

Digital & ICT Access Strategy

Folkestone & Hythe District Council

2026 – 2029



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Our commitment

Foreword by Cllr Fuller

We are delighted to present the next chapter in our journey: the Digital and ICT Strategy for 2026–2029 at Folkestone & Hythe District Council

This strategy represents our commitment to harnessing the power of technology, data, and robust security to deliver outstanding, accessible, and modern services for everyone in our district, residents, businesses, and visitors alike.



Digital transformation is at the heart of our vision for the future. It is not simply about upgrading systems or adopting new tools; it is about empowering people, streamlining processes, and ensuring that every individual can access council services in ways that suit their needs and preferences. We recognise that technology should be an enabler, making our services more efficient, cost-effective, and user-centred, while also remaining flexible and adaptable to the changing demands of our community.

Over recent years, we have made significant progress. Our achievements include enhanced cyber security, improved accessibility standards for our website, expanded online services, and the migration of key systems to the cloud. These advancements have laid strong foundations for further innovation and continuous improvement. We are proud of our efforts to make services more inclusive, ensuring that those who cannot or choose not to use digital channels are not left behind. This strategy has been developed to specifically complement the updated Customer Access Strategy.

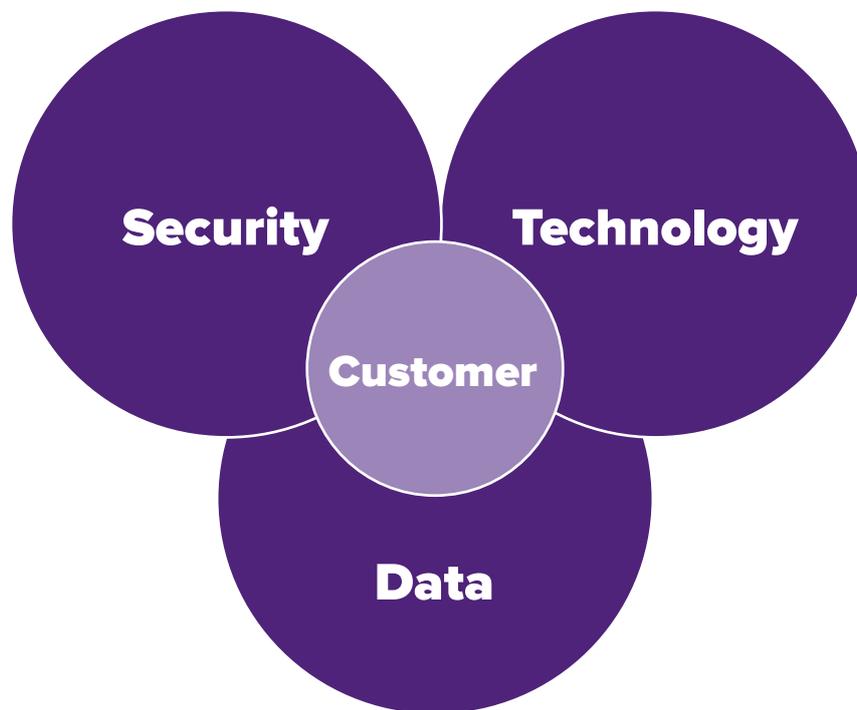
This strategy builds on our successes and sets out clear aims and objectives for the coming years. We will continue to invest in modern, safe, and reliable technology, support our customers through multi-channel access, and use data-driven insights to inform decision-making and service design. Our approach is rooted in transparency, openness, and a commitment to user-centred design, so that every interaction with the council is straightforward, secure, and effective.

By embracing innovation and making the most of our resources, we will create a resilient, forward-thinking council that meets the evolving needs of our community. As we navigate the upcoming Local Government Reorganisation, we remain fully committed to maintaining the delivery of our services and ensuring the security of our data is protected throughout the transition period and into a new unitary council. Together, we will ensure Folkestone & Hythe remains a place where digital and ICT excellence drives better outcomes for all.

Cllr Fuller

Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement & Accountability at Folkestone & Hythe District Council

Digital & ICT Principles



The Digital and ICT Strategy 2026-2029 aims to enhance the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of our services through a comprehensive approach that focuses on three key themes: Security, technology, and data to provide the best experience possible for Customers (both internal and external). This strategy will guide our efforts to improve our digital presence, ensure robust security measures, and provide exceptional customer experiences.

Digital and ICT is no longer just about technology, it is about enabling how people work and engage with the council, streamlining and automating processes where we can, to make them more efficient and cost effective. Ensuring that the services we deliver are user centred, flexible, adaptable, safe and secure, making the most of the available technology. We should be facilitating user choice, so we do not exclude those who are not able to use, or choose not to use, online services.

