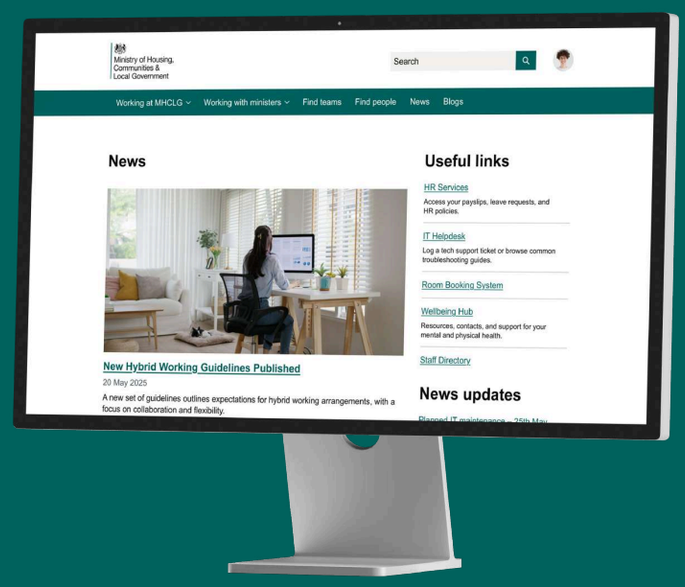
Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Redesigning the Intranet Experience for MHCLG Staff

Enhancing Usability, Accessibility, and Engagement Across the Ministry's Internal Digital Platform



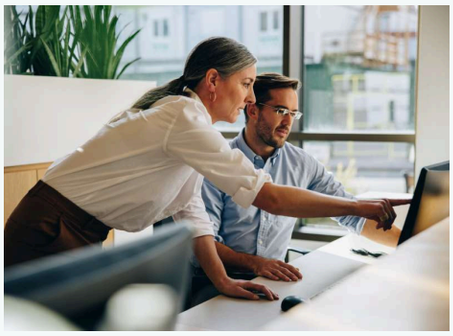
Client

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government of the United Kingdom

Location	Services
Manchester	User Experience
London	Web Development

The Situation

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) relied on an internal staff intranet that had grown outdated in both design and functionality. As staff needs evolved and government digital standards became more stringent, the intranet required a comprehensive overhaul to meet modern usability, accessibility, and performance expectations.



Problem

The existing intranet did not meet Government Digital Service (GDS) compliance, relied heavily on outdated third-party components, and posed issues with speed, accessibility, and user experience. Staff were encountering persistent bugs, difficulty navigating the system, and challenges accessing key resources efficiently. The branding was inconsistent, and the system lacked alignment with MHCLG's updated digital identity.

Solution

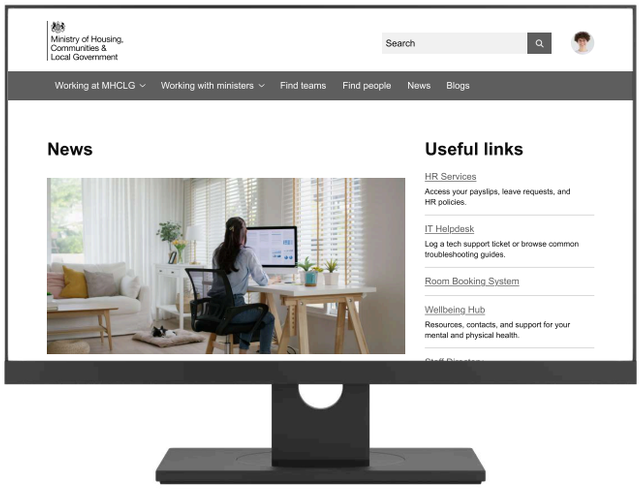
We conducted a full UX and accessibility audit to identify core usability issues and accessibility barriers. Working closely with the MHCLG team, we developed GDS-compliant wireframes and iteratively tested them with staff to identify pain points and refine user flows. A complete redesign followed, adhering strictly to GDS design patterns and MHCLG branding. We rebuilt the site using a secure architecture with significantly reduced dependency on third-party components, ensuring consistent performance and long-term maintainability.

