



Report of Corporate Management Team

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

**Councillor Susan McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Digital,
Customer Services and Procurement**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1. To present to members the proposed new and updated Digital Strategy for the county.

Executive summary

2. In 2019 the council adopted a digital strategy. Since that time a significant digital transformation has taken place. The council has achieved a range of successes and is continuing to deliver an ambitious programme of transformation.
3. The updated Digital Strategy set out in this report (the strategy) builds upon the existing strong foundations and provides the opportunity to further develop and build upon our digital principles, whilst adapting to the changing environment we work and live in and the developing needs of our communities.
4. The new strategy has been developed through consultation with key groups and a wide range of stakeholders across the county.
5. The new five-year strategy is an important step forward in our commitment to connect our communities and meet our 2035 vision as a County.

6. The updated digital strategy is structured around five digital themes:
 - (a) Digital Customer;
 - (b) Digital Council; and
 - (c) Digital Community;These themes being supported by two enabling themes:
 - (d) Digital Collaboration; and
 - (e) Digital Inclusion
7. The two enabling themes are critical to ensuring that we are delivering in the right way and when progressed together, which will enable us to further achieve our vision of a digital county.
8. The strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to align with the County Durham Vision and Corporate Plan.
9. The strategy will be supported by a delivery plan which is currently being developed and will be finalised by September 2023.
10. The updated strategy will be designed and published as web content, in line with best practice and accessibility legislation.

Recommendation(s)

11. Members are recommended to note the information in the report and support the adoption of the new strategy.

Background

12. For most people, digital technology is an essential part of modern daily life. We all live in an increasingly connected world and the internet has given us access to a world of information and on demand and accessible entertainment. We can shop, bank, and transact with public services on a 24/7 basis. We can all share our thoughts, opinions and photographs with the world instantly through social media. Global communication is readily available and instantaneous.
13. These connections and the Covid-19 pandemic have changed the way people expect to interact with the council to request, access and receive our services.
14. To meet these changing expectations, the council continues to enhance and expand its digital offer. This means getting the most out of technology to increase choice and improve quality, finding innovative solutions that allow us to work in better and smarter ways and helping our communities to thrive in a digital world.
15. In 2019 the council adopted a digital strategy with three core themes:
 - a) Digital Customer
 - b) Digital Organisation
 - c) Digital Communities
16. Since that time, and through the delivery of the digital strategy, the council's digital offer to its customer has seen dramatic improvement.
17. Successes achieved over recent years include:
 - (a) We have worked to digitise our contact and improve our online offer, with over 140 services now available online;
 - (b) Online services are increasingly becoming our customers preferred channel of choice, with on line transactions more than doubled since 2019 resulting in almost 390,000 fewer telephone calls per year, enabling us to be more efficient and to provide greater assistance to those who need it;
 - (c) We have worked in partnership to provide superfast broadband coverage across the county, with 97% of all households and businesses now covered. This work has seen ¹superfast broadband availability in County Durham increased from 65% to 97% and gigabit speed coverage rise from 3%, when

¹ <https://labs2.thinkbroadband.com/local/E06000047>

Government first announced its gigabit ambitions in November 2019, to 155% currently;

- (d) The way we work as an organisation has also changed dramatically, with over 8000 employees now using Microsoft 365 to improve teamwork and collaboration and to facilitate more flexible and hybrid ways of working;
- (e) The way that we deliver services has also changed, with mobile digital devices now being routinely used in frontline service delivery, harnessing the power of digital and data to provide a better customer experience;
- (f) A research and baselining exercise on the status of Digital Inclusion in County Durham has led to the creation of a working group under the County Durham Partnership. There is already a broad range of activities taking place in this field to help people get online, and the aim of the group is to facilitate a more co-ordinated approach to digital inclusion, greater collaborative working between organisations (public, VCS and private sector) and improved marketing and communication of available initiatives. We have several long-standing digital inclusion related initiatives which include:
 - (a) Free computer access and public wi-fi in our libraries, alongside support;
 - (b) Durham Learn digital skills courses;
 - (c) Reboot scheme provides registered charities and social enterprises with access to low-cost recycled computer equipment;
 - (d) Computer and connectivity provision for eligible job seekers as part of Employability Durham support; and
 - (e) Information and advice on the available support on the Digital Durham website – a signposting tool is in development which will direct people to local support

18. The updated strategy has been developed to expand on this strong foundation to ensure that we continue to bring the benefits of technology to communities, businesses and partners in Durham, to make it convenient and easy for our customers to interact with the council.

