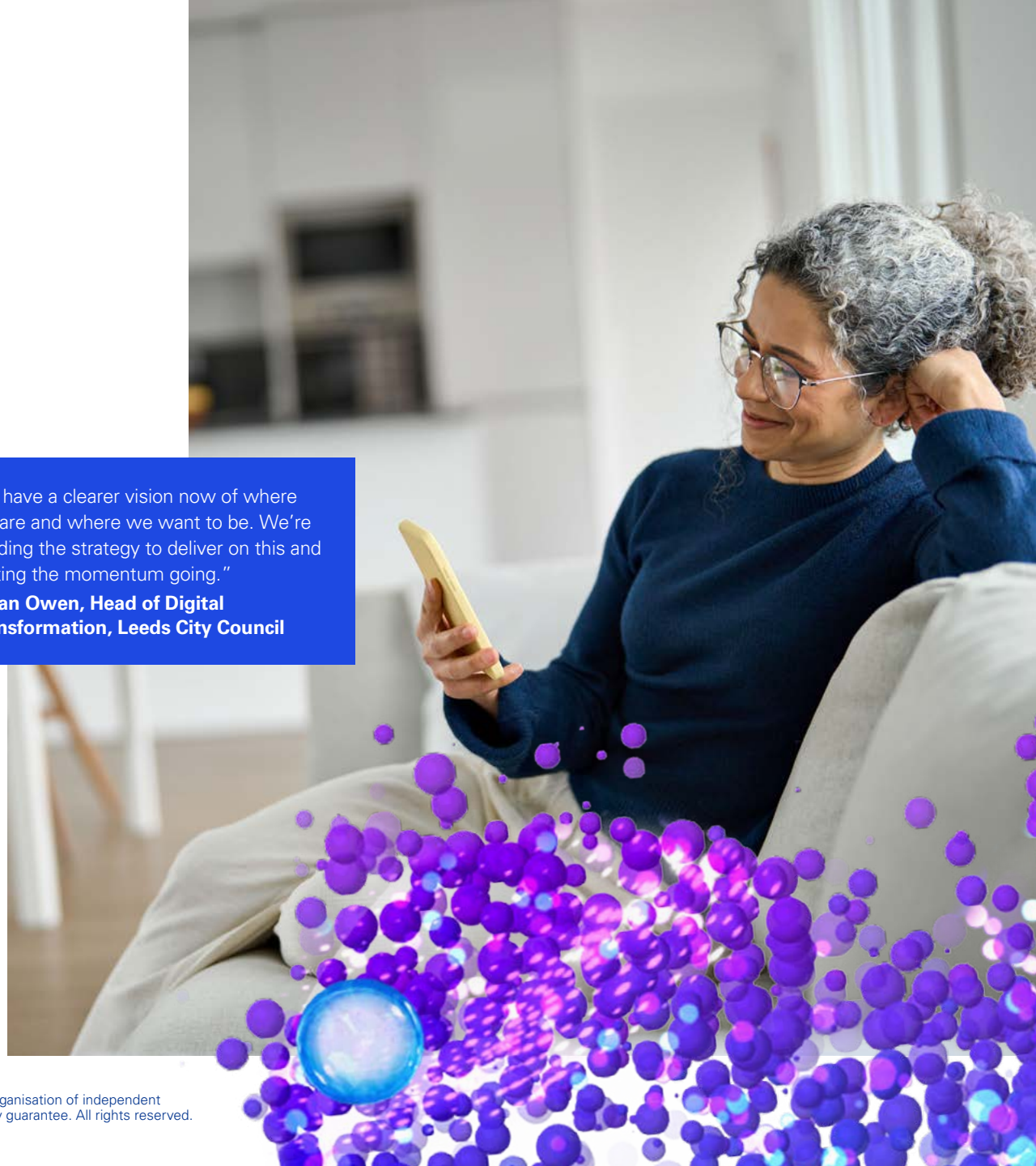
However, the council is ambitious to do better – embarking with KPMG’s support on a programme of service transformation, in particular aiming to improve customer experience with a digital first approach to customer contact and engagement.

Dylan Owen, Head of Digital Transformation at Leeds City Council, emphasises that this transformation is in the early stages: “We are still in the first steps of the journey,” he says. “But we have a clearer vision now of where we are and where we want to be. We’re building the strategy to deliver on this and getting the momentum going.”



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Dylan Owen, Head of Digital Transformation, Leeds City Council





‘Unified front door’ ambition

At the heart of the strategy is designing services around citizen needs. This means that, while digital rather than analogue is the preferred method of delivery, it remains important that users should be able to interact in other ways if that suits them best, including phone, email or face-to-face. This approach can perhaps be summed up by what Dylan refers to as a ‘unified front door’.