Results

The new intranet is fully GDS-compliant, faster, more accessible, and significantly easier to navigate. Staff engagement has increased due to the intuitive layout and responsive design. Key resources are now easier to find, and accessibility scores have improved markedly. The redesigned platform provides a secure, scalable foundation that better supports the daily needs of MHCLG staff while reflecting the professionalism and clarity expected of a modern government department.

Goals

1. **Ensure GDS Compliance -** Redesign the intranet using Government Digital Service (GDS) standards to guarantee accessibility, consistency, and usability across all staff touch points.
2. **Improve Performance and Security -** Rebuild the platform with a secure, modern architecture that reduces reliance on outdated third-party components, enhances loading speed, and minimises potential vulnerabilities.
3. **Enhance User Experience -** Deliver a user-friendly intranet that is easy to navigate and free of common bugs. Focus on clear layouts, intuitive content structures, and streamlined access to essential tools and resources.
4. **Support Staff Needs Through Research and Testing -** Engage directly with MHCLG staff throughout the design process—via interviews, wireframe testing, and iteration—to ensure the final product reflects their real-world workflows and pain points.

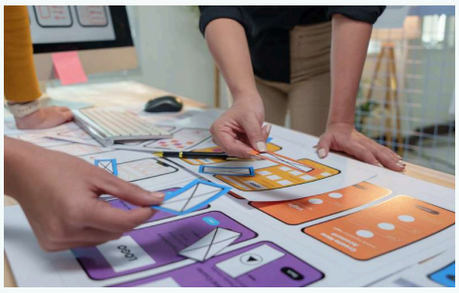


Research & Development

Our approach to redesigning the MHCLG staff intranet was rooted in research, collaboration, and continuous iteration. From accessibility audits to wireframe testing, every step was informed by real user feedback and GDS best practices. This ensured a secure, fast, and intuitive platform that meets both departmental standards and user expectations.

Accessibility Review

We conducted a full audit of the existing intranet to identify accessibility issues and ensure the new design would meet WCAG and GDS guidelines.



UX Audit

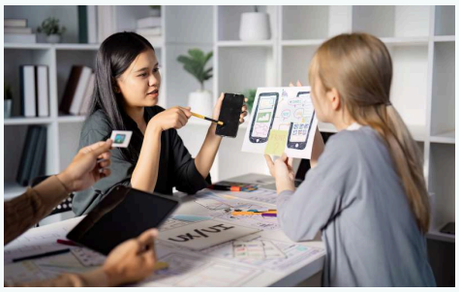
A thorough review of the existing user experience revealed key usability issues, including poor navigation and inconsistent layouts.

Stakeholder Workshops

Workshops with MHCLG teams helped us gather requirements, align on priorities, and understand how different departments use the intranet day-to-day.

Wireframing and Prototyping

Multiple wireframe concepts were developed and shared with staff to explore layout preferences and test functional flows before full design development.



Usability Testing

We tested prototypes with real users to validate design decisions, uncover usability barriers, and ensure that the intranet would be intuitive for staff of all tech skill levels.

Iterative Design Process

Feedback loops with MHCLG stakeholders and users allowed us to refine the design over several iterations, resulting in a final product that balances user needs, GDS standards, and departmental branding.

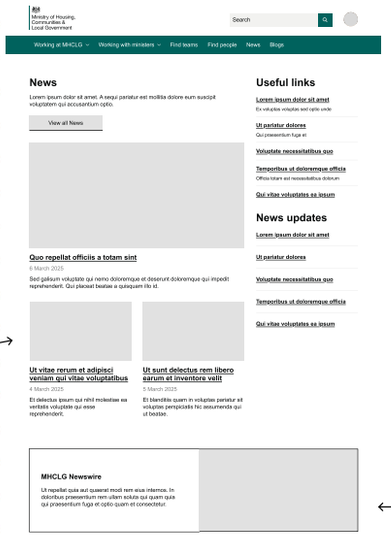
Wireframes

To establish a clear and functional foundation for the intranet redesign, we created a comprehensive set of wireframes. These early-stage designs allowed us to demonstrate both layout and usability to the MHCLG team before moving into full visual design.