An Updated Digital Strategy for County Durham

19. The updated strategy has been developed following extensive consultation with residents, businesses, partners and employees through surveys, workshops and various focus groups including the youth council and disability partnership. It sets out the council's ambitions for the County over the next five years and provides a framework on how these can be delivered. This five-year strategy is an important step forward in our commitment to connect our communities and meet our 2035 vision as a County supporting existing core strategies.

Digital Strategy Themes

20. The updated digital strategy is structured around five digital themes. The five digital themes; three of which are delivery themes (Digital Customer, Digital Council and Digital Community) and two are enabling themes (Digital Collaboration and Digital Inclusion), will ensure that we are delivering in the right way and when progressed together, will enable us to further achieve our vision of a digital county.

Theme one: Digital Customer

21. This theme considers how we can improve people's experience of interacting with the council and enable the council's customers to access the information and services they need online. However, it is important to remember that this is about improving access and not restricting contact to online methods only.
22. Headline commitments in the Digital Customer theme include:
- (a) Updating our website and online offer so it is always up to date and accessible;
 - (b) Making it easier for citizens and customers to self-serve online for themselves and on behalf of friends and family with more and more services available online;
 - (c) Using artificial intelligence to understand customer needs and shape our services;
 - (d) Ensuring all our online services are accessible and co-designed where possible with our customers;
 - (e) Redesigning our processes to improve communication and engagement with customers;

Theme two: Digital Council

23. This theme relates to how we have used digital within the council to improve service delivery and operate more efficiently and deliver positive outcomes by equipping staff with the digital skills and technology required to deliver these services effectively and efficiently.

24. Headline commitments in the Digital Council theme include:

- Reviewing our systems architecture and applications to rationalise where possible;
- Exploring the use of artificial intelligence to improve automation, productivity, efficiency, and decision making;
- Developing a corporate digital roadmap to support the outcomes of the digital strategy, the council plan, wider plans, and other partner strategies; and
- Ensuring employees have the right digital skills and tools to work effectively and efficiently

Theme three: Digital Community

25. This theme focuses on improving digital infrastructure and connectivity, providing people and businesses with the skills and technology needed to enhance their lives.

26. Headline commitments in the Digital Community theme include:

- In partnership, making the most of available investment, working with national teams, partners, and other local authorities on joint initiatives;
- Ensuring that digital is embedded in all our strategies, particularly around social care and tackling the climate crisis;
- Working with communities, businesses, and citizens to support access to hardware and training and make the most of the technical solutions developed in the community;
- Facilitating and supporting digital initiatives, whilst ensuring that information can be shared between partner organisations and adhering to rigorous information governance; and
- Encouraging residents and businesses to make use of national and regional funding opportunities to further our digital objectives.

Theme four: Digital Collaboration

27. This supporting theme relates to working digitally in partnership to seamlessly tackle complex issues.
28. There are no commitments under this cross-cutting theme as they have already been factored into other elements.

Theme five: Digital Inclusion

29. This supporting theme relates to ensuring people have access to connectivity and devices and the skills and confidence to flourish.
30. There are no commitments under this cross-cutting theme as they have already been factored into other elements.
31. Whilst the new strategy is ambitious in its scope, it is also important to set digital development within a context of providing more choice to customers and not less. In this respect the council will maintain the position of ensuring that access to services is not wholly dependent on digital access and that other alternatives, through telephone and face to face services, will continue to be available to those who prefer or need them, and that digital assistance will be available to those that require it.

