

Digital Strategy

Durham County Council 2023 - 2028

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Introduction

Digital technology is an essential part of everyday life for all of us and we live in a rapidly changing world that is more interconnected than ever. The public, our businesses, our communities, our partners and our employees expect our digital offer to meet their needs whether they live, work or visit Durham. In addition, the Council is facing significant financial challenges. To meet these expectations and provide value for money, we must be a modern Council. We need to empower and connect our communities, create more efficient processes, and improve services. This is more important than ever to ensure we can tackle today's challenges such as economic challenges, the climate crisis, an aging population, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and digital inclusion.

As a Council, we are committed to providing our customers with the benefits of digital technology and have made significant progress over the period of our last strategy for our customers, communities and organisation. We will continue to meet our previous digital strategy and new challenges and priorities that may arise.


Our Vision

Digital Durham: innovative technology, customer focused, empowered communities.


Our Ambition

To be a modern digital Council, by putting technology and information at the heart of everything we do, understanding the community we serve and supporting the achievement of Council Priorities.


Why Digital?



We know we can use digital technology where appropriate, to deliver convenient services, for example through using online portals and offering self-service options, which reduce the need for in person visits or phone calls. Digital technology can also help us to make our everyday operations more effective and efficient, for example by digitalising our processes where possible, so that we can save time and money and allowing us to allocate resources more effectively to where customers need it. In addition, digitalisation is changing the way that many of our partners work and allowing for all of our services to be connected in new and exciting ways. An example of this being the growing use of assistive technology in the health care sector.



Digital technology also allows us to engage with our communities in new and innovative ways, for example through social media, using Artificial Intelligence (AI), or using apps to provide opportunities for residents to give us feedback, obtain services, and connect with their local representatives. It also helps us to be more transparent and accountable, using open data and online reporting to give our communities great insight into our decision-making processes and performance.



New and innovative technology continues to develop the opportunities to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our services. By embracing digital technology, reusing where we can, being innovative and working in collaboration with our communities and partners, we will be able to meet the changing and growing expectations of residents, improve processes, and deliver better services.

Business context and strategic refresh

As part of our ongoing commitment to developing our strategies and ensuring that they are up to date, we have reviewed our previous strategy, the current business context, and the lessons we've learned through delivering digital change over the past five years.

We know that the demand for our services is growing from both our internal and external customers and are mindful of ensuring we provide the best value for money in all that we do, to ensure wider financial considerations are taken into account. Partnership working is increasingly important across the business and with external partners to enable us to tackle pressing issues such as climate crisis, an aging population, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, and digital inclusion.

We have conducted a large-scale analysis of our digital position, looking at our digital maturity, our vision for the future, our technical landscape, and consulted with our staff, Councillors, partners, businesses, and the wider public. All of the information gathered through this process has helped to inform our digital strategy and our digital delivery programme.

We found through this work that the top priority areas for our customers are making our website easier to use and find information, expanding our 'DoItOnline' portal for Council records, and more applications to connect with and inform customers.

Our Customers

We provide digital services to a diverse group of customers with a range of needs, preferences and expectations. This includes:

- Working with residents to digitally enhance our services such as our website, our online portal, leisure, and social care;
- Supporting our staff to better deliver services and develop their digital skills and capabilities;
- Providing digital services and support to our local schools and teachers and pupils to enhance their access to digital tools and learning.
- Our commercial service offer to schools, emergency services, health providers and a vast range of external businesses and organisations to share our expertise and add value to these services
- Working with local businesses to support economic development and growth, developing digital connectivity and providing a forum for digital innovation through our 'Digital Durham' website;
- Using digital information and guides to promote Durham as a destination with attractions for visitors and tourists.