Each wireframe incorporated key GDS components to ensure accessibility and compliance from the outset. We included examples of how forms, buttons, search functionality, and information panels would appear using GDS standards. The wireframes also introduced the newly designed navigation system and footer structure, making it easy for stakeholders to visualise how users would move through the site and access essential content. This phase was crucial in aligning expectations and confirming functionality before progressing further in development.

Revamped navigation with cleaner look

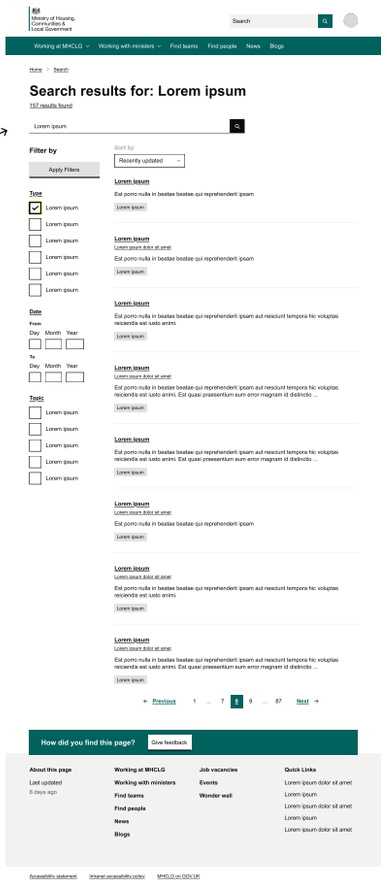
Useful links moved to the top of the page so they are easier to access



Featured News articles as the first item users see on the page

Featured news separate as it is from an external source

On page search bar for easy access to change search term if required

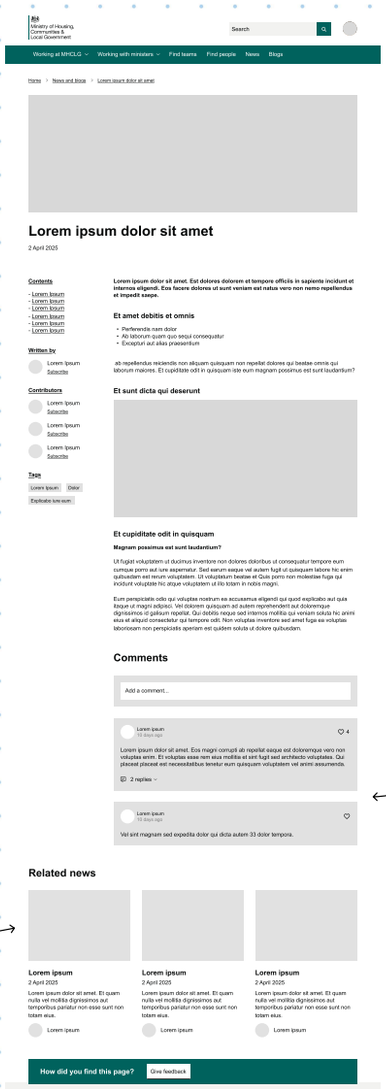


A range of filters so that users can narrow down results

Different layouts across the page to keep variation and interesting to the user

Events and jobs update automatically to show the latest posts

Cleaner and more simple footer layout with links added for easy navigation



Extra details of the news article such as authors and tags

Ability to add comments and reply

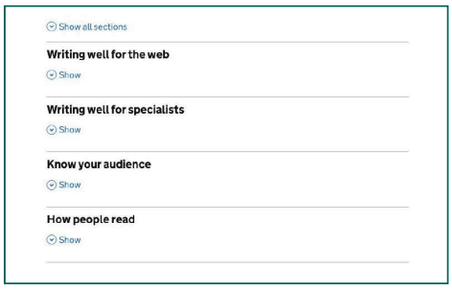
Quick links to other news articles to encourage users to read related news

GDS Components

To ensure full accessibility, consistency, and compliance, the redesigned MHCLG intranet was built using a robust set of components from the GOV.UK Design System. These elements not only standardised the experience across the platform but also ensured that the system met government accessibility and usability standards.

