Digital Strategy 2024-2028

Stafford
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Contents

Executive Summary

This strategy is designed to be a catalyst for technological innovation and change, propelling our organisation into the future. This will be achieved by ensuring that the necessary tools, policies, and people are in place to support.

The advances we are making with our 'cloud' systems (storing and accessing data and programmes over the internet rather than on local hard drives and servers) have created a solid foundation for the next five years, enabling us to think bigger and more creatively about the challenges and opportunities and how we are best positioned to benefit from them.

We are working to become digital, not just do digital

This strategy sets out the necessary detail, guiding principles, and objectives. It contains the key achievements we will meet, ensuring critically important and interdependent milestones are managed to completion. It aims to leverage technology to enhance service delivery, improve efficiency, and foster collaboration between the two councils. One of the primary results of the strategy will be:

- The creation of a Customer Experience platform, a digital platform that pulls together integrated data and intelligent systems, enabling us to properly integrate and automate transactions for all our customers.

Creating a new Customer Experience Platform, giving easy access to all council data and customer information, integrating remaining systems into the new Customer Experience Platform and decommissioning redundant systems and servers held on site that have been replaced with the more agile solutions.

We will then have positioned staff to deal with more complex, high value demand and create more opportunities for adding value to the organisation, (currently unquantified), because of better management and interrogation of our data.

Vision

Our vision is to create a seamless digital experience for residents, businesses, and employees of Cannock Chase District Council and Stafford Borough Council. Using technological solutions, we aim to deliver efficient services, empower communities and staff, and drive economic growth while maintaining high standards of governance and data security.

Strategic Objectives

The objectives for digital are:

- Provide a 24/7 public service available to customers wherever they are.

- Continue to drive engagement with our customers through more relevant digital channels. As well as Enhancing the quality and accessibility of services through those digital channels.

- Transforming the Technology department as we know it to become a Digital Services team.

- Moving from on-site provision of infrastructure to pure cloud and Software as a Service solution (SaaS) and making this the standard approach moving forwards with new technology purchases

- Equip council staff with the necessary digital tools and skills to deliver services effectively, increase productivity, and adapt to changing work environments.

- Encourage innovation and experimentation with emerging technologies to address challenges, improve decision-making, and create value for stakeholders.

- Streamline internal processes, reduce administrative burden, and optimise resource utilisation through digital transformation.

- Leverage data analytics to gain insights, monitor performance, and make informed decisions that drive service improvements and innovation.

- Drive the council's green agenda by, for example, the purchase of recycled laptops, using cloud solutions which reduces council electricity usage and energy efficient technology solutions.

The strategy has been written to underpin the council's corporate business plans and define how we will meet these objectives.

Measuring Success

- All staff having access to information and data they can use to create and provide new services and improvements to existing services.

- Elevated levels of enrolment onto the newly created digital platform 'My Account' portal by customers and a preference for the digital channel.

- Receipt of customer feedback

- Reduced carbon footprint

Governance and Delivery

What follows outlines the proposed governance for ensuring delivery of this programme of projects:

- **Leadership Team**: will engage and support members and senior managers in understanding and embedding the principles set out in this strategy.

- **The Technology Program Board**: The Board will drive the delivery of the building blocks outlined above. The Delivery board will also agree prioritisation within the programme with service areas and transformation projects and obtain and manage the resources needed, thus ensuring delivery.

- **Service Areas**: will handle mapping and re-designing their processes to encompass channel shift and take advantage of the modern technology put in place as part of new strategies. Service areas are recognised as subject matter experts so they are best placed to design practical solutions which will improve customer service in their area.

Business Engagement

Users are keen to see innovative and intuitive solutions as part of a value for money Technology service. Technology is an enabler for future agile work and will support the cultural shift that is required across the organisation and assist in addressing business processes. This cultural shift will be underpinned by a digital first approach to problem solving, looking towards innovative use of existing tools or looking for new tools to remedy challenges or improve service delivery.

There is also recognition that to be a digital organisation, we need our staff to use technology in a more skilled and proficient way. Users need a range of support mechanisms to build the necessary confidence and competence to get the most out of the solutions available to them.

The technology and customer service teams need to respond to the evolving needs of its user base by adapting its support services and providing more innovative ways to assist users out of core hours. We also need to ensure greater sharing and collaboration of technical options with our business areas.

Thinking Digital

Improve Customer access to services

We will use new technology to deliver services tailored for residents and ensure peoples information follows them through their journey regardless of who they are interacting with.

We will achieve this by:

- Developing a new customer portal to deliver better access to services online

- Communicate with residents and stakeholders using language that is clear and easy to understand

- Make services easier to find and access

- Use automation to make services better

What this means for us:

- Better access to services

- More effective public services

- Better informed residents

Enhance the use of Technology and new ways of working

We will build on existing ways of working, improving information flow between organisations supporting the council's ambitions.