Final Digital Strategy document

32. For the first time, the digital strategy will be designed and published as web content in line with best practice and accessibility guidelines. Paper based copies will be available upon request and these will also be available in easy read and large text if required.
33. The web content design breaks down the content into bitesize areas, therefore making the content more manageable and easier to digest for all readers.
34. It is recognised that the digital strategy is a detailed document and as such it is proposed that a video setting out the key points of the strategy, will also be produced following approval of the digital strategy to reach all stakeholders.
35. A static form of the document is presented as Appendix 2 of this report for completeness.

Impact Assessment

36. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is presented in Appendix 3.
37. The assessment identifies that the digital strategy will have a positive impact across the protected characteristics of widening choice of access and communication channels. National evidence shows however, that residents who are older, experience social or financial disadvantage, have lower educational attainment levels, have poorer health, or English as a second language, are more likely to experience digital exclusion. This has a disproportionate effect across protected characteristics. Mitigations are planned to address these impacts, with provision of a range of support planned to assist citizens in the use of digital channels. Alongside this, work is planned through the County Durham Together Board to address digital exclusion issues across the county.

Delivery of the strategy

38. The new strategy sets out an ambitious direction for the county and will support existing core strategies and plans.
39. The next steps are to develop a detailed delivery plan and further shape our monitoring framework. This will also be supported by a specific delivery plan and monitoring framework.
40. The use of a Delivery Plan approach throughout the 5-year period of the strategy will enable regular reviews, which will include workshops with the youth forum and disability partnership, to respond to changes and allow priorities to be reassessed and recalibrated; and actions to be refined based on whether outcomes are being achieved. This will ensure the Digital strategy remains a relevant and live document throughout its lifespan.

Conclusion

41. The adoption of the new strategy provides a framework within which these ambitions can be delivered, and aligns to our other key strategies, such as the County Durham Vision and Corporate Plan, and our wider partnership work and collaboration.
42. Since 2019 a significant digital transformation has taken place, and the council is continuing to deliver an ambitious programme of transformation and has achieved a range of successes.
43. The updated strategy builds upon these strong foundations and provides the opportunity to further develop and build upon our digital principles, whilst adapting to the changing environment we work and live in and the developing needs of our communities.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

Contacts

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Digital Strategy sets out a framework for the delivery of the council's digital ambitions. Delivery within this framework will be managed within a range of project and programme environments, each with individual legal, contractual, and regulatory positions.

Finance

The Digital Strategy sets out a framework for the delivery of the council's digital ambitions. There are no direct financial implications arising from the adopt of the updated strategy, but delivery of the ambitions will require prioritisation and investment. Any financial implications will be managed through the MTFP process and within a range of project and programme environments, each with individual financing provision, monitoring and control.

Consultation

A public consultation exercise has been undertaken and the results of this have been used to define the position taken in this strategy document.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

An equality impact assessment has been completed and is attached as appendix 3. The assessment identifies that the digital strategy will have a positive impact across the protected characteristics of widening choice of access and communication channels. National evidence shows however, that residents who are older, experience social or financial disadvantage, have lower educational attainment levels, have poorer health, or English as a second language, are more likely to experience digital exclusion. This has a disproportionate effect across protected characteristics. Mitigations are planned to address these impacts, with provision of a range of support planned in assist citizens in the use of digital channels. Alongside this, work is planned through the County Durham Together Board to address digital exclusion issues across the county.

Climate Change

The development of the digital strategy and the associated projects that will be developed as part of the delivery roadmap, may have a direct/indirect positive impact on climate through the provision of more online services, new technology, a reduction in travelling, improved infrastructure. Benefits of each project will be identified as part of the benefits identification process for each agreed project.

Human Rights

n/a

Crime and Disorder

n/a

Staffing

The Digital Strategy will result in activity ensure that staff have access to the right training and digital skills required to effectively conduct their roles and support customers.