“The unified front door ambition means that whichever route a citizen chooses to interact with us via, it will bring them to the same level of service,” Dylan says. “We’re not there yet of course. Some things are harder and take longer to get done via phone or in person than online. But we are really committed to keeping all channels available, even if digital is the route we are encouraging citizens to go down where possible.”

This approach builds on what customers have become accustomed to elsewhere. Dylan draws the analogy of booking a holiday or flight – for most people nowadays, it’s much easier and preferable to do this online themselves from the comfort of their sofa rather than phone a contact centre or go into a travel agent.

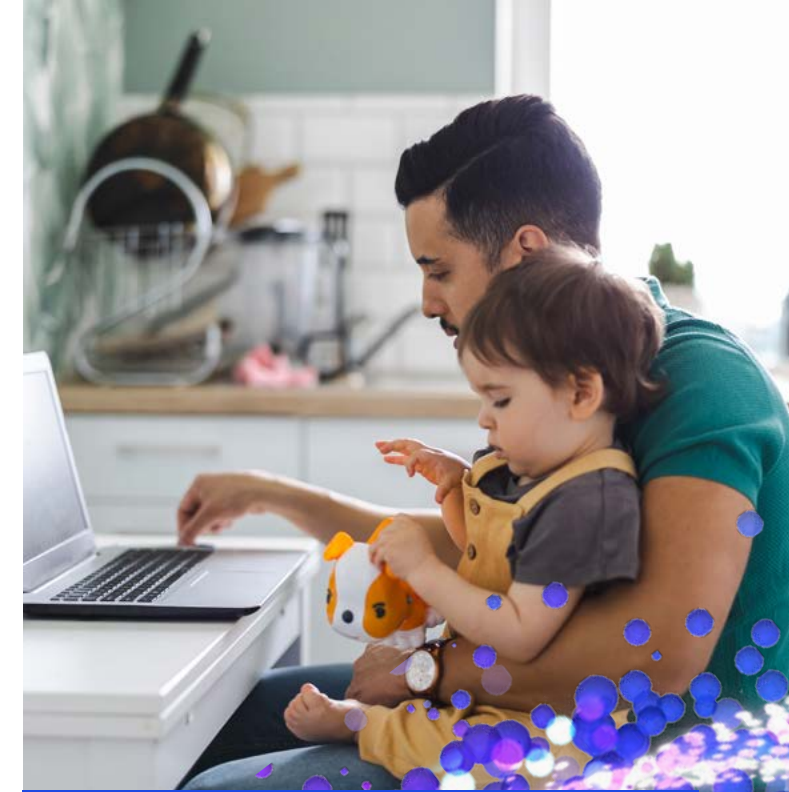
As Dylan says: “Our job, through good design, is to make the quality of the digital experience as high as possible to keep driving adoption up. It’s also about growing digital as part of the journey so that individuals can complete more and more of what they want to do through self-serve.”

If Leeds can achieve that, Dylan points out, it will create cost efficiencies and enable the council to focus more on major priority areas that require significant resource and human interaction such as children’s services and adult social care. Given the financial constraints that councils operate under, finding those efficiencies is simply essential.

