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The new era of collaboration? Ooh yes please!

In the age of austerity, local authorities are pressed for time and resources. Just leaving the office to network can be hard, and navel gazing instead of collaborating, becomes the order of the day.

Culturally, when jobs are at risk, working openly with partners is difficult to get going and defensiveness, protectiveness and silo working can start to prevail.

Even outside of the austerity bubble, I've had some fairly negative experiences of sharing what other councils have done. They've tended to be led by the big suppliers, focussing on a "magical" digital box that promises to fix all, or a talking shop where ideas are shared but rarely acted on – unless processes and legacy systems are the same.

It's pretty rare to see councils fully engaging in user centred, end to end service redesign. But we have had the joy of working with a loose collection of like-minded peeps at [Local Gov Digital](#). They've been doing some sterling work – coming up with the [Local Government Digital Service Standard](#), providing a [Slack channel](#) to support conversations and hosting events like [Local Gov Camp](#) to inspire a generation of proper digital service designers. To be honest, with no money and no sponsorship, this is a great achievement... but it felt like there needed to be more.

And then – this happens!

The [local government digital declaration](#) launched on 4 July 2018. Forty organisations, including the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Government Digital Service, are inspiring us to deliver amazing digital services.

No more:

- magic boxes; off-the-shelf digital services that claim to work without service design
- thinking our legacy tech is going to sort itself out
- talking shop

Yes please:

- user centred design
- building capabilities that can be reused
- proper collaboration and making a difference



"We're on the journey, working to solve big problems with digital solutions."

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The journey ahead

There's some tough actions to get in place to be able to live up to the declaration, but for those organisations that do there are huge benefits. It really does enable us to collaborate in a deep and meaningful way.

I'm exceptionally proud that my organisation – LGSS along with 2 of the partner councils in our shared service; Cambridgeshire Council Council and Milton Keynes Council have been involved in co-authoring the declaration.

We've been committed to delivering digital services to the [local government digital service standard](#) for some time. We're on the journey, working to solve big problems with digital solutions, and we want to help others get on that same journey.

The declaration helps us understand who shares the same values and design standards, which makes it easier to share service patterns – whilst still being able to build services for local needs.

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