Accommodation

n/a

Risk

Any risk linked to delivery plans will be managed and exiting risk assessment/logs will be in place for the service.

Procurement

None directly

Appendix 2: Digital Strategy

Attached as a separate document.

Appendix 3: Durham County Council Equality Impact Assessment

NB: The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires Durham County Council to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people from different groups. Assessing impact on equality and recording this is one of the key ways in which we can show due regard.

Section One: Description and Screening

Service/Team or Section	Digital Engagement
Lead Officer	Cheryl Duggan
Title	Digital Strategy
MTFP Reference (if relevant)	
Cabinet Date (if relevant)	12 July 2023
Start Date	November 2022
Review Date	January 2024

Subject of the Impact Assessment

Please give a brief description of the policy, proposal or practice as appropriate (a copy of the subject can be attached or insert a web-link):

Digital Services has developed a refreshed digital strategy, with the aim of adapting us to the changing environment we work in and developing the needs of our communities.

Our proposed digital approach is centred around five digital themes, which will ensuring we deliver our services in the right way.

Three of these digital themes are delivery themes; Digital Customer, Digital Council and Digital Communities and the remaining two are enabling themes; collaboration and inclusion.

The Digital Collaboration and Digital Inclusion themes run throughout the strategy ensuring that we work in partnership and in an inclusive way as we

implement the activities in our Digital Customer, Digital Council, and Digital Community.

The strategy has been informed from significant consultation with the public, customers, businesses and partners, and by the previous successful and ongoing digital work as part of the previous digital strategy.

The strategy is a five year document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure that it continues to align with the County Durham Vision and Corporate Plan.

Who are the main stakeholders? (e.g. general public, staff, members, specific clients/service users):

- General public: County Durham residents, businesses, visitors and landowners
- Employees and Elected Members
- Prescribed bodies including neighbouring authorities
- North East Combined Authority
- Town and Parish Councils
- Area Action Partnerships
- Groups with protected characteristics

Screening

Is there any actual or potential negative or positive impact on the following protected characteristics?

Protected Characteristic	Negative Impact Indicate: Y = Yes, N = No, ? = unsure	Positive Impact Indicate: Y = Yes, N = No, ? = unsure
Age	?	Y
Disability	?	Y
Marriage and civil partnership (workplace only)	N	N
Pregnancy and maternity	N	Y
Race (ethnicity)	N	N

Religion or Belief	N	N
Sex (gender)	?	Y
Sexual orientation	N	N
Transgender	N	N

Please provide **brief** details of any potential to cause adverse impact. Record full details and analysis in the following section of this assessment.

The Digital Strategy will not include plans to make any services available online only as this could have a direct or indirect negative impact for some, in particular, people with disabilities and older people.

Our availability through traditional contact methods for example telephone and face-to-face will continue to be available but by providing alternative channels for those that wish to use them will allow us more time to spend with those that need to contact us face to face and through telephone.

How will this policy/proposal/practice promote our commitment to our legal responsibilities under the public sector equality duty to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
- advance equality of opportunity, and
- foster good relations between people from different groups?

Strategy outcomes will assist advancing equality of opportunity for all. The aim of the strategy is to make use of and maximise the potential of digital transformation, making more services and processes available online to those who prefer, whilst freeing up officer time to support those customers who are most in need.

It will aim to harness a 'digital culture' which provides a focus on innovation, using customer insight, reviewing the way we handle data and investigating the potential of tools like automation to improve processes across all contact channels.

It will benefit anyone who is able to access the internet, with particular benefit for customers who:

- may find it difficult to access the Council offices during usual working hours
i.e. working age people and carers
- want more choice on how and when to transact with the Council
- have physical access, mobility difficulties or sensory impairments
- want choice over the communications channel(s) they prefer i.e. mobile telephone, PC, tablet etc
- use or want to learn about the free internet services in customer access points, libraries and other customer facing council locations

It is understood that not all individuals or communities will have access to the internet and digital inclusion will form part of the 'Digital Strategy' as well as continued provision of services by telephone, correspondence and face to face.

Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled service users, customers and staff where appropriate and in line with our duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Evidence

What evidence do you have to support your findings?

Please **outline** your data sets and/or proposed evidence sources, highlight any gaps and say whether or not you propose to carry out consultation. Record greater detail and analysis in the following section of this assessment.

The following evidence sources, along with public consultation feedback has been used in the development of the strategy and informed our equality analysis in section two of this assessment:

- Existing customer services data – which includes metrics (how, when, why etc) and satisfaction
- Consultation feedback, Customer feedback, complaints and comments to Ombudsman level
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- National statistics confirming the take up and demand of digital services

Current Usage

We currently offer more than 140 services online. Online services are quickly becoming our customers preferred channel of choice, which have more than doubled since 2019 resulting in almost 390,000 fewer calls per year, enabling us to be more efficient and to provide greater assistance to those who need it.

Research and data sources

Since 2011, when the Office for National Statistics (ONS) began recording annual usage data, internet use in the UK has steadily increased.

Research undertaken by Ofcom in June 2017: 'The real digital divide? Understanding the demographics of non-users and limited users of the internet: an analysis of Ofcom data' (<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/research-publications/real-digital-divide>) identifies several characteristics that strongly correlate with digital exclusion: - Residents aged 75 years and over - Disadvantaged residents - Residents who left school without qualifications - Residents who are chronically ill - Residents on a low income.

There are 15.2 million people in the UK who are either non-users, or limited users of the internet. An estimated 7.8 million people (14.9%) do not currently use the internet in the UK. A further 7.4 million people (14.3%) in the UK are 'limited users' of the internet, giving a total population of 15.2 million people who are not using the internet to its full potential. 90% of non-users can be classed as disadvantaged. This takes into account the most common indicators - social class DE and being disabled, as well as leaving education at 16 or under.

Although age is a factor in defining non and limited users, it isn't the only one: 18.9% of under 65s are non or limited users of the internet; a population of approximately 7.5m people. Nearly half (48.9%) of non or limited users of the internet are under the age of 65. The most pronounced indicators of non and limited use include age, disability, social class, income and the age at which people leave education: 64.4% of non-users are aged 65 or over: 25.3% aged 65-74; and 39.1% aged (Information taken from: <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/researchpublications/real-digital-divide>)

Statistics indicate 14.2% of County Durham residents are non internet users, ranking the local authority as 12th highest in the UK. For comparison, South Teesside has the next highest regional ranking at 26th and 12%. Whilst this figure is likely to have reduced marginally due to the pandemic pushing some to utilise the Internet, it is unlikely to have reduced the gap significantly.

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Population data available at Durham Insight

<https://www.durhaminsight.info>

Being Disabled in Britain, a journey less equal (EHRC)

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/being-disabled-britain-journey-less-equal>

Government Guidance on encouraging use of digital take up

<https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/communications/increasing-digital-takeup.htm>

Consultation Approach

Phased consultation

- Phase 1 – Assess digital maturity of DCC, ambitions and vision for future, residents needs and challenges (8 weeks)²
- Phase 2 – acid test outcomes from Phase 1 (2 weeks)
- Phase 3 – draft strategy for comment (2 weeks)

Stakeholders

Are wide-ranging and have a different set of needs / outcomes so survey questions / info will be adapted by audience.

General public, businesses, Partners including CDP, Economic Partnership, Better Together Forum, AAPs and others, Youth Council, Elected Members and employees (digital and non-digital)

Plan to reach groups more likely to have some form of digital exclusion via selected AAPs and also work with Disability Partnership and Age UK.

Consultation Methods

- Online info and survey – website and staff intranet
- Structured conversations with target groups
- Presentations at AAPs
- Focus sessions or presentations for Youth Council, Age UK and Disability Partnership
- Emails to partner networks including Better Together Forum, Econ Partnership, Advice in County Durham
- F2F with public in a Durham town – location TBC
- F2F with targeted frontline staff
- Email briefing and survey for members
- Target businesses via Business Durham

Consultation communication approach

- Targeted emails across partnership network
- Social media / digital signposts
- Press release
- Digital signage for public buildings

² [Have your say on digital services - Durham County Council](#)

- Members briefing

Consultation Feedback

Consultation feedback has been used to help inform the key themes, high level principles and commitments contained within the strategy.

