Digital Folkestone & Hythe
Digital Strategy 2018 – 2023

Introduction

We live in the age of the Digital Revolution. Our customers expect the same quality and convenience of service from us as they receive in other aspects of their lives. To meet their expectations and demands, we need to use the Digital Revolution to transform how the Council works and redesign public services around our residents.

Digital information and services should be easy to access, convenient, mobile-friendly and well designed. We want to make it much easier for our customers to report an issue, pay for a service or find out information. We want to be able to solve most of our customers' requests there and then, at their first point of contact, and be able to track enquiries through to delivery. We welcome our customers' feedback and suggestions about our services, which help us understand what drives their satisfaction, and identify and eliminate the causes of failures and complaints.

Embracing the Digital Revolution will help the Council run more efficiently. Empowering our customers with direct, digital access to our systems eliminates multiple handling of the same query, cutting the opportunity for error. National figures from the Society of IT Managers (SOCITM) suggest that every face-to-face contact costs on average around £8.62, whereas each digital transaction costs a Council around 15p. This frees up significant resource and expenditure, which instead can be invested into the things that matter to our communities, including promoting more homes, more jobs and an attractive environment.

As part of our digital ambitions, it is essential that our staff have the right equipment to do their jobs, and that the systems we use can talk to each other. This Strategy will help us grow the digital skills of our staff to enable them to become even more productive. They will be able to work flexibly from anywhere, connect more easily with their co-workers, and work more effectively within the Council and with partners.

We want high-speed broadband and wireless networks across the District, supporting our ambitions to see Folkestone & Hythe as the best place to start and grow businesses. These networks will also enable the Council's increasing use of mobile technology to become a vital part of our business operating model.

Our award-winning Council has already received recognition for its progress in embracing the Digital agenda. A wide range of services have been successfully moved online, with positive customer feedback and successes in managing demand. This Strategy takes us on the next stage of our exciting journey, outlining our vision of a digitally enabled community, who can easily connect with the Council, when and how they want to, supported by a transformed Council with a highly skilled, joined-up and mobile workforce.

Cllr Rory Love
**Cabinet Member for Customers, Communications and Digital Delivery**

Background

The Digital Revolution powered by internet and mobile technology is changing the world we live and work in, and the pace of that change is ever increasing. The Council must be prepared to meet these new challenges in the future. The expectation of customers is that they can be connected to who or what they want, wherever they want through easy to use technology. This will have an impact on how the council provides its services. Almost 95% of the UK population have access to the internet, and a generation of people have always had access to the internet at home or school. The Government's digital strategy predicts that within 20 years 90% of all jobs will require digital skills and we need to ensure that we support staff to cultivate an environment of digital self-confidence and capability.

This Digital Strategy recognises the importance of implementing a digital infrastructure and culture across the district – maximising the use of digital technology to drive better services and reduce costs – and helping to ensure that everyone who wants to, has the chance to benefit from these changes.

The adoption of a Digital Strategy is about more than just the technology we use. It will enable the Council to radically rethink how we support suppliers and partners to deliver efficient, cost effective and high quality services for customers, as well as how we work with our staff. The Council's People Strategy will need to support our digital ambitions by planning for the skills that are needed now and in the future.

Our Future Organisation

This strategy makes an effort to describe how the Council will operate in three to five years' time and the contribution that ICT and Digital technology will make. There are three priority areas that will enable us to deliver the Strategy. These are:
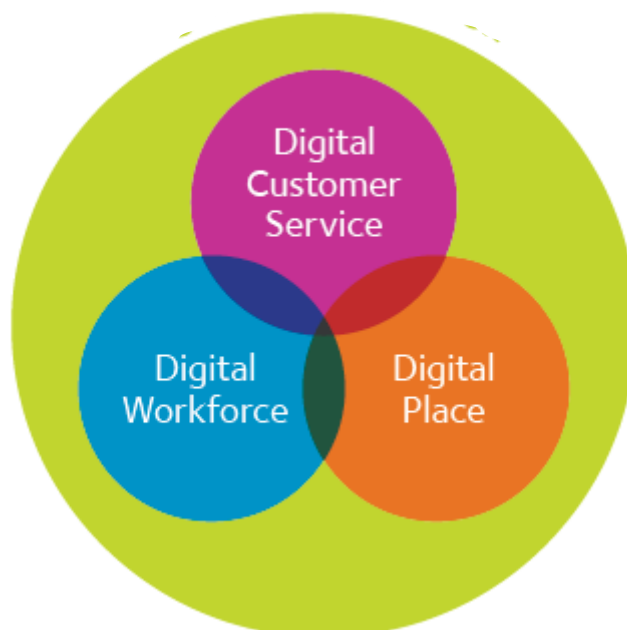
Digital Customer Service
Our future service delivery model will maximise the use of technology, while not forgetting the person we are serving. The move towards more digital working will help us manage demand better and target scarce resources at those who most need them. In five years' time we expect that:

- The default channel for communications and engagement will be digital.
- Customers will be able to use an online account for the majority of their service requests and information should they so wish. They will have the ability to manage their own data (e.g. change of address, telephone numbers) and their relationship with the Council (the services they choose to take).
- Services will be designed with security built-in so that customers can have the confidence that their personal information and privacy is protected.
- Communications with our customers will be better targeted and personalised.
- There will be an increased use of system automation that will speed up decision making and transaction processing, and provide even more consistent service delivery. This will allow us to use our staff resources to support more difficult and complex cases.
- We will continue to make use of customer insight tools to better understand our residents and businesses to ensure services are designed to meet their needs.

The Council recognises that digital transactions may not be suitable for everyone and will ensure that those who cannot use digital services are not excluded.

Digital Workforce
Our workforce remains our most important asset – without them we cannot deliver services. Changing demands require them to more mobile and flexible, and cover a wider range of tasks and activities than ever before.

Digital technology will improve communications and transform the way we work from traditional office based delivery to empowering our people to operate from anywhere in the district where there is a demand for service.

In the future, we expect that:

- Our workforce will continue to deliver excellent customer service using technology and processes designed to support them in their work.
- Introducing a greater degree of customer self-service and automated systems will reduce the burden of many repetitive tasks making our staff more responsive to those customers who cannot self-serve or who have more complex needs.
- Staff will be provided with the digital skills required by a modern workforce and they will feel empowered to influence service improvements

Digital Place
We want to have a connected District, that reaps all of the benefits that digital can offer. For this to be achieved everyone in the District needs to have access to fast broadband.

Kent County Council is working with the Government's broadband agency Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to improve access to superfast broadband services

across Kent. The Making Kent Quicker programme covers a range of projects that Kent County Council is leading to improve broadband infrastructure.
95% of properties across Kent and Medway can now access a superfast broadband service of at least 24mbps. BT provides a basic broadband service for those on benefits.

The Telecommunications Infrastructure (Relief from Non-Domestic Rates) Act 2018 was given Royal Assent in February 2018. By enabling 100% business rates relief, it provides incentives for operators to invest in the broadband network.

In five years' time, we expect:

- High speed broadband to have been rolled out across rural communities
- All new developments to be encouraged to provide the required infrastructure to enable fibre to all premises
- New ways to be implemented to increase the speed, reliability and coverage of broadband across the district, especially in rural areas
- Areas where poor broadband provision is hindering the development of business to be identified to help inform the areas of focus for the extension programme to the BDUK funding.

Transformation
Technology is not only creating a shift in the way people interact. It is also forcing organisations to rethink how their businesses are structured to better meet the needs of customers. The Council is undergoing a business transformation that, in conjunction with improvements in technology, will deliver efficiency and service improvements to customers. To achieve this:

- Service re-design will be business led; technology will be an integral enabler.
- We will prioritise the design of digital services that enable customers to self-serve, reuse information we already hold so that data inputting will be reduced to a minimum, and make sure information held and processed is as relevant and as accurate as possible.
- Technology will support enhanced collaboration across the Council and with our partners and customers.
- We will procure modern ICT systems that support the principles of this strategy and provide the most efficient methods of service delivery
- We will constantly monitor the performance of our systems and processes and will be focused on driving improvements in outcomes for customers.
- We will reduce the cost of service delivery through a greater use of technology.

Design principles
The Council will follow the Government's principles of 'Digital by Design' across all services in order to deliver services through the channels that customers and businesses want to use and that are most appropriate to their enquiry and their needs.

When we design services we will design our digital services around our customers' needs and adopt a standardised approach to user-centred digital service redesign. This will be based on the Local Government Digital Service Standards and Design Principles, which fall into six broad categories including:

- Design around the customer and the user
- Design for flexibility
- Use open standards
- Reuse of digital components
- Information management
- Efficiency in digital procurement and ownership