Residents



Businesses



DCC Staff



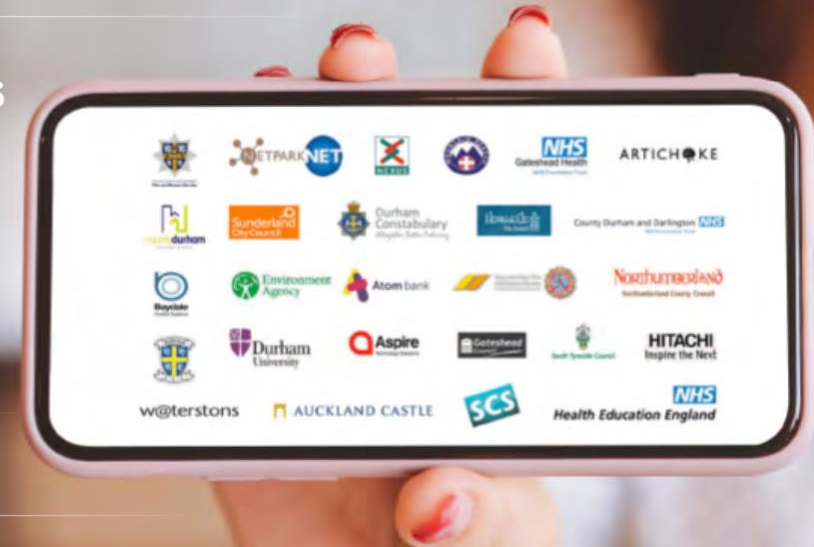
Teachers



Pupils



Visitors



We also work closely with our partner organisations locally and nationally, such as police, fire, and NHS colleagues to make the most of new digital tools, align our digital offers, and ensure our customers have the best digital experience possible across all the services they receive.

We work across Durham to ensure that all our customers have the services and connectivity they need close at hand, and that no one is excluded due to where they live.

Why Digital?

This five-year strategy is a document that is intended to adapt to the changing environment we work in and the developing needs of our communities.

We will review the strategy regularly to ensure that it continues to align with the County Durham Vision and our Corporate Plan.

This 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.

This work focused on building our digital platforms and infrastructure, providing access to fibre broadband, developing the offer around digital skills for customers and staff, support modern way of working, increasing self serve options and supporting the digital economy.

Expanding on this strong foundation, we will 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. This five-year strategy is an important step forward in our commitment to connect our communities and meet our 2035 vision as a County.



Where are we now? – Overview

From our previous digital strategy we are proud to have won awards for digital successes.

We have worked to digitise our contact and improve our online offer, with over 140 services now available 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.

We have worked in partnership to provide superfast broadband coverage across the County, with 96% now covered.

Over 8000 employees now use Microsoft 365 to improve team work and collaboration supported by Digital Champions working as a community to improve digital adoption.

Finally, we have had over 1,100 customers who have volunteered to help shape our services and over 1600 customer satisfaction surveys are completed each month to give our managers a better insight into our performance and ensure we hear our customers' voices.

