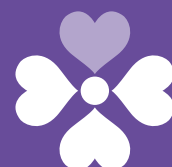> *Applying the culture, practices, processes and technology of the internet era to respond to peoples raised expectations*
>
> Tom Loosemore's definition of Digital

Digital Strategy

2024-2027

North Herts Council

About the Digital Strategy

This strategy sets out our vision and aims for progressing our digital transformation strategy at North Herts Council and links our work in this area to our key corporate strategies; The Council Plan, Customer Service Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Council Plan sets out our overarching council priorities as:

People first

Sustainability

A brighter future together

We have been steadily transforming and evolving our services, working towards a **digital first** approach for many years. Having already embraced homeworking, implemented collaboration tools, and desktop mailing solutions, when the pandemic arrived in 2020 we were able to continue with minimal disruption to our customers. The legacy of the pandemic has seen a huge shift in consumer behaviours and expectations with the adoption of strong digital services being more in demand now than ever before.
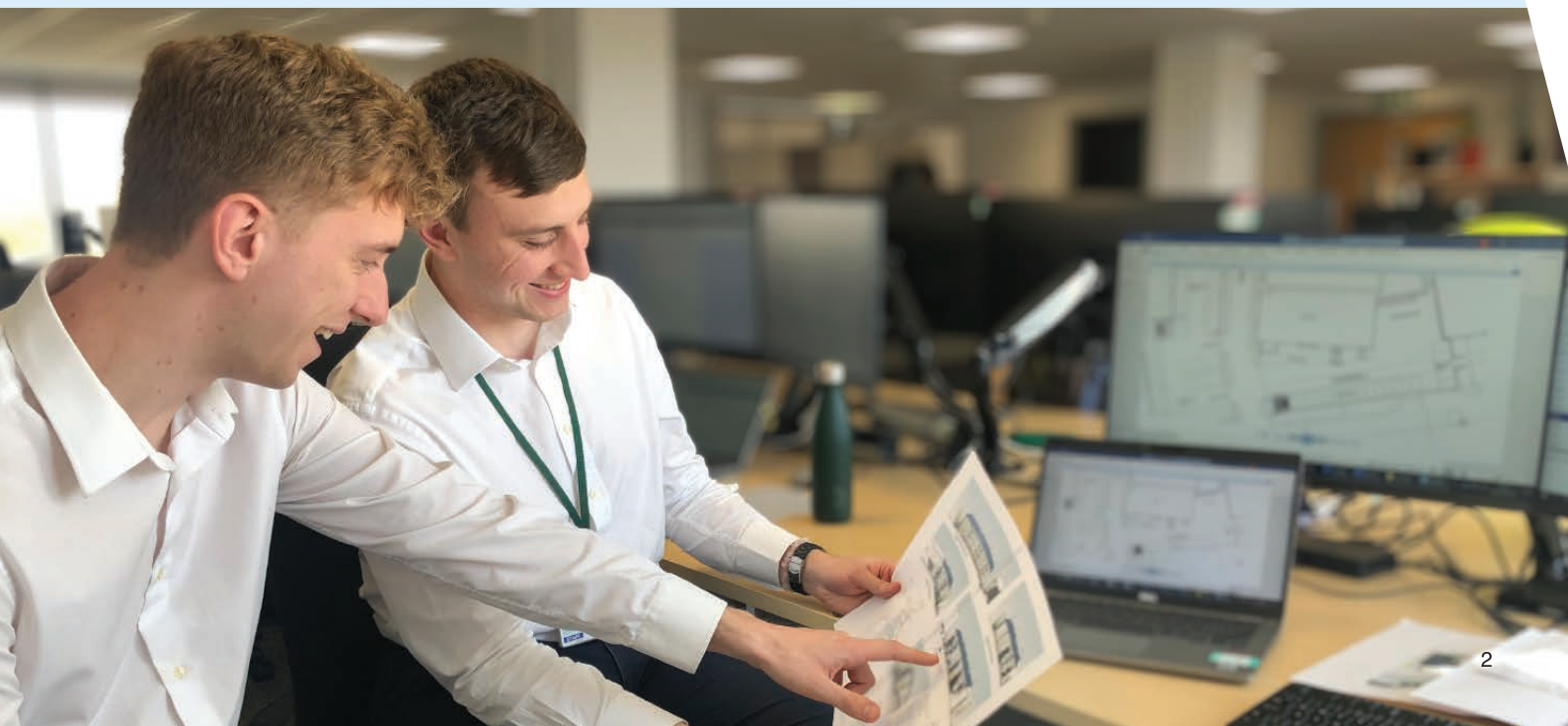
Whilst the pandemic was undoubtedly the biggest accelerator in channel shift and digital adoption in recent years, many other external factors also have had, or will have, a significant impact, including:

The rise of **Generative AI** such as ChatGPT

The **digital health and social care** agenda

The **2025 Big Switch Off** that will see analogue voice telecoms such as ISDN and PSTN cease

The **cost-of-living crisis** and high inflation

A continued **reduction in government funding**, meaning, we need to continually seek ways to be more efficient and reduce costs or increase income

The adoption of our **Local Plan** which will increase demand on our services

A changed **labour market** which has introduced recruitment and retention issues in the public sector

Changing consumer demand, meaning that customers expect to be able to **self serve** at a time that is convenient to them

The challenges we face, along with changes in customer expectations and demand means that we need to embrace the opportunities that digital transformation can create to enhance service delivery, remove any inefficiencies, and make the best use of our valuable resources and our people.

Greater adoption and evolution of council wide digital services is no longer an optional aspiration, it is essential for us to create much needed capacity within the council whilst enhancing the service offerings to our customers.

True transformation involves not just making services available online, it is rethinking how services are delivered. We also need to ensure that as an organisation we are fit and able to deliver our digital aspirations.

For that reason, we commissioned a **digital maturity assessment** of the organisation to help us prepare for the work ahead and identify where we prioritise our attention.
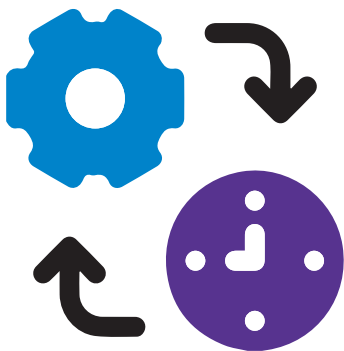
This strategy covers the next three years; however, we recognise that with the **pace of change** around modern technology this journey is one that will continually develop and evolve therefore the strategy will be a live document that will be reviewed and refreshed during its term.

What we have done so far

Although not at the same pace, it is fair to say we have been on a digital journey for many years. Some of the key digital projects that have already been delivered have paved the way for our current ambitions.

2014/15	Implemented a modern CRM system, with a customer portal and range of e-forms
2015/16	Implemented a new corporate telephony solution with new and enhanced internal communication tools
2015/16	Migrated our corporate telephony from traditional landlines to modern telephony services (SIP) whilst significantly reducing costs
2015/16	Purchased and refurbished the Council office building, increased home working and reduced the need for office space
2016/17	Implemented the ModGov software for committee and electronic meeting papers, reducing costs associated with printing
2016/17	Implemented an inbound mail service to enable incoming post to be scanned and delivered electronically
2018/19	Built and implemented a proof-of-concept chatbot
2019/20	Implemented an outbound mail service to enable desktop printing from any location and reduce costs associated with printing and posting documents
2020/21	Implemented Robotic Process Automation (RPA) software to automate processes
2020/21	Introduced desk booking software to facilitate hot-desking and efficiently manage desk availability
2021/22	Implemented a digital consultation and engagement platform
2022/23	Implemented Microsoft Enterprise 5 licencing model for enhanced Microsoft features and functionality
2022/23	Redesigned our internal laptop infrastructure to enable smarter working
2022/23	Implemented an intelligent Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to automate appropriate call types
2022/23	Digitised over 75,000 planning files so customers can access online

Vision and guiding principles

As a council we want to use the best of modern digital, technology and data to help achieve our priorities. Whilst the digital strategy is about much more than just technology, we will use modern, agile technology as an enabler to help us achieve our desired outcomes. We have identified the following nine priorities that we will focus on:

Continuous development of our services & technology

Making technology work better for our staff

Digital first for our customers

Making processes as simple & efficient as we can

Vision and guiding principles

An agile & iterative approach

Organisational culture & capacity

Making a positive impact on our climate commitment

Being data-led in our decision-making

Creating Value

Vision and guiding principles

Digital first for our customers

We will put customers at the heart of our services, making services digital by default so they can be accessed 24/7 and so that customers get what they want from us, without needing multiple interactions or contacts. We will provide a seamless experience across all channels and will ensure that we do not leave anyone behind by providing traditional contact methods for those who need them.