The percentage of respondents, in terms of protected characteristics, is as follows:

Total number of responses: 205

Gender:

Male – 113

Female – 79

Prefer not to say – 5

Prefer to self-describe – 1 (Agender/non-binary)

Age:

Under 18 – 1

18-24 – 8

25-34 – 14

35-44 – 48

45-54 – 71

55-64 – 51

65-74 – 1

Prefer not to say – 4

Ethnic origin:

White British – 191

Mixed race – 3

Prefer not to say – 4

Considered a disabled person:

Yes – 22

No – 165

Prefer not to say – 11

Ongoing and Future Stakeholder Engagement

Moving forward we will endeavour to engage with specific groups, where appropriate, to support the development of solutions as part of the digital strategy roadmap.

There will also be initiatives, activities and projects, which will be developed following approval of this strategy, to address the digital divide for those groups who currently struggle to access the intranet.

Screening Summary

On the basis of this screening is there:	Confirm which refers (Y/N)
Evidence of actual or potential impact on some/all of the protected characteristics which will proceed to full assessment?	Y
No evidence of actual or potential impact on some/all of the protected characteristics?	N

Sign Off

Lead officer sign off: Cheryl Duggan, Digital Engagement Strategic Manager	Date: 5 May 2023
Service equality representative sign off:	Date:

If carrying out a full assessment please proceed to section two.

If not proceeding to full assessment please return completed screenings to your service equality representative and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

If you are unsure of potential impact please contact the corporate research and equalities team for further advice at equalities@durham.gov.uk

Section Two: Data analysis and assessment of impact

Please provide details on impacts for people with different protected characteristics relevant to your screening findings. You need to decide if there is or likely to be a differential impact for some. Highlight the positives e.g. benefits for certain groups, advancing equality, as well as the negatives e.g. barriers for and/or exclusion of particular groups. Record the evidence you have used to support or explain your conclusions. Devise and record mitigating actions where necessary.

Protected Characteristic: Age		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Record of evidence to support or explain your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?
<p>The proposed digital strategy will have a positive impact for the Countywide population, although this impact will vary for differing age groups.</p> <p>Improving digital access and widening the choice of channels for those that wish</p>	<p>Between 2001 and 2011 the population of County Durham increased from 493,678 to 513,242</p> <p>The 2016 mid-year population estimate for County Durham shows a population of 521,800, which is an increase of 4,027 people since mid-2014 and a 5.9%</p>	<p>The Digital Strategy will not include any plans to make any services available online only.</p> <p>Our availability through traditional contact methods</p>