Principle	Description	Impact
Design around the customer and the user	Whoever uses the Council's digital services, can expect the 'customer journey' to be simple, intuitive and designed for their needs. This includes mediated support when necessary, single view of the user and uninhibited automation and self-service wherever possible. Digital services will be designed for inclusion, simplicity and usage.	This will require high digital capability from the Council, placing the user at the centre of its digital solutions. This will apply to all services and users, whether external (customers, partners, suppliers) or internal (staff, management and elected Members). The user will feel in control, receive a personal service, with connections made automatically to related services. This will help to reduce unnecessary contact and cost, whilst ensuring that mediated support is there when needed. The use of tools such as CRM and customer support functions will reflect this in how they work.
Design for flexibility	The Council's IT components and the digital solutions it creates, must be responsive to changing needs and new technologies. They must be reusable across service areas and scalable at marginal cost.	Simple and flexible systems' architectures should drive lower cost IT change: easier to scale, upgrade, share and adapt contracts. This will impact how systems are chosen, procured, used and managed. It will be easy to replace a technology solution component when required without impacting upon the overall architecture and principles, and diverse service areas will use common digital components and share supplier contracts wherever possible. Contracts will be let in ways which are flexible enough to remain aligned to a changing digital platform of services, including scalability or early retirement.
Use open standards	All central, shared and common digital tools will use open industry standards where possible, taking account of wider industry and Government-led developments.	It will be easier to exchange information and to share digital services with partners. In particular, there will be a defined and recognised approach to security, data handling, sharing systems,

	These will be defined and maintained by the Council.	cloud adoption and systems integration.
Reuse of digital components	Common digital tools and functions will be reused across the Council, not tailored, duplicated or re-invented in different service areas. An integration platform will support information exchange between systems, enabling separation of data and system components for reuse.	The choice of suppliers and technologies, and the business cases for IT investment, will be led by digital design principles and priorities. Systems integration, data reuse and data sharing will be prioritised where needed, with lower cost, less complexity and fewer contractual restrictions. Common digital components will be universal across services, and existing IT investments will be reused. Duplication of systems or technologies will be rationalised.
Information management	The information requirements of the Council will define systems choice and reporting tools. Consistency of information and data management across channels will be expected. This includes data capture, use, publishing, and deletion, alongside GDPR compliance functionality.	A mature approach to information management in the Council will maximise the value that can be derived from data and information in all areas. This will ensure data quality and information security policies that are appropriate, understood and followed, as well as the optimisation of information value, not just relying on IT to deliver this.
Efficiency in digital procurement and ownership	Digital solutions will optimise the value of IT investments. This includes benefits realisation and return on investment in projects, avoiding short-term tactical IT solutions where a strategic investment is required, or long-term IT investment where low cost disposable digital tools can suffice.	All IT service acquisitions will support a reduced cost of ownership of IT, alongside a consistent approach to specification and procurement of digital solutions. This will help to avoid unnecessary independent departmental systems development and acquisition, so reusing technology where possible, or quickly replacing or upgrading digital components when required.

What this means

Systems will be procured and designed with the user (both customer and user) needs in mind, and refined as needs change or as opportunities for improvements are identified from ongoing research and data analysis.

The Council's Corporate Plan (2017-2020) aspiration of 'digital by default' champions a holistic approach to service redesign, the aspiration being that the digital service will be intuitive enough for the customer to succeed first time. Every stage of a process needs to be analysed and evaluated with the customer in mind. This has an impact on the following:

- **Number of steps in a process**

- All processes should be as lean as possible, with the necessity and requirements of each step assessed from the perspective of the customer.

- **Language and presentation**
  - All communications must be written in plain English, have a consistent user interface and presentation style, and tell the customer as clearly as possible what they need to do. If communicating via letter, the call to action should direct the user to a web service in the first instance.

- **Formats**
  - Accessibility to all documents must be flexible and available in formats familiar to customers and users.

Therefore, systems will need to be lean and flexible enough to allow for continuous improvement and multifunctional so that they can be tailored to fulfil a number of different customer needs. For example, a single CRM system to centralise the collection of customer data and a single workflow system that all customer and internal processes can be built with. This aligns with the Council's adopted ICT Strategy and its emphasis on selecting core cloud based applications that can be configured easily and integrate with one another.

Additionally, there needs to be an awareness, understanding, and commitment to the digital principles across the organisation to ensure that procured solutions and working practices meet the criteria of working collaboratively, harnessing expertise across the Council.

Finally, we will continue to learn from and utilise best practice from other authorities and businesses, whilst seeking to drive future improvements based on appropriate performance measures and customer feedback.

Conclusion
There is enormous potential for digital technology to transform the way we work and deliver services. Adopting a Digital Strategy gives the Council a recognised framework and methodology that will allow us to achieve the goals of the ICT and People strategies and Transformation project. Its strong focus on customer needs, multidisciplinary teams, and making data-driven decisions will allow for the selection and implementation of digital services that meet the requirements of our customers, using software solutions that can be refined and improved based on collected data.