We will achieve this by:

- Ensuring information can be shared between organisations, adhering to information governance policies and processes

- Investing in infrastructure to support the services we deliver

- Take a proactive approach to dealing with cyber threats

- Tools to allow working choices provided as standard based on role

What this means for us:

- Confidence that data is protected

- A modern forward thinking council

Develop our Workforce

Our modern infrastructure and skilled workforce will attract staff and businesses to the area.

We will achieve this by:

- Introductory training for new staff on the use of hardware, software and systems used

- Promotion of self-help through guides and videos on our 'Teams and 'Intranet' sites

- Technical tips become part of global communication to encourage digital skills

- Use the intranet more effectively

- Invest in software to meet needs

What this means for us:

- Confident digitally skilled workforce

- New ideas that improve services

- Make the best use of our assets

Current Customer Experience

The services currently delivered by the Technology service are reflective of an era where users primarily work in a council office environment and are connected to a fixed network point or use corporate Wi-Fi to gain access to information, systems, and applications. Mobile working is available; however, it is not found everywhere due to budget limitations, network constraints, not being intuitive, and it also has some constraints around application suitability.

The provision of the current desktop, delivered by Remote Desktop Servers, has enabled many users to work in a more flexible way, as they can access a "virtual desktop" wherever they have internet connectivity.

Our users can often have two or even three phones: the traditional fixed desk telephone for office working and one or more mobile phones for business private use. Each device has a different number that makes contacting someone more complicated than it needs to be.

The estate of applications comprises of several core applications and specific business applications. Not all the functionality of these systems is being utilised and, in many cases, only basic functionality has been exploited. This partial use of systems can be symptomatic of a poor return on investment in a product and has led to business areas requesting and relying on bespoke applications as an alternative to provide missing features or functional gaps.

Traditionally applications are purchased for a specific business unit's requirement, resulting in application and data silos. These applications cannot work with each other without costly integration that were not factored in at the time of procuring them.

Many of our staff deliver services to our residents and businesses 24/7. These users are still constrained by the technical support team, only being available during office hours. The Technology service has access to a range of self-service solutions to support customers and needs to look at what is of most benefit, to address this gap.

The user base has a wide range of abilities and confidence in using the technology; where this is limited or less advanced, in some cases it can prevent efficiencies from being fully achieved and opportunities are missed in identifying where ICT or data sharing could make a real difference to the value of a service.

Security and compliance standards are also of prime importance to the authority and its residents and in many cases, there are national standards that define the required controls that ensure that the delivery of solutions is secure.

Understanding Customers

People have more access to technology today in the form of smartphones, enhanced home appliances, and the internet where they can see and buy anything.

The diagram below shows the online presence of residents in the UK as of January 2023; mobile devices have overtaken laptop computers as the most used device type and is continuing to rise with a rise of +1.2million mobile connections against last year.
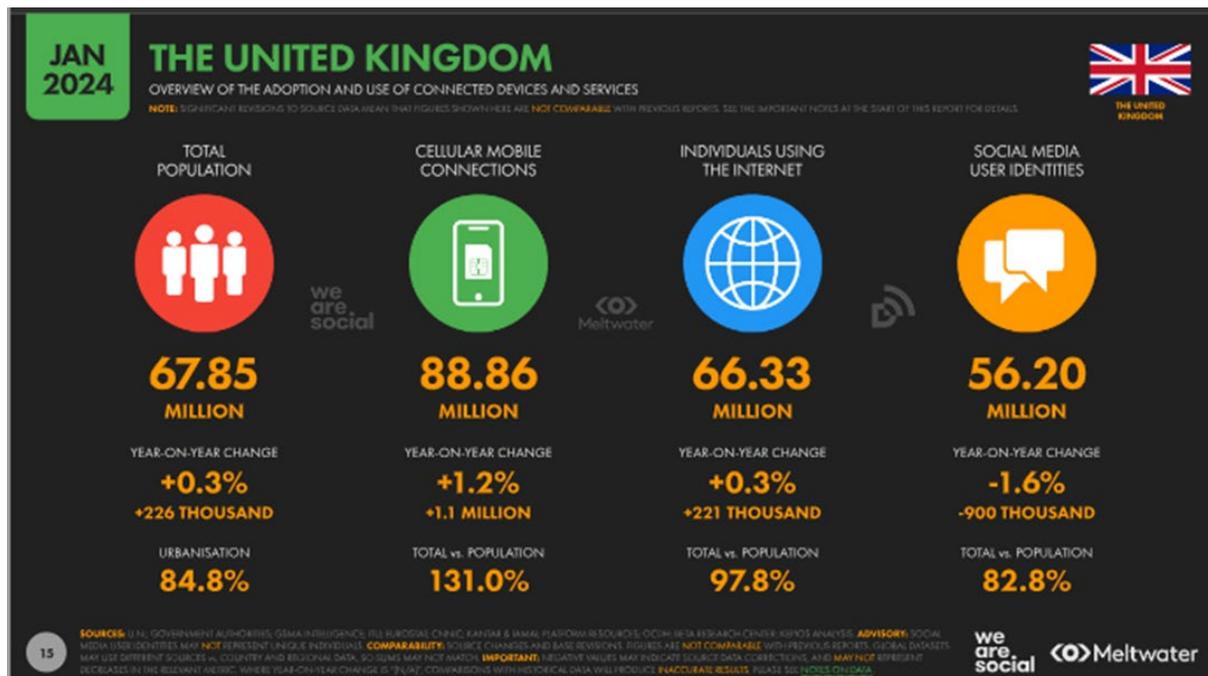
Customers expect things to be available all the time with clever, fast delivery of information.