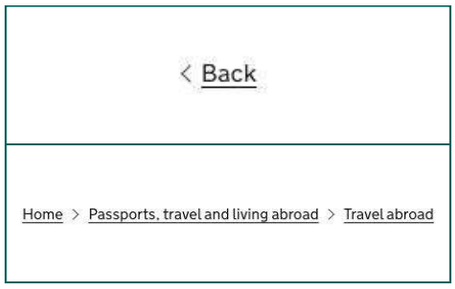
In addition to these components, we adopted the GDS styles for typography, colours, spacing, and layout. This included the use of the GDS Transport font, standardised heading structures, accessible colour palettes, and grid systems. By following these principles and patterns, the final product is not only visually aligned with other UK government digital services but also optimised for usability, performance, and accessibility.

We incorporated the following GDS components into the design and development:



Accordion

To allow users to expand and collapse content, reducing visual clutter.

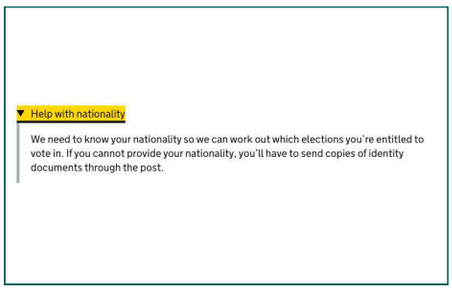


Back link & Breadcrumb

For improved navigation and orientation within the intranet structure.

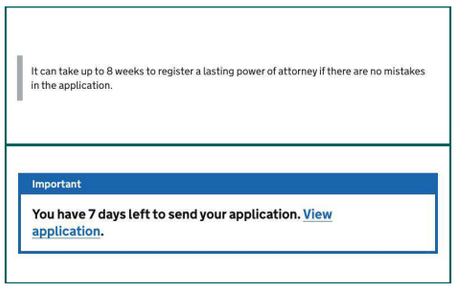
Button

Clear, consistent call-to-action buttons used across pages and forms.



Details

To let users reveal extra content only when needed, helping streamline page layouts.



Inset text & Notification banner

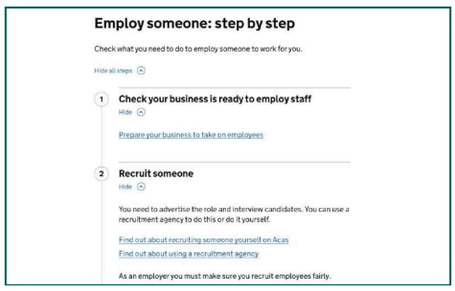
For highlighting important information and alerts.

Skip link

Essential for keyboard users to quickly access the main content.

Table

Used for presenting structured data clearly.



Step by step navigation

Ideal for process-driven pages or instructions.

Select & Checkboxes

Core form elements used consistently across input fields.

Accessibility

Accessibility was a core focus throughout the redesign of the MHCLG intranet. From the initial audits to final implementation, every step of the process was shaped by the goal of ensuring that all users—regardless of ability—could navigate and interact with the platform with ease.

We began with a comprehensive accessibility review of the existing intranet, identifying key problem areas that hindered user experience, particularly for screen reader users and those navigating by keyboard. These insights directly informed our design decisions and component selection.

The new intranet was built using GOV.UK Design System components, all of which are rigorously tested for accessibility. We followed best practices for colour contrast, semantic HTML, focus states, and screen reader compatibility. Interactive elements like buttons, accordions, and form fields were tested for clear labelling and logical tab order.

Additionally, we ensured:

- Keyboard Navigation – All interactive elements are fully operable using keyboard alone.
- Skip Links – Provided quick access to main content for assistive technology users.
- Alt Text & ARIA Labels – Used consistently across images and interactive elements.
- Responsive Design – Ensured accessibility across devices and screen sizes.

By embedding accessibility into every layer of the design and development process, we delivered an intranet that not only complies with WCAG 2.1 AA standards but also supports the needs of every MHCLG staff member.

User Testing

To ensure the new intranet design was intuitive and effective, we conducted a series of user testing sessions with employees from MHCLG. Due to the nature of the project, testing needed to be conducted internally. This proved valuable, as participants were regular users of the existing intranet and could directly compare the current experience with our proposed wireframes.

Overall feedback on the new designs was positive, with many users commenting on the improved layout and clarity. Beyond verbal feedback, it was especially useful to observe how participants interacted with the wireframes — identifying moments where they struggled to find content or clicked in unexpected places. These insights helped us fine-tune both usability and content structure.