Making technology work better for our staff

Our staff's time is precious, and so we want to remove pain points for them so they can focus their time and efforts on higher value tasks and on delivering for our customers. We will rationalise the number of applications we use and seek to remove any frustrations with the technology we use.
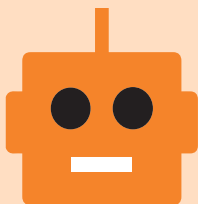
Making processes as simple and efficient as we can

We will review our processes and identify ways to streamline and remove any inefficiencies that may exist. We will use automation and AI where appropriate. This will enable us to enhance our services to our customers and provide a better experience for our staff.
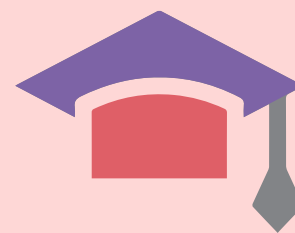
Organisational culture and capacity

We will put digital technology at the heart of the way we work, recruit, and train our staff to build on a culture of digital both now and for the future workforce. We will create digital champions across the organisation and support everyone with digital changes. We will invest in ongoing development of digital skills in our staff and councillors who in turn can support our customers where needed.

Being data-led in our decision-making

The data we collect about our customers is valuable and rich. We want to make the best use of it to enable informed decision making about how we can continually improve our services and where to focus our resources. We will invest in ways of joining up the data we collect so that our service design decisions are data-led.
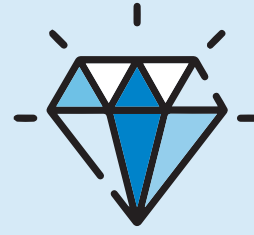
Creating Value

We will harness the opportunities of digital technology to release pressure on our resources, both people and money, and will proactively seek funding opportunities to support the delivery of digital transformation.

Making a positive impact on our climate commitment

We will always consider Cloud first to enable a reduction in our physical IT estate and we will work hard to reduce the amount of physical print and post that is produced in favour of environmentally friendly options.

We will continue to enable staff to work remotely to reduce unnecessary travel, likewise we will serve our customers in a way that does not depend on them travelling to our offices.
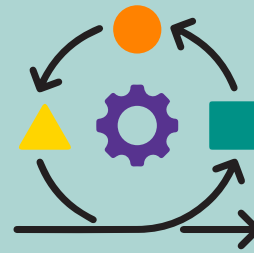
An agile and iterative approach

We will embrace new ways of delivering on our intentions, moving from large, static work programmes, to small, iterative work packages so that we can benefit quickly from our efforts and encourage innovation across all areas. We will adopt a Minimum Viable Product or Service approach to support iterative development, while working at pace.
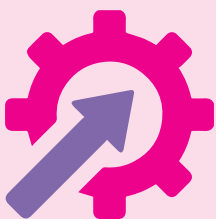
Continuous development of our services and technology

We will invest in a corporate low code digital solution that will enable us to control and rapidly develop our technology internally without a reliance on traditional IT development capability. We will not leave technology to stagnate and create risk, but continuously keep pace and iterate what we can offer, adapting to changing demands and needs as required. We will make sure that our infrastructure, data and systems are secure and resilient.

How we will achieve this

We will develop a clear programme of works that will enable us to deliver the outcomes we need and track our progress against the plan. Some work is already underway such as the procurement and investment of a low code digital platform. Some work will start in one year and continue into the next.