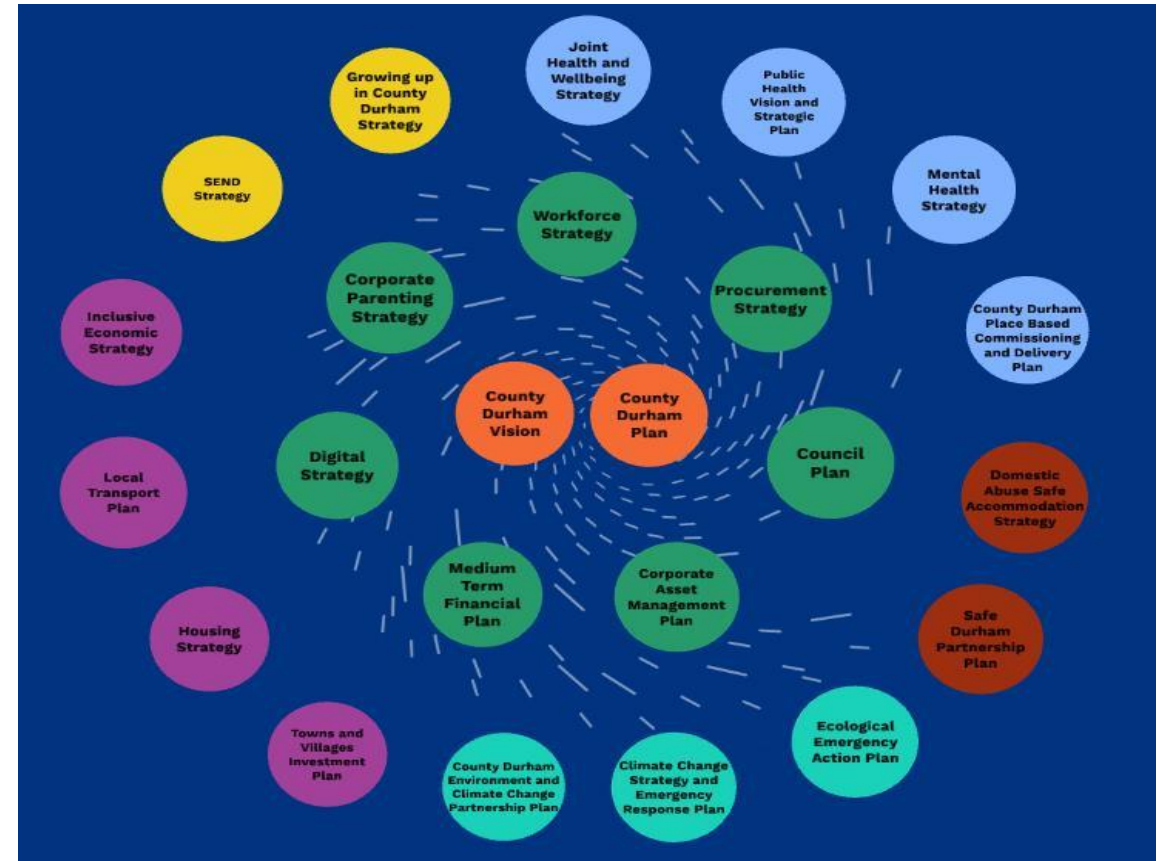
Where are we now? - Links to other strategies

The digital strategy links to our other key strategies and our wider partnership work and collaboration. As digital is an enabler for much of the work that we do, the strategy supports all of our strategies in some way, such as the County Durham Vision and Corporate Plan.

Other key strategies supported by the Digital Strategy include our Integrated Care Strategy, our Procurement Strategy, our Inclusive Economic Strategy, our Climate Change Strategy, and our Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The County Durham Vision 2035 is a document developed with partners to provide a shared understanding of what everyone wants our county to look like in 15's year time.

The County Durham Vision 2035 was written together with partner organisations and the public and sets out the shared long-term ambitions for the county. It provides strategic direction and enables us to work together more closely, removing organisational boundaries and co-delivering services for the benefit of our residents.



This diagram shows where our Digital Strategy sits in the wider strategic context of the Council and our partnerships.

Working in Partnership

Collaboration and partnership working is a supporting principle throughout our Council Plan and Digital Strategy. We want communities to be well connected and supportive of each other. In our Council Plan, we have pledged to:

- Work with communities to support their development and empowerment;
- Be asset focused by acknowledging the different needs of communities and the potential of their assets
- Build resilience by helping the most disadvantages and vulnerable.

We are committed to working with communities rather than doing to them, and want to make sure that everything we do is supported by evidence and informed by our conversations with residents – known as our approach to wellbeing.

To design and develop the supporting systems in our approach to wellbeing, we have pledged in our Council Plan to:

- Work together across sectors to reduce duplication and ensure greater impact
- Share decision making by designing and developing services and initiatives with the people who need them
- Doing with, not to - making our interventions empowering and centred around individuals
empowering and centred around individuals;
- And using what works, with everything that we do being supported by evidence and informed by local conversations.