<p>to use them, allows us to spend more time with those that need to contact us face to face and through telephone.</p> <p>Impact could be particularly beneficial for younger people who are more likely to have good digital skills and rely more on digital technology. Evidence suggests that 99% of people aged 16 – 44 years use the internet.</p> <p>With more council services, communications and consultation taking place online, younger people who may not have previously interacted with the council may find it easier to do so.</p> <p>This is also supported by the increase in social media engagements relating to</p>	<p>increase since 2001.</p> <p>County Durham has experienced a higher rate of growth than the north east region (3.3% over the period 2001-2015), but a considerably lower rate of growth when compared to England as a whole (10.8% from 2001-2015).</p> <p>2014 based population projections for County Durham indicate that from 2016 to 2035 the county's population aged 65 or over will increase from 105,200 to 146,300 (a 39% increase) and those aged 75 and over will increase from 45,00 to 75,700 (a 65.6% increase).</p> <p>This age group is projected to increase more than any other age group in the county.</p> <p>Since 2011, when the Office for National Statistics (ONS) began recording annual usage data, internet use in the UK has steadily increased.</p>	<p>for example telephone and face-to-face will not change and by providing alternative channels for those that wish to use them provides us with more time to spend with those that need to contact us face to face and through telephone.</p>
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<p>community projects and how public services are provided.</p> <p>Increased levels of digital access will prove beneficial for working residents (predominately 18-67 years old) who will be able to access/request/book certain services 24/7.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that some older people may be less likely to use the internet, this can be linked to factors like not having used a computer at work and not learning about IT in school.</p> <p>The proposed strategy increases the various digital ways to engage with and access council services meaning all current access and communication channels are also retained.</p>	<p>It currently sits at 90% for the adult population (age 16 and over). For people aged 16 – 44, it has reached 99%.</p> <p>Internet use by older people is still lower than by younger people, and decreases with age: of those aged 65 – 74, 80% have ‘recently’ (within the last 3 months) used the internet, while only 44% of those aged 75+ have.</p> <p>Ofcom research identifies several characteristics that strongly correlate with digital exclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residents aged 75 years and over - Disadvantaged residents - Residents who left school without qualifications - Residents who are chronically ill - Residents on a low 	
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<p>This will benefit those people unable to access services digitally as alternative routes of access such as telephone and face-to-face will still be available.</p>	<p>Income</p> <p>Ofcom data shows that over a third of the non-digital user population are aged 75 and older. This equates to an estimated population of approximately 100,000 people in County Durham</p>	
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Protected Characteristic: Disability		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
<p>For many disabled people improved digital technology will increase access to services and this is positive.</p> <p>Baseline population data</p> <p>County Durham shows has a higher percentage of permanently sick and disabled people than the North East average, representing 22.4% of the overall population (Census 2021).</p>	<p>County Durham has a higher percentage of permanently sick and disabled people than the North East average, representing 22.4% of the overall population (Census 2021).</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled service users, customers and staff where appropriate.</p> <p>Increased life expectancy is leading to an increase in the number of years adults may live with poor health. (Source: Durham Insight)</p>	<p>Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled service users, customers and staff where appropriate and in line with our duty under the quality act 2010.</p>

<p>Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled service users, customers and staff, where appropriate, to ensure our people with disabilities to remain independent and people will be able to access more council services from home without the need to travel, particularly those with mobility and hearing impairments.</p> <p>Social contact can be increased through digital technologies, especially for people with conditions like Agoraphobia.</p> <p>However, it is worth noting that physical social contact may reduce through increased digital interaction, which may impact on mental health conditions.</p> <p>Some people rely on personal contact with public services to maintain positive mental, and sometimes physical, health (by getting</p>	<p>Research from Equality and Human Rights report 'Being Disabled in Britain', 2017, states that disabled people were less likely than non-disabled people to have accessed the internet (63.6% compared with 89.5% in 2013).</p> <p>ONS data tell us that 22% of disabled adults have never used the internet (compared to 9% for the adult population as a whole). Ofcom data shows that 47.7% of the 'non-user' population said that they had a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity. This represents an estimated population of 3.7m people in the UK and indicates that disabled people are more likely to experience digital exclusion.</p>	
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out of the house). Equally, people with conditions such as Alzheimer's can benefit from using technology to support memory loss, for example, calendar reminders for appointments.

Although the strategy is likely to have a positive impact for many disabled people there are some complex conditions that mean that some disabled people may never be able to use the internet (for example people with severe learning disabilities).

Some disabled people may not have access to the internet or sufficient IT skills. Some conditions may require additional support to process information to help make decisions. People with memory loss and dementia are at particular risk if they don't already have IT skills.

As part of ongoing improvements we will co-design our online services to ensure they are accessible. This will involve contributions from users with a disability/sensory impairment.