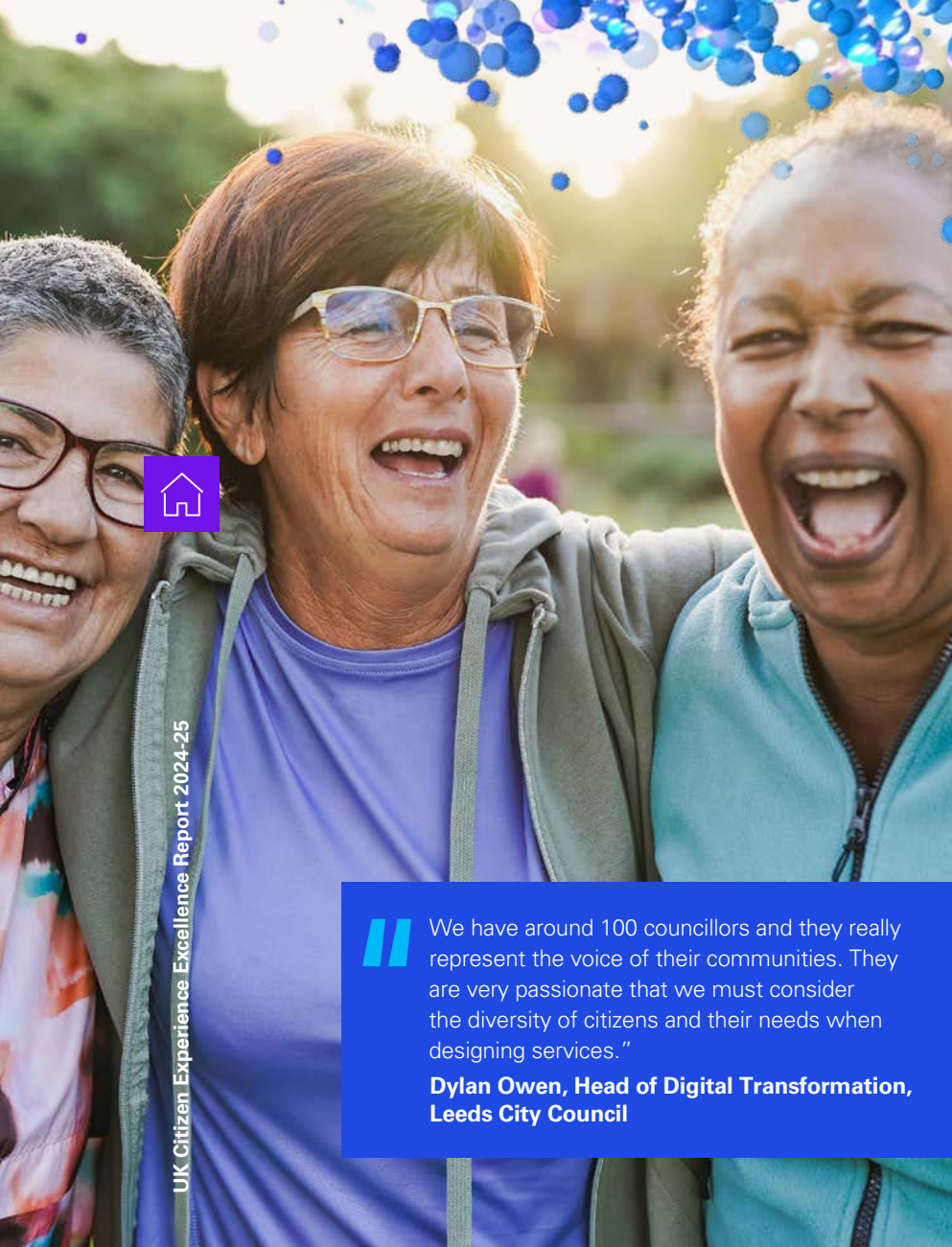
A single version of the truth

Longer term, by joining up technology systems and information sources, the aspiration is to arrive at that nirvana for all public bodies: a single view of the citizen, with just one version of the truth.

“That means we can then start to really personalise our services through one, comprehensive view of the citizen,” Dylan says. “Say that someone moves from one part of Leeds to another and we know that they go for a swim each week in their local leisure centre. We could proactively contact them when they move and ask if they want us to switch their membership to this leisure centre instead. That’s personalisation in action – and real customer service.”



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**Dylan Owen, Head of Digital Transformation,
Leeds City Council**

Falling trees – and streamlining processes

Dylan stresses that such a level of personalisation remains a long way off – but it’s the goal they are aiming for. It’s not just a nice-to-have either – bringing information and systems together more seamlessly can have real impacts on efficiency and resourcing. Dylan gives the example of when a tree comes down in a storm. When that happens, multiple people will contact the council through multiple different routes to let them know – through the website, by phone, by email, maybe even by contacting their local councillor.

“Something like a fallen tree creates a lot of noise and a lot of reporting,” Dylan reflects. “However, many people that report it won’t get a response. Nevertheless, that doesn’t mean we’re not doing anything about it. A tree surgeon will be going out there and dealing with it. But if we had more unified systems, we could send an acknowledgement to everyone who reported it regardless of channel and keep them updated if they request that, perhaps when the tree surgeon uploads a photo of the job when it’s done. In that way, we’re offering a more personalised response at the same time as streamlining processes so they’re more efficient and don’t take up lots of different staff members’ time.”

Customer feedback key to improvement

Building services around customer needs and preferences means that gathering feedback is essential. Leeds is doing this in multiple ways: collecting feedback as part of the delivery of individual services, through surveys that are sent out, and through focus groups on the ground. They are investing more in data & analytics capabilities so that feedback can be analysed in depth and patterns or trends identified. In addition, the council has user research teams who test services to assess their usability and accessibility, identifying pinch points or aspects where improvements are needed.

However, it is not just a case of “fixing a workflow”. Dylan stresses that some issues are more structural in nature, perhaps involving the need for more community support. For example, as part of its Best City Ambition, the council has an Age Friendly Leeds strategy that includes supporting the elderly community to better access and use technology.

Dylan also flags the importance of local councillors, who are often closest to their communities and are very active in relaying feedback to central teams. “We have around 100 councillors and they really represent the voice of their communities. They are very passionate that we must consider the diversity of citizens and their needs when designing services.”