Where do we want to be? - Working Together



Working together in partnership is essential to our services being the best they can be, and we know that there are many issues that can only be resolved jointly by working with our partners and communities.

Tackling these complex issues, such as the climate crisis, an aging population, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, and digital inclusion, requires us to pool our resources and our data to develop solutions that work locally.

We know that customers want a seamless journey when they deal with public sector organisations, and that only by working together, can we deliver this.

An important part of working with our partners and communities is to ensure that we use data effectively to improve services and customer experience.

We are committed to managing, communicating, and securely sharing data where appropriate in order to improve the lives of customers and this is a key theme 'Working better together' of our Council Plan.

Where do we want to be? - Our vision

Our Vision

Digital Durham: innovative technology, improved services, empowered communities.

To achieve our vision in a way that aligns with our values and principles, we are committed to getting the foundations right to enable future digital development and innovation.

This means that we continue to test our digital activity against our vision and values and ensure that the digital change we introduce has a strong rationale and is inclusive for our customers and communities.



Our Digital Principles?

Our principles

We have developed a series of digital principles to guide our strategy and decision-making processes. These principles will shape the way we develop our digital roadmap and manage the changing digital environment through the life of the digital programme. They are intended to ensure that Durham is a place with 'more and better jobs', 'long and independent lives' and 'connected communities'.

- 1 Use digital where it adds value
- 2 Be data led and insight driven
- 3 Involve people in the design and development of services
- 4 Be open and transparent to build digital trust
- 5 Be agile, and design sustainable and adaptable systems
- 6 Develop efficient and innovative processes
- 7 Collaborate with our communities and partners
- 8 Exploit innovation, share best practice and reuse
- 9 Data use is secure by design

How are we going to get there?

To deliver our strategic aims and to support our digital delivery, we have identified five digital themes.

The five digital themes – of which three are delivery themes (Digital Customer, Digital Council, and Digital Community), and two are enabling themes (Digital Collaboration, and Digital Inclusion), will ensure we are delivering in the right way.

Delivery themes:

- Customer - Enabling Durham's Customers to access the information and services they need online
- Council - Equipping staff with the digital skills and technology required to deliver services effectively and efficiently
- Community - Improving digital infrastructure and connectivity, providing people and businesses with the skills and technology needed to enhance their lives

Enabling themes:

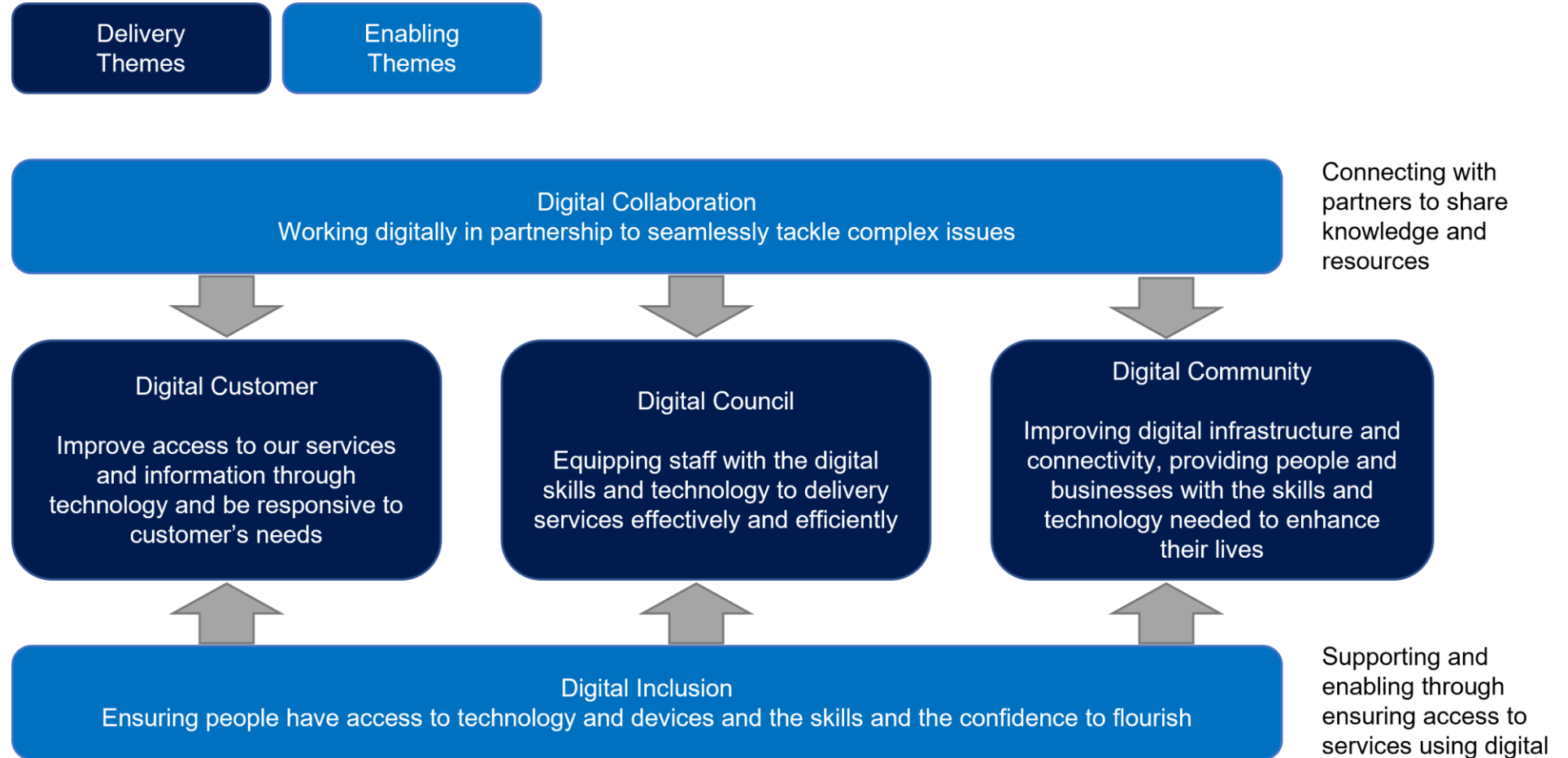
- Collaboration - Working digitally in partnership to seamlessly tackle complex issues
- Inclusion - Ensuring people have access to connectivity and devices and the skills and confidence to flourish

How are we going to get there?

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 themes.

Under our three delivery themes we have developed a set of commitments.

These have been developed from our previous learning, as well as consultations with our partners, customers, businesses, and staff.



How are we going to get there? – Digital Customer

Digital Customer

Improve access to our services and information through technology and be responsive to customer needs

Delivery Themes

Ensure our website, online services and local information directories are easy to use, with up to date, relevant information that is accessible by all.

Expand our online services to ensure that are quick, simple and secure; ensuring they become our customers channel of choice.

Expand the use of existing technology and introduce new technology that uses artificial intelligence and automation capability to improve customer experience and reduce demand e.g., voice enabled services to help direct calls more efficiently, or an improved search function to help customers find the content they're looking for quickly and easily.

Expand assistive digital arrangements to our customers for those that need a little more help using digital technology e.g., supporting the use of wearable technology

Develop our use of social media and other channels and proactive notifications to cascade real-time alerts and notifications to customers.

Enabling Themes

Use authorised data gathered during transaction processes to improve reporting of and access to information and services.