2023/24	Invest in a low code digital platform and start to build a suite of new digital services including a replacement CRM / Customer service platform
	Make appropriate use of open standards and open-source technology
	Implement live chat and intelligent chat bot services
	Continue to make services digital by default, without compromising other channels for those who need them.
	Conduct a customer centric review and re-design of end-to-end processes
	Implement text and email modules of Govmail so that more communications can be sent electronically
	Move our intranet to SharePoint, making this the heart of internal information and services
	Develop a clear technology roadmap.
	Develop and implement a Cloud strategy
	Continually develop the Customer Service digital services and make key personalised services available via the customer portal
	Sign up to the Digital Declaration
2024/25	Conduct Council wide integration analysis
	Develop and implement a programme of application development and rationalisation of legacy systems
	Develop a data strategy
	Ensure all appropriate customer contact routed via our customer service centre channels
	Work and collaborate with and learn from others, i.e. other councils, Local Digital.
	Develop a digital skills training and communications plan for staff and councillors

2024/25	Build a new IT helpdesk solution to create a modern support function and a better self-service experience for staff
	Maximise our investment in Microsoft, utilising collaboration, and other tools available
	Experiment with new technologies where appropriate, such as machine learning, Generative AI (ChatGPT) and voice activated services
	Continue to robustly maintain the security of the Councils network and data.
2025/26	Consider a fully integrated telephony solution for a complete omnichannel experience

What success will look like for us

When designing change, it is important to know how we'd recognise success. Here are a few of the overarching success measures we expect to see.

What success will look like for us

- A reduction in time spent on manual processing
- A reduction in software & licencing costs
- An increase in online & self service transactions
- A reduction in the number of disparate software applications
- Fewer complaints as services are redesigned to be quicker & easier to use
- A reduced IT hardware estate through greater cloud adoption
- A reduction in the use of printed mail & associated postage costs
- Enhanced customer experiences & greater first time resolution

Vision and guiding principles

- Continuous development of our services & technology
- Making technology work better for our staff
- Digital first for our customers
- Making processes as simple & efficient as we can
- An agile & iterative approach
- Organisational culture & capacity
- Making a positive impact on our climate commitment
- Creating Value
- Being data-led in our decision-making

A reminder of our vision and guiding principles

Conclusion

We want to make life easier for everyone that interacts with the council, Including our residents, local businesses, partners, and our staff.

This strategy signifies an exciting opportunity and a clear commitment to continue to deliver on our digital transformation across the whole council. The strategy will act as our digital compass so that we all understand the direction of travel and what needs to be done as well as being able to recognise successes as we deliver on these commitments.

We know that we need to release capacity within the organisation so that we can focus on the value-added areas that will make better use of our time and skills by working smarter and by removing inefficiencies where they exist.

We see digital transformation as an enabler and a way for us to tackle workforce challenges that are prevalent in the public sector as well as an opportunity to develop our organisational skills and capabilities so that we can deliver on our ambitions now and continue to build upon them for the future.

Appendix A

In July 2022, the LGA launched a new outcomes-based framework for improving and supporting local government digitalisation programmes around 12 strategic outcomes that were agreed in partnership with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace) and the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (Socitm).

Below are the 12 elements of the technology code of practice of the Local Government digitisation Almanac. These elements feature in our Guiding Principles and in various aspects of our programme of works, i.e. share, use and collaborate is a key feauture of our new low code digital platform.

Define user needs	Make things accesible and inclusive	Be open and use open source
Make use of open standards	Use cloud first	Make things secure
Make privacy integral	Share, reuse and collaberate	Integrate and adapt technology
Make better use of data	Define your purchasing strategy approach	Make your technology sustainable

Appendix B

High level IT Technical Roadmap

The full IT Technology roadmap is a separate document that aligns with the Digital strategy and wider digital transformation aims.

This page shows when key technology Infrastructure changes will be implemented by the IT team, these are changes to ensure a modern and secure technology stack with a robust integration capable environment for the council.

Our technology will enable us to work closely with others and provide a safe secure environment to deliver from. The pathway detailed in the IT roadmap will provide a clear and transparent viewpoint for those who we work with.

Our IT infrastructure will become the firm, secure foundation to enable continual delivery of our traditional service methods allowing them to work seamlessly with our new digital delivery platform.

2023 / 2024

Deploy low code in readiness for wider digital programme

2024

- Move to Nutanix AHV virtualization
- Expand Microsoft Azure utilisation
- Migrate all devices to Windows 11
- Implement Netcall and Microsoft Azure automations
- Replace Crystal reporting with Power BI

2024 / 2025

Start to retire internal access databases

2025

Review additional Microsoft Azure capability and options