Insights from Usability Testing

To validate the new intranet design, we carried out usability testing sessions with employees at MHCLG. Due to project constraints, the sessions were conducted internally. This turned out to be beneficial — the participants were frequent users of the existing intranet and were well placed to evaluate our new designs against their current experience.

Watching users interact with the wireframes revealed not just what they said, but how they used the designs — highlighting points of confusion, misclicks, or difficulty locating information. This provided critical insight into areas where the experience could be improved.

User Feedback Collection

We gathered both qualitative and observational feedback during the sessions. Verbal comments highlighted user expectations and reactions, while live navigation patterns revealed usability challenges — such as missed filters, unclear content hierarchies, or ambiguous labels. These sessions gave us practical direction for what needed refining in the next design iteration.

Iterative Changes Based on User Feedback

The feedback was systematically reviewed and used to inform a range of updates — from interface tweaks to content structure and feature placement. By addressing these insights early, we were able to embed user-centred thinking directly into the high-fidelity designs and avoid friction further down the line.

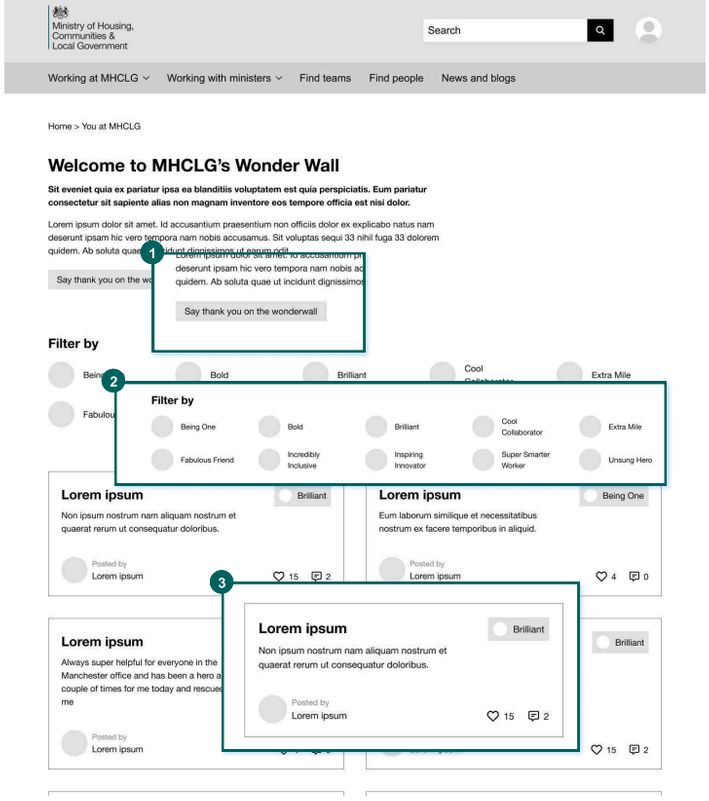
Iterations

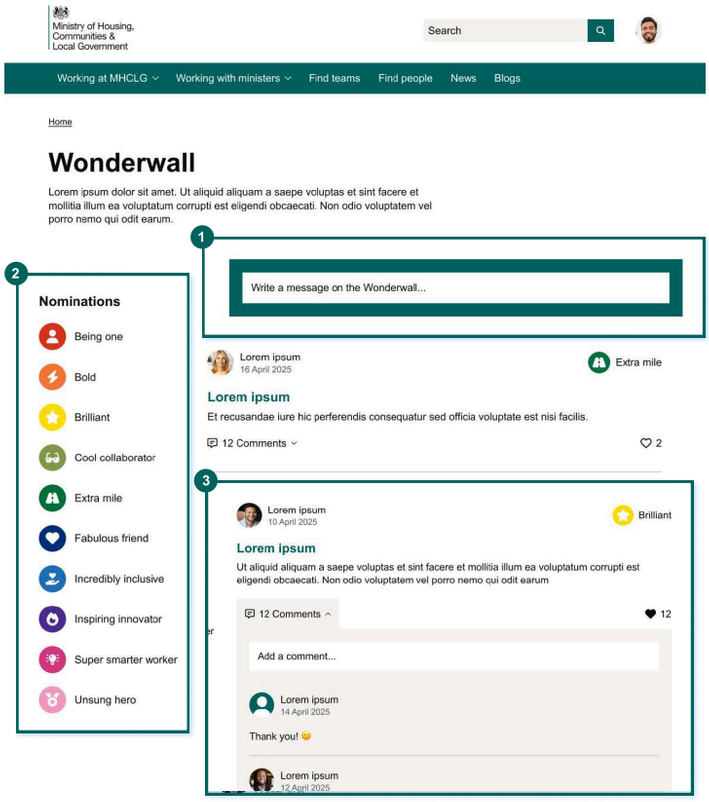
Based on user feedback, we made a range of changes across all designs — from small visual tweaks to more significant layout and functionality updates.