Protected Characteristic: Marriage and civil partnership (workplace only)		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
No identifiable impact		

Protected Characteristic: Pregnancy and maternity		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
<p>Improved digital technology will increase access to services and this is likely to be positive for most pregnant women and new mothers.</p> <p>By making services available online, the council can support women who may have reduced mobility due to pregnancy related health problems.</p>	No specific consultation feedback was received in relation to this protected characteristic.	As above (for age)

Protected Characteristic: Race (ethnicity)		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
<p>Equal access regardless of race.</p> <p>Providing information digitally enables people to use online translation services.</p>	In County Durham BAME communities are a relatively small number of the population. According to the 2011 Census, 98.1% of Durham's population is white British. 1.9% is 'other ethnic group', the largest component of this being mixed race and Asian.	Specific requests/need for face to face interpretation and/or document translation will continue to be available

Specific requests/need for face to face interpretation and/or document translation will continue to be available, where necessary, as is current policy.	We also have a significant population of Gypsies and Travellers who are either migrant or settled in the County. (Source: Durham Insight)	
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Protected Characteristic: Religion or belief		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
No identifiable impact		

Protected Characteristic: Sex (gender)		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
<p>The proposed digital strategy will have a positive impact for the Countywide population, although impact could vary for men and women</p> <p>Evidence suggests that older women are less likely to access the internet.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that disadvantaged residents and those on a low income are more likely to experience digital exclusion.</p>	<p>Internet use is similar for men and women in younger and middle age groups. Among those aged 65 – 74, men are a little more likely to use the internet than women, but there is a marked difference in the oldest age group as 51% of men aged 75+ have recently used it compared to 38% of women. (Source: ONS)</p>	As above (for age)

<p>As women are more likely to experience financial disadvantage compared to men there could be a disproportionate impact.</p> <p>However, men are more likely to experience disadvantage such as homelessness and addiction problems and this is likely to lead to digital exclusion.</p>		
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Protected Characteristic: Sexual orientation		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
No identifiable impact		

Protected Characteristic: Transgender		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
No identifiable impact		

Section Three: Conclusion and Review

Summary

<p>Please provide a brief summary of your findings stating the main impacts, both positive and negative, across the protected characteristics.</p>
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The proposed digital strategy will have a positive impact across the protected characteristics in terms of widening choice of access and communication channels.

Availability through traditional contact methods, for example telephone and face-to-face, will continue to be available but by providing alternative channels for those that wish to use them, this will allow us more time to spend with those that need to contact us face to face and through telephone.

Evidence demonstrates that younger age groups are more likely to have good digital skills and rely more on digital technology and are therefore likely to receive the greatest benefit from the strategy. Digital solutions can also improve access for a lot of disabled people although it is recognised that some solutions may worsen access.

In response, multiple access channels and tailored access solutions (reasonable adjustments) will remain available as part of DCC's digital approach.

Evidence shows that residents who are older, disadvantaged, left school without qualifications, are chronically ill or on a low income are more likely to experience digital exclusion. This has disproportionate impact across the protected characteristics in terms of age (older), disability and gender (both men and women).

Mitigation includes provision of support in use of digital channels e.g. support in CAPs, alternative access channels and reasonable adjustments.

Will this promote positive relationships between different communities? If so how?

With more council services, communications and consultation taking place online, people who may not have previously interacted with the council may find it easier to do so. This is also supported by the increase in social media engagements relating to community projects and how public services are provided.

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescales for implementation	In which plan will the action appear?
Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled service users, customers and staff, where appropriate and in line with our duty under the Equality Act 2010	Customer Services	Ongoing	
Specific requests/need for face to face interpretation and/or document translation will continue to be available, where necessary, as is current policy	Customer Services	Ongoing	

Review

Are there any additional assessments that need to be undertaken? (Y/N)	Individual assessments on specific pieces of digital work will be undertaken where relevant
When will this assessment be reviewed? Please also insert this date at the front of the template	January 2024

Sign Off

Lead officer sign off: Cheryl Duggan, Digital Engagement Strategic Manager	Date: 5 May 2023
Service equality representative sign off: M C Gallagher, E&D Team Leader	Date: 5 May 2023

Please return the completed form to your service equality representative and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