The Digital and ICT Strategy is a key enabler for the Corporate Plan. It provides the technological foundation and digital innovation needed to deliver the council's ambitions for prosperity, well-being, sustainability, and excellent service for all.

Where are we now

Our progress so far

This strategy builds on the foundations put in place through various projects and programmes of work that were initiated as part of our previous strategy. These projects implemented changes to ways of working, additional online forms, improving remote access, security and migrating services to the cloud.



Moved servers to the cloud - Enhanced flexibility, scalability, sustainability and disaster recovery capabilities



Improved cyber security measures with a Security Operation Centre providing constant monitoring of systems and increased preparedness by regular training of staff and councillors



Improvements to the website to meet accessibility standards. Industry benchmark is 86%



Additional online forms created resulting in 385 forms and processes offering 24/7 access to the majority of our services



Improvements to infrastructure to support operational needs and future growth

In 2024/2025

70%
Servers
migrated to
the cloud

93.2%
Website
accessibility
score

74.17%
Transactions
were online

71,269
Online forms
completed

16%
Reduction
in targeted
phone calls

During the 2024/25 financial year, we engaged with Socitm in order to carry out a comprehensive review of IT across the council in order to support the development of this strategy. This led to a further piece of work with WeChange. AI to fully understand the digital capabilities of our staff and how we can

fully utilise the capabilities of our current Microsoft licenses. The work with WeChange.AI will continue through the 2025/26 financial year to maximise the use of technologies already available to us.

Next steps

Aims and objectives

We want to ensure continuous improvement in our processes and be a modern, data driven and digitally enabled council, that uses the capabilities provided by up-to-date technologies to best effect whilst ensuring good value for money. This will allow us to deliver excellent user centred services that improve the lives and outcomes for our residents, visitors, and businesses.



We will use data to inform how we operate and the technologies we use so that we can continuously improve our services to residents, visitors, and businesses whilst enabling a modern, safe and secure, digitally capable, and efficient workforce. To achieve this, we will focus on the following key areas: Security, Technology, Data and Customers. This will be measured by improved security, service delivery, online functionality and customer satisfaction.



Security

Cyber security isn't just about firewalls, encryption protocols, or antivirus software. It is also about customers having the trust that when they provide their personal information to carry out a transaction, that the council's governance arrangements will ensure that all of their data will be treated with the utmost care and responsibility.

How will we achieve this?

- Maintain advanced cyber security measures, including multi-factor authentication, encryption, and regular security audits
- Conduct regular training sessions for staff and councillors on cyber security best practices and protocols
- Use cyber security to monitor and respond to potential threats in real-time
- Improved cyber security Governance framework and risk assessment methodology to align with the national Cyber Assessment Framework
- Annual IT health check carried out by recognised external companies



Technology

The Council has a hybrid working environment, supporting staff to work onsite and remotely, offering staff an improved work life balance. As such the ICT and Digital Service that underpins the corporate functions of the Council needs to ensure that the infrastructure, security and systems are fit for purpose. Ensuring that the ICT and Digital service continues to enable the Council to provide the citizens, visitors and businesses of the district with the services they need, whilst ensuring that the technology and infrastructure can adapt to changing needs whilst remaining safe and secure.

How will we achieve this?

- Have reliable, secure technology that is cost effective and minimises our carbon footprint
- Continue to migrate systems to the cloud for flexibility of accessing systems and increased security
- Build on the current ICT workplan to shape the priorities for the services, for our customers and for the Council as a whole
- To align IT services with the future and current business needs with the aim of reducing the long-term cost of service provision including utilising AI where appropriate
- Utilise the technology solutions already available within the existing Microsoft packages to and enhance the customer experience



Data

Making better use of our data is essential for driving continuous improvement in how we work and deliver services. By leveraging insights derived from data, we can identify areas for enhancement, streamline processes, and make informed decisions that benefit our customers'. Our commitment to being more open and transparent means that we will actively seek opportunities to share our data with the public and where possible, we will publish data sets. All data will be handled securely and in compliance with relevant legislation, including the UK GDPR, ensuring customer information is protected and used responsibly. By embracing a data-driven culture, we can enhance the quality of our services provided to our customers.

How will we achieve this?

- Enable effective data sharing between all areas of the Council and our partners, where allowed, to improve outcomes for citizens and businesses
- Implement data analytics tools to extract actionable insights from existing data
- Use data and insight to design services, support decision making and to help support people before they need help
- Design and improve services based on data and feedback from citizens and businesses
- Actively publish non-sensitive data sets on our website



Customers

Citizens, visitors, and businesses assume the council will keep pace with their expectations of how they want to interact and engage with the council. They are already using digital and online services for shopping, banking, travel etc. and are used to using online services, apps and chat bots to interact with companies and managing various aspects on their lives. We also need to acknowledge that not everyone is able to or wants to use online / digitally enabled services and for those people we must ensure they can still contact and engage with the council via their preferred channel.