Minor changes included clearer filter labels, shortened homepage text, and improved content positioning. However, the most substantial updates were made to the Wonder Wall and People Finder pages, where we focused on improving how the pages functioned rather than just how they looked.

For Wonder Wall, we simplified the layout and reconsidered the use of filters. In People Finder, we added clearer team and directorate info, and began exploring a combined view with Find Team to reduce confusion.

These changes ensured the final designs were more intuitive, practical, and shaped by real user needs.





1. **Posting to the Wonder Wall** - In the wireframe, the call-to-action for adding a message opened a separate page containing a submission form. While functional, this added unnecessary steps and friction for users. A more streamlined approach would allow users to post directly within the page or through a simpler overlay.

2. **Filter Layout** - The filters were displayed in two full-width rows of five options each. Although this reduced vertical space, it required users to scan the entire width of the screen, which can be more cognitively demanding and less user-friendly. A more compact or grouped layout would support quicker scanning and better usability.

3. **Post Layout** - Wonder Wall posts were presented in a tiled, two-column card layout. Each post was clickable, opening a separate page for more detail and comments. This approach created additional navigation steps for users and consumed significant page space while displaying minimal content. A more efficient design would surface key post details inline, reducing the need for clicks and enhancing the browsing experience.

1. **Posting to the Wonder Wall** - In the high-fidelity designs, the Wonder Wall was reimagined to function more like a familiar social media feed. This approach better suited the tone and purpose of the page, while also improving usability. The “Post on Wonder Wall” feature was integrated directly at the top of the feed, reducing steps for users. When selected, it expands in place to reveal options for entering a message, selecting a recipient (person or team), and choosing a category — all without navigating to a separate page. This streamlined interaction reduces clicks and maintains user focus.

2. **Filter Layout** - To ensure accessibility and better content hierarchy, Wonder Wall posts now occupy three-quarters of the page width. This left a natural space on the left-hand side, which was used to display the nomination categories. Placing filters here makes them more accessible without occupying excessive space or interrupting the reading flow.

3. **Post Layout** - The redesigned layout adopts a vertical, single-column format in which posts are stacked — mirroring common social media feeds. This allows posts to display inline, removing the need for separate containers or individual post pages. Comments are now included directly beneath each post, enabling users to engage without additional clicks. Overall, this layout is more efficient, user-friendly, and content-focused.

Key Takeaways

Redesigning the MHCLG intranet was an opportunity to rethink how staff access, navigate, and engage with internal content. Through iterative design, informed by direct user testing and feedback, we developed a platform that prioritises usability, clarity, and familiarity. Balancing functionality with simplicity was central to our approach — resulting in a more intuitive experience that reflects the daily needs of its users.

User-Led Design Makes A Measurable Difference

Engaging real users early in the process proved invaluable. Their feedback surfaced practical pain points and usability issues that weren’t visible in static designs. By observing how users navigated the site, we were able to make targeted improvements that directly enhanced user experience.

