

Placecube's Digital Place: Building an ecosystem of digital services

Dr. Gavin Beckett, Executive Director of Placecube, discusses his vision on building an ecosystem of digital services based on common service patterns

In my career to date, leading digital for Bristol City Council, and then working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Local Digital Declaration team, several things have become clear to me.

- Our services and the whole business model of local government need to be designed afresh, based on an understanding of user need, if we are to adapt successfully to continued austerity and the impacts of Brexit – the new normal.
- There has been good work by a small number of leading councils, tackling a small number of the many things councils do. But it's been limited to those councils and has cost them a lot of money and time.
- As a sector we cannot afford for every council to spend the budget and elapsed time to design every one of their services from scratch. It just won't happen... too many councils will fall off the financial cliff edge before they get very far.
- The answer cannot be for the majority of councils to remain trapped in their current forms with their current IT and digital products and services. Nor can it be for one single system to replace the hundreds in use across the UK – there is no political or commercial support for a single Local GDS, GOV.UK or the equivalent of the ill-fated NHS National Programme for IT.

So, what can we do?

Working with the MHCLG Local Digital team last year I was privileged to be part of the collective drafting and publication of [the Local Digital Declaration](#). I support the intent behind it – when a service is designed in the internet age, the user research, interaction and content design/service patterns, data structures, API and integration definitions should all be published openly so that they can be implemented by other councils and by suppliers who want to support this good practice.

Once there is a recognised pattern and model for implementation of the digitally enabled service that meets user needs, councils should expect their suppliers to offer products built on those patterns – and not to extract a premium for it!

Re-use will lead to reduced costs for a better outcome, and if councils across the country can adopt them easily and cost-effectively, it will contribute to a massive reduction in cost across the sector.

The great digitally enabled services that were built by suppliers with councils like Bristol, Hackney, Camden, Stockport and Southwark are largely based on open source code which in many cases has been published openly on GitHub.

But it's not easy to pick them up and place them down into another council

with different technical infrastructure and back-end systems. We need to pay attention to the standards needed to wrap these systems in a way that makes them interoperable and portable, with clean boundaries and well-defined services and interfaces.

If we can define a set of ecosystem standards that enable multiple building blocks to be used together in a way that ensures they will fit – like Lego™ – we will move further towards the vision of [local government as a platform](#) that people like me, [Dave Briggs](#) and [Mark Thompson](#) have been writing about for the last few years.

That's the vision we have at Placecube – we want to create that ecosystem based on open standards, where we can provide a re-usable set of building blocks “Cubes” based on the work we've done with [Bristol](#) and [Camden](#), for other councils to adopt easily and cost-effectively.

But unlike many of the legacy suppliers in the local government market, we don't want to lock customers in and push you to buy everything from us – we want to be able to easily incorporate the best digital services from other suppliers, who have already understood user needs, worked to design services and then realised them with new code.

We invite them to work with us on the common standards needed to ensure



Dr Gavin Beckett

services can be composed together by councils who want to re-use the great work that has already been done. And whilst councils are the democratic centre of the local place, we know that people, businesses and visitors to the area interact with hundreds of other organisations that provide services, advocacy or information advice and guidance.

Our vision of an open ecosystem is more than just councils being able to use better digital services, it is to digitally connect the network of organisations in a place, enabling them to provide or access data, services and to collaborate on meeting community, individual and local business needs.

For further information take a look at the Place Designs already being used to run leading UK local public services at www.placecube.com.



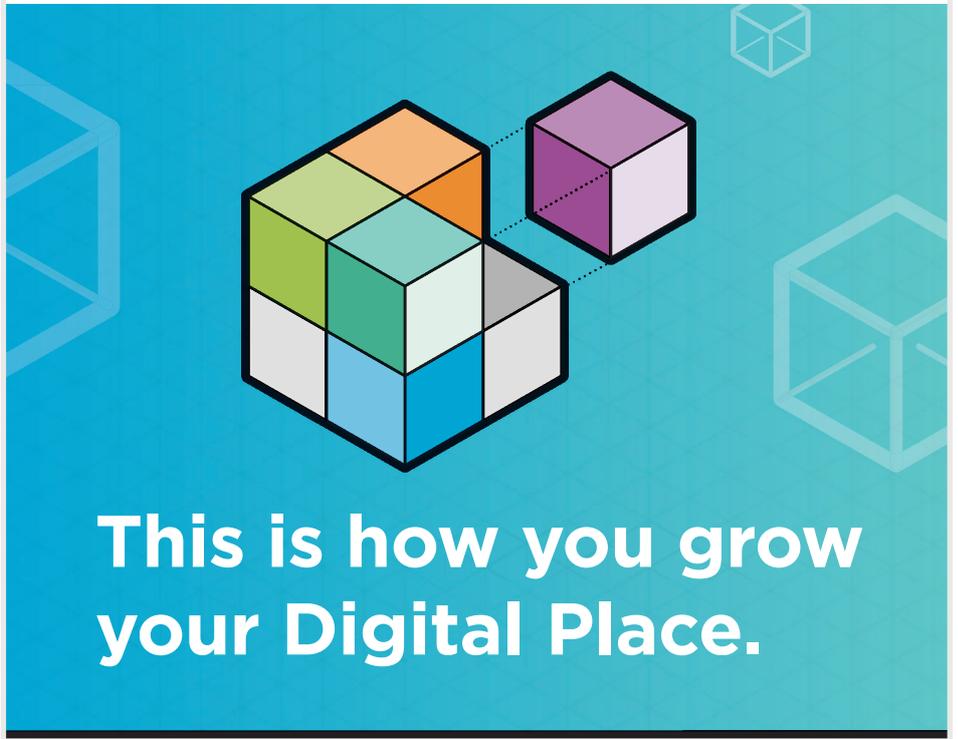
PLACECUBE

Dr Gavin Beckett
Executive Director,
Product Research & Innovation
 Placecube
 Tel: +44 (0)20 8895 6756
enquiries@placecube.com
www.placecube.com
www.twitter.com/placecube



PLACECUBE

Crown
 Commercial
 Service
 Supplier



Digital Place

Now you can accelerate your approach to place-shaping using Digital Place to grow your local services and economy.

- Based on leading open source technologies
- Designed by local government for local government
- New style partnerships promote co-creation & re-use
- 100+ re-usable 'cube' components reduce new build costs
- Instant tools to engage your communities online
- Flexible, agile innovation of your Digital Place

Rapidly launch digital strategies that bring people, communities, businesses and infrastructure closer together for a smarter, more connected Digital Place.

+44 (0)20 8895 6756 | www.placecube.com