How will we achieve this?

- Continue to develop our user-centred design process and use this across all our services, making them easy to use and accessible for everyone in line with the Customer Access Strategy
- Continue to improve our services so that requests can be completed at the first point of contact, where possible, irrespective of channel
- Maintain a user-friendly website with easy navigation that is accessible to all with up-to-date information
- Provide digital support if citizens and businesses need assistance to complete a request
- Make further development to the online platform available to our customers, improving online processes and developing push notifications



Summary of expectations

- 1** Maintain robust cyber security measures with improved multi-factor authentication, encryption, and carry out regular security audits to ensure protection of data and systems
- 2** Invest in modern technology that is reliable, secure, and cost-effective that minimises the carbon footprint and supports the council's operations.
- 3** Regular training sessions for staff and councillors on cyber security best practices and protocols to keep them informed and vigilant and training on the latest Microsoft applications to improve efficiency.
- 4** Use data and insights to inform decision-making, improve services, and drive continuous improvement.
- 5** Continue to develop user-centred design processes, making services easy to use and accessible for everyone.
- 6** Research and implement AI where appropriate to enable automation and efficiencies which will improve customer satisfaction.

How will we know we have achieved this?

Software is kept up to date and the continuous monitoring by the Security Operations Centre continue to keep the Council safe from numerous attempted cyber-attacks.

Simulated phishing emails sent to staff and councillors to ensure an increased awareness and preparedness as well as regular refresher training that needs to be undertaken.

Additional systems are migrated to the cloud to reduce the footprint of physical servers that need to be maintained.

Microsoft applications already included within our licences are utilised and staff training carried out to realise the benefits creating efficiencies and improved customer service.

Data is used to make informed decisions to improve and streamline service delivery.

Website review is undertaken to improve accessibility, and the information is current and accurate.

Additional online services have been developed that meet customer requirements.

Action plan

This action plan supports the delivery of the Digital and ICT Strategy for Folkestone & Hythe District Council. It outlines key initiatives that will be undertaken over the next three years. The focus will be on improving security and protecting personal data, technology to deliver efficiencies, data analysis to make informed decisions, and the customer experience. Year One actions lay the foundation for transformation, with Years Two and Three building on progress and expanding capabilities. Wherever possible, these initiatives will be delivered within existing budgets by maximising the use of current system capabilities and optimising available resources.

Year 1 (2026 – 2027)

Cybersecurity Enhancements

- Implement multi-factor authentication across all systems.
- Conduct quarterly review of security risks and annual external IT health checks.
- Develop and maintain a dedicated cyber risk register aligned with essential services.
- Review of supply chain cyber security.

Cloud Migration & Infrastructure

- Migrate additional physical servers to the cloud.
- Review and update the ICT roadmap to align with business needs.
- Identify and assess risks from third-party suppliers, including subcontractors. Integrate into procurement and contract management.

Data Strategy Implementation

- Review data analytics tools to support service design and decision-making.

- Establish protocols for internal data sharing and publish non-sensitive datasets.

Customer Experience Improvements

- Review and redesign (where applicable) online forms using user-centred design.
- Launch push notifications for service updates.
- Provide digital support services for citizens needing assistance.

Staff Enablement

- Deliver training on Microsoft applications included in current licences.
- Promote hybrid working tools and ensure infrastructure supports remote access.

Year 2 (2027 – 2028)

Advanced Technology Integration

- Explore AI applications for automation and customer service (e.g., chatbots).
- Research voice Bot and AI search engine capabilities on the council website.
- Review and optimise the online platform for accessibility and usability.

Data-Driven Service Design

- Use analytics to identify service bottlenecks and reduce wait times.
- Expand data-informed decision-making across departments.
- Publish performance dashboards for transparency.

Customer Engagement Expansion

- Develop digital skills workshops in partnership with external organisations.
- Promote multi-channel access including social media and mobile platforms.
- Further improvements to the website using feedback loops and mystery shopping for digital services.

Year 3 (2028 – 2029)

Innovation and Automation

- Implement AI-driven response tools.
- Automate switchboard functions to free up staff for complex queries.
- Expand chatbot capabilities to cover more service areas.

Strategic Partnerships

- Strengthen collaboration with front-facing organisations to improve signposting and community support.
- Share best practices and data insights with regional partners.

Continuous Improvement

- Conduct full review of all digital services and processes.
- Update ICT roadmap based on evolving needs and technology trends.
- Maintain ongoing staff training and system updates.

Commitments

Our Commitment to You

- Deliver secure, accessible, and user-centred digital services.
- Protect your data and privacy.
- Continuously improve based on feedback and performance data.
- Provide support across all preferred communication channels.

Your Commitment to Us

- Engage with digital services where possible.
- Provide feedback to help us improve.