Less Clicks, More Clarity

Reducing unnecessary navigation steps became a key principle. Whether

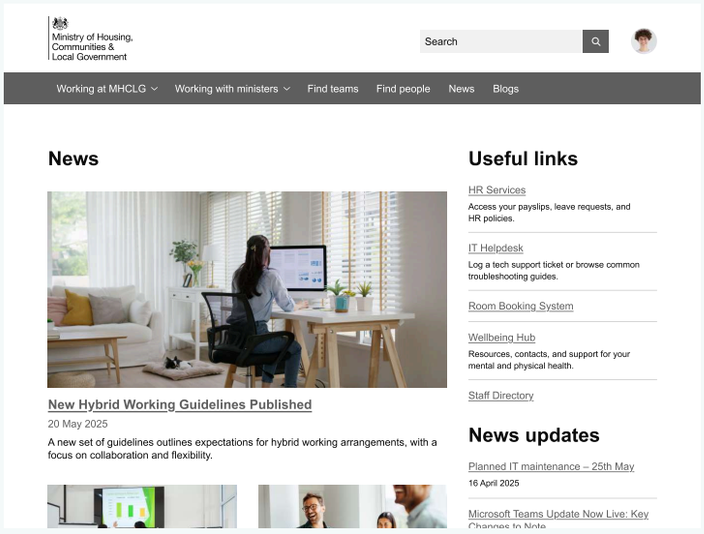
Functionality Should Support Familiar Behaviours

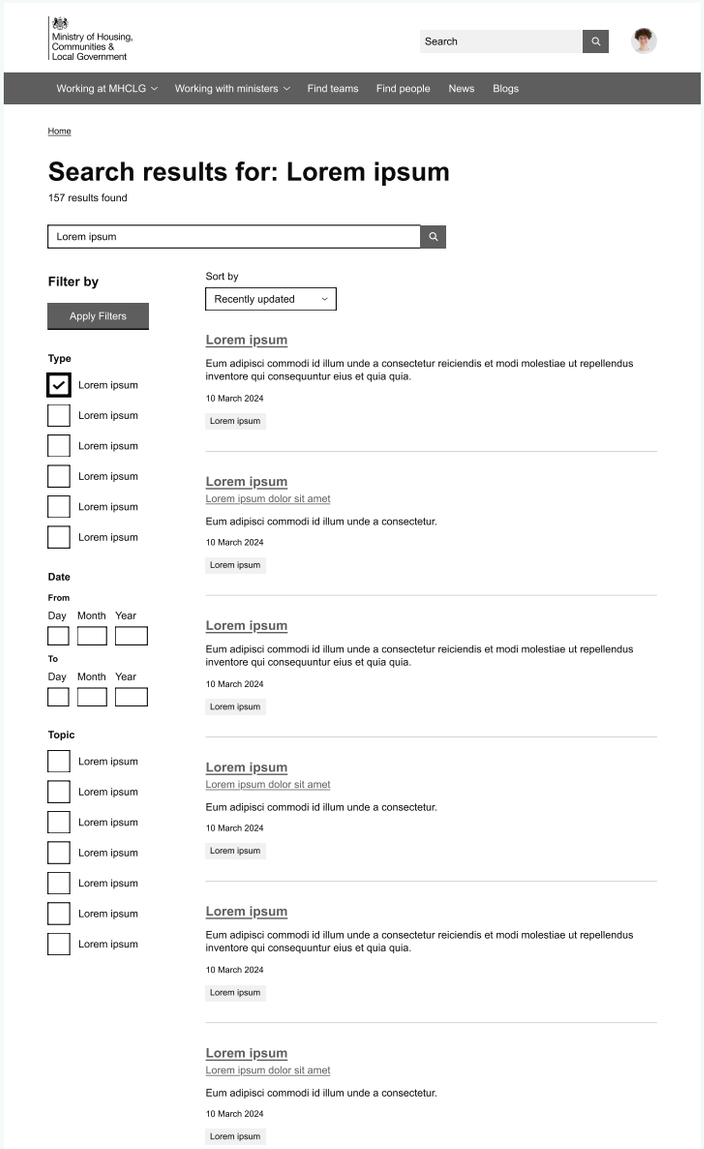
Where possible, we leaned on patterns users already understood — such as a social media-style layout for Wonder Wall — to reduce cognitive load and improve ease of use. This helped users interact with the site more naturally, without requiring explanation or onboarding.