Utilise customer data to create business intelligence and use it to improve services by informing decision-making, service planning and policy development

Expand on digital ways to involve customers in service design

Secure and protect data and make sure it is used correctly

Make it easier for citizens to manage services on behalf of friends and family

Ensure all our online services are fully accessible

Redesign our processes to pre-empt resident and business requests

Ensure that citizens and businesses only have to share information with us once

Measure our performance and publish our results on how we're delivering against targets

How we are going to achieve our ambition – Digital Customer

Digital Customer

Improve access to our services and information through technology and be responsive to customer needs

What you've told us	What we are going to do	What this means for you
Ensure our website, online services and local information directories are easy to use, with up to date, relevant information that is accessible by all.	Update our web and online offer so it is up to date and accessible	You can access our services on a mobile or desktop and find the services or information you need quickly
Expand our online services to ensure that are quick, simple and secure; ensuring they become our customers' channel of choice.	Make it easier for citizens and customers self service online for themselves and on behalf of friends and family with more available online.	You will be able to do more online
Expand the use of existing technology and introduce new technology that uses artificial intelligence and automation capability to improve customer experience and reduce demand e.g., voice enabled services to help direct calls more efficiently, or an improved search function to help customers find the content they're looking for quickly and easily.	Use artificial intelligence to understand customer needs and shape our services.	Your customer experience and journeys will be improved
Expand assistive digital arrangements to our customers for those that need a little more help using digital technology e.g., supporting the use of wearable technology	Ensure all our online services are fully accessible and co-designed where possible with our customers	You will be able to use our online facilities without the need to adapt them.
Develop our use of social media and other channels and proactive notifications to cascade real-time alerts and notifications to customers.	Redesign our processes to improve communication with customers	You will receive more digital proactive communications for services

How are we going to get there? – Digital Council

Digital Council

Equipping staff with the digital skills and technology to delivery services effectively and efficiently

Delivery Themes

Equipping staff with the digital skills and technology required to deliver services effectively and efficiently. Ensure staff have the right devices to support service delivery.

Ensure staff have the right skills to utilise technology effectively

A robust and efficient ICT infrastructure that supports customer and organisational requirements

Transition to a SaaS and cloud hosted model where appropriate to enhance resilience and flexibility delivering value for money with secure solutions

Implement lean and efficient business processes based on data and learning

Continue to remain secure and adapt to future legislation

Maximise the use of our investment in technology to change the way we work

Ensure systems are appropriately resilient, and robust arrangements and procedures are in place to ensure service continuity in the event of systems' failure.

Enabling Themes

Ensure digital communications, engagement and collaboration is maximised across the authority to increase productivity and enable staff to work smarter

Increase automation across the organisation through the use of digital solutions and technologies.

Ensure IT and software systems are able to exchange data, are scalable and able to adapt to change

Continue to use digital practices to mobilise our workforce and support agile working in order to provide a more flexible, responsive workforce.

Have reliable, secure technology that is cost effective and minimises our carbon footprint

Pilot new and innovative technology

Integration – open data standards

Maintain our systems so they are suitable, safe and secure

How we are going to achieve our ambition – Digital Council

Digital Council

Equipping staff with the digital skills and technology to delivery services effectively and efficiently

What you've told us	What we are going to do	What this means for the Organisation/Employees
Equip staff with the digital skills, technology, and devices required to deliver services effectively and efficiently.	Ensure effective digital communications, engagement collaboration and training is in place to work smarter	Our staff will have the skills and technology to deliver our services and meet customer needs
Ensure a robust and efficient cloud-based ICT infrastructure that supports customer and organisational requirements, enhances resilience and flexibility and delivers value for money.	Develop cloud infrastructure and encourage automation across the organisation using digital solutions and technologies that give value for money and enhance our resilience	Our systems can adapt to new requirements and demands quickly and make the best use of our resources, so our services can change with your needs
Implement lean and efficient business processes based on data and learning	Review our processes to ensure they are efficient, fit for purpose and leverages digital technology to deliver more with less.	Our services will be efficient and developed based on how you interact with us, allowing us to better understand how to help you
Maximise the use of our investment in technology to change the way we work	Pilot new and innovative technology and use digital practices to support a more flexible, agile and responsive workforce.	We will use new technology to optimise the services that we offer and give our workforce the flexibility to deliver these services to you in the best way possible
Ensure systems are appropriately secure, compliant, and resilient, and that robust arrangements and procedures are in place to ensure service continuity in the event of systems' failure.	Have reliable, safe, and secure technology that is cost effective and minimises our carbon footprint	You can rely on our services to be secure and robust whilst tackling the climate crisis