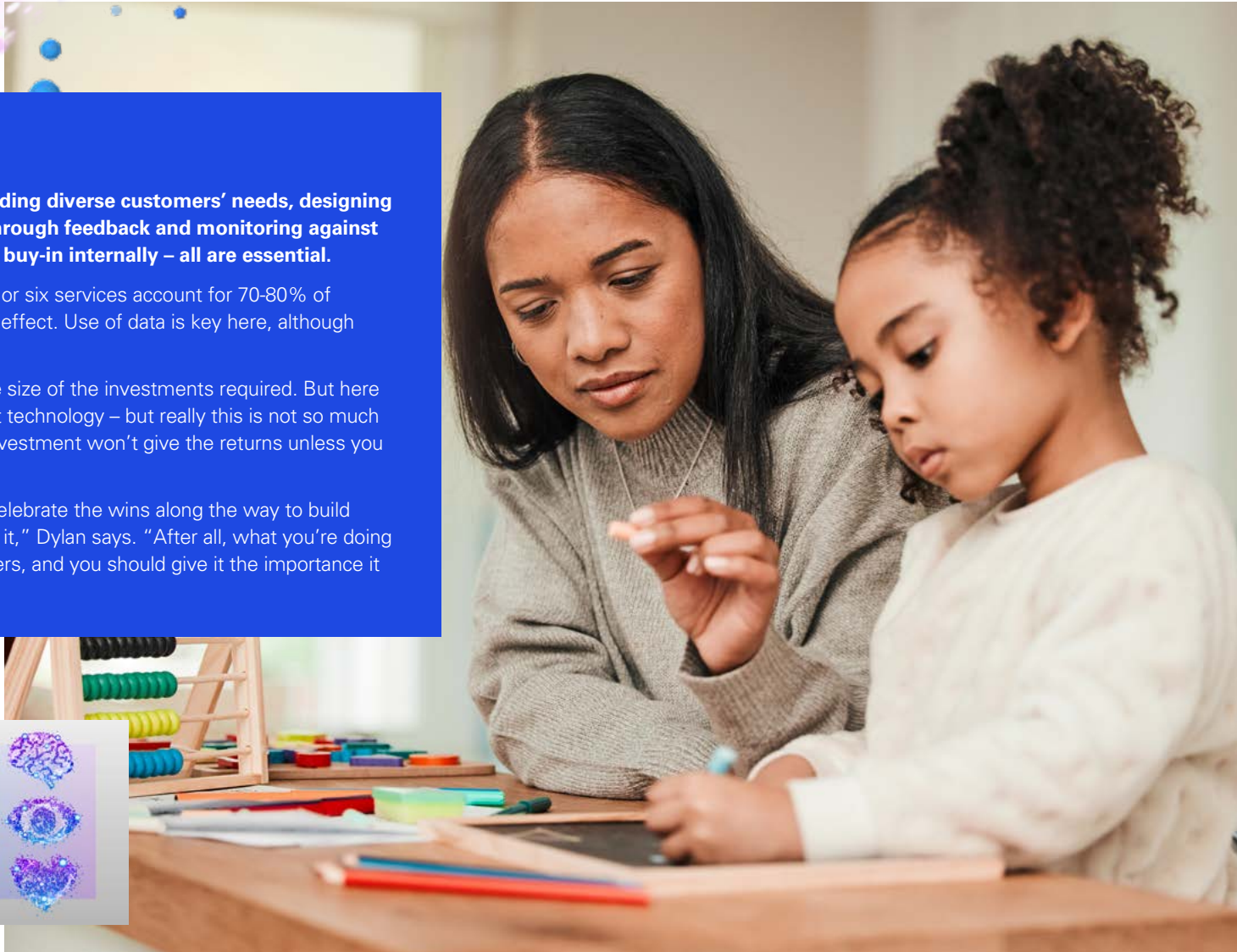
Top tips

Dylan observes a number of key principles. Really understanding diverse customers' needs, designing the end-to-end customer journey, continuously improving through feedback and monitoring against clear metrics, obtaining senior stakeholder engagement and buy-in internally – all are essential.

Prioritisation is another part of the puzzle. Dylan reflects that five or six services account for 70-80% of transactional contacts – so optimising those will have a powerful effect. Use of data is key here, although Dylan admits that this is a steep learning curve.

It is also crucial to make the right technology decisions, given the size of the investments required. But here Dylan makes a key additional point: "We all tend to obsess about technology – but really this is not so much a technology project as a people and culture programme. Your investment won't give the returns unless you also invest in upskilling staff so that they can use it properly."

Finally, transformation is a hard and long-term undertaking – so celebrate the wins along the way to build momentum and keep motivation high. "Be loud and proud about it," Dylan says. "After all, what you're doing is making user journeys better for the people you serve – it matters, and you should give it the importance it deserves."



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