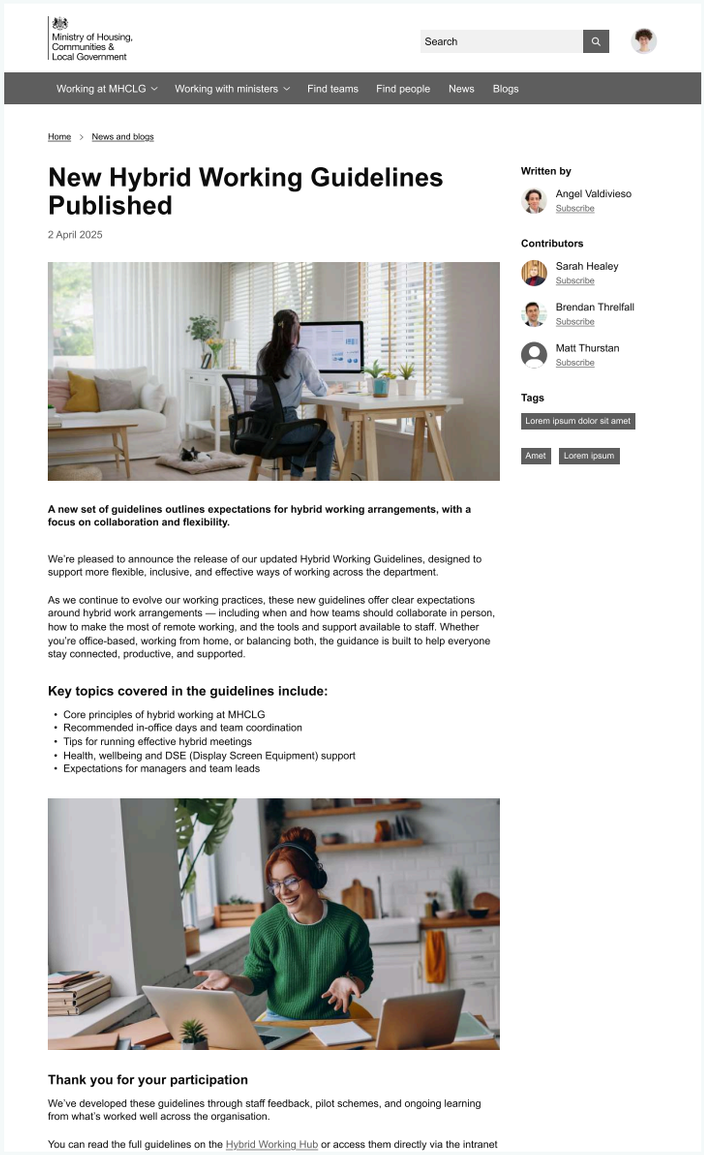
Layout And Structure Are As Important As Aesthetics

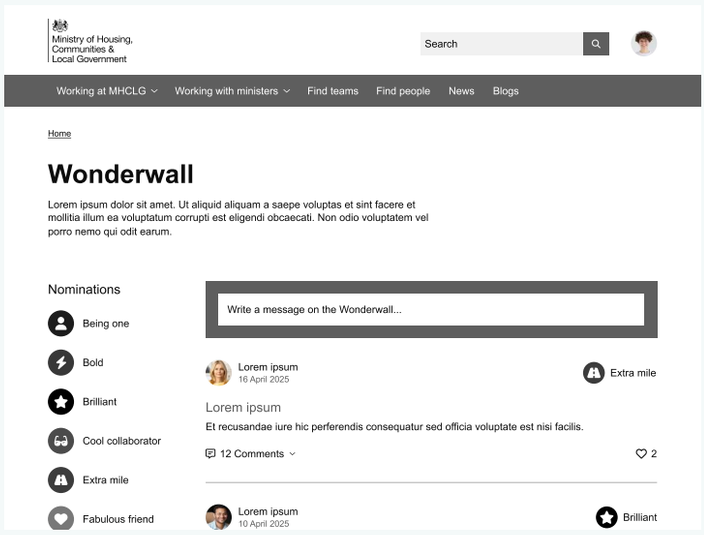
integrating form interactions directly on the page or simplifying how content is displayed, we worked to keep interactions efficient and streamlined — enabling users to find or complete tasks faster.

While visual polish is important, structural decisions had the greatest impact on usability. From repositioning filters to rethinking how people and teams are found, these layout changes supported better user journeys and helped content feel more purposeful and accessible.









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