How we are going to achieve our ambition – Digital Council

Digital Council

Equipping staff with the digital skills and technology to delivery services effectively and efficiently

What you've told us	What we are going to do	What this means for the Organisation/Employees
Reduce the number of applications and where possible reuse technology across the organisation	Review our architecture and applications to rationalise where possible	Increased efficiency, improved security, improved support and maintenance, reduced complexity and costs
Use artificial intelligence to improve processes	Explore the use of artificial intelligence to improve automation, productivity, efficiency and decision making	Delivery of more cost-effective services
Have a clear corporate digital programme with robust governance that incorporates corporate, service and partner priorities	Develop a corporate digital roadmap to support the outcomes of the digital strategy, the Council plan and wider plans and other partner strategies	A clear plan with joined up delivery and resources where progress can easily be monitored

How are we going to get there? – Digital Community

Digital Community

Improving digital infrastructure and connectivity, providing people and businesses with the skills and technology needed to enhance their lives

Delivery Themes

Demonstrate digital leadership locally, regionally and nationally

Ensuring digital is a key focus in our strategies and is used support the delivery of the Council's aims and objectives.

Supporting Digital adoption across the county in the community, education and the private sector

Working with Partners and VCS to facilitate and support a programme of digital inclusion initiatives for residents to gain digital skills, confidence and motivation to unlock the benefits of being digitally connected and reduce isolation

Facilitating and contributing to private sector investment in internet connectivity in the County.

Enabling Themes

Encourage SMEs to make use of national and regional funding opportunities to further our economic objectives

In partnership, making the most of available investment, working with national teams, partners and other LAs on joint initiatives

Supporting Access to hardware

Carbon, Environment, Sustainability & Social Value

Ensuring information can be meaningfully shared between partner organisations, adhering to rigorous information governance policies and procedures

Work with communities, businesses and citizens to make the most of the technical solutions developed in the community

How we are going to achieve our ambition – Digital Community

Digital Community

Improving digital infrastructure and connectivity, providing people and businesses with the skills and technology needed to enhance their lives

What you've told us	What we are going to do	What this means for you
Demonstrate digital leadership regionally and nationally	In partnership, making the most of available investment, working with national teams, partners and other LAs on joint initiatives	We will lead regionally and nationally to develop improved and innovative digital services
Ensure digital is a key focus in all our strategies and is used support the delivery of the Council's outcomes.	Ensure that digital is embedded in all our strategies, particularly around social care and tackling the climate crisis	Our strategies will be clear on how we are using technology to meet our goals
Support Digital adoption across the county in the community, education and the private sector	Work with communities, businesses and citizens to support access to hardware and training and make the most of the technical solutions developed in the community	We will offer you support to access devices and skills to take advantage of new technologies developed with the community.
Work with Partners and VCS to facilitate and support digital initiatives, and particularly digital inclusion initiatives for residents to become more digitally connected and reduce isolation	Facilitate and support digital initiatives, whilst ensuring that information can be shared between partner organisations and adhering to rigorous information governance	We will work with our partners and the voluntary and community sector to offer you opportunities to become more digitally connected
Facilitate and contribute to central government and private sector investment in internet connectivity in the County.	Encourage residents and businesses to make use of national and regional funding opportunities to further our digital objectives	We will work with the private sector to further improve the connection access and strength in the County