As an organisation we need to ensure we are ready to meet the increasing demand of these customers while also dealing with more complex queries.

The diagram below shows the demands of today's customers and their grand expectations of a digital first experience.
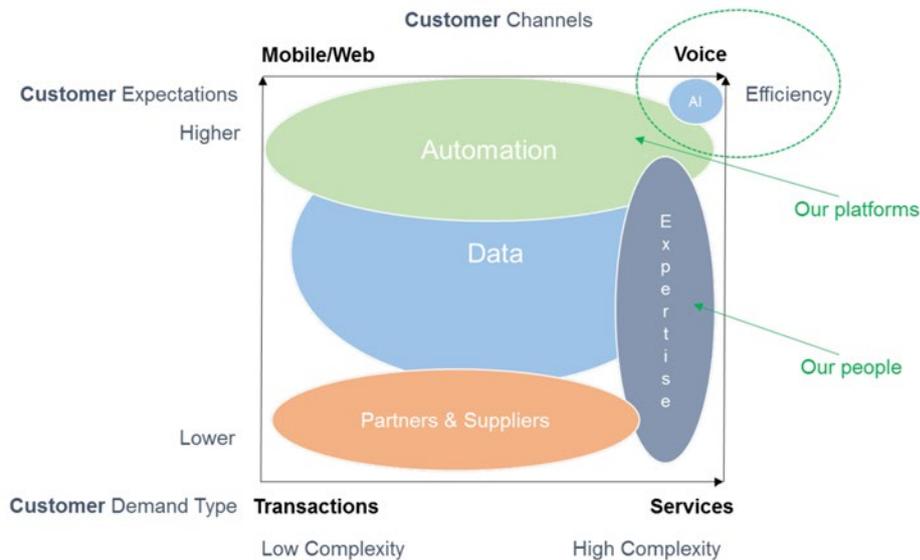
Complex needs are currently met by our staff, experts, however new emerging technologies such as voice activated services and online chats are becoming more efficient at delivering some of these services, backed up by our data.

Basic transactional requests are currently automated to a degree, with some re-keying involved; customers still have high expectations of these. As expectations increase, more complex services will be delivered by people along with some artificial intelligence (AI) voice control.

In time, artificial intelligence and voice activated channels will provide the highest level of efficiencies (circled in green above)

We will utilise partners to create less visible but still important activities which give value to our customers.

This is further reinforced by the chargeable Garden Waste sign up process taken up by residents in Stafford and Cannock.

The Aging Population

The combined authorities have more than 233,000 residents, 20% (1 of 5) of those residents who are over 65, 12% being over the age of 74. With an aging population comes additional social care and health needs for individuals, combined with the difficulties that come with living alone. This needs to be recognised by our strategy.

New processes and technology will free up resources to spend more time dealing with elderly and vulnerable residents across the borough/district. Advanced smart technology, for example, Alexa and other voice activated systems, can be incorporated to meet social needs. This will enable customers to ask questions, for example, "Alexa when is my bin being collected.'

Meeting Customer Need

Reception should give visitors a positive impression and feel; the recent pandemic has seen our reception areas closed with residents and customers having to use online services; this has highlighted where current processes for frontline services have failed to keep up with the channel shift.

Customers expect the 'Amazon' type experience when using online services, being able to book and pay for the services while having the ability to chat with a customer service agent. Expectations are now such that residents have a video consultation with a doctor rather than attending the surgery.

To meet this new expectation the council has invested in a modern, fit for purpose, Customer Platform:

- Intuitive user interface

- Cloud based accessible on any device.

- Management reporting and data.

- Customer information is all in one place – the 'golden thread.'

- The ability to track queries online.

- The ability to book and pay for services online.

The platform has the ability for all systems to work together with ease of access and facilities for continuous improvement and better communication with our residents and stakeholders.

The meeting of customer need will always ensure that while there is focus on digital and a move to digital first no one will be left behind or unable to access customer services. Other non-digital means of accessing services will be maintained where there is a user need to ensure that services remain available to all.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Whilst AI is developing quickly now it is a very resource intensive and expensive tool in the main. The council, where possible, will explore the use of AI. Taking this into account, Artificial Intelligence (AI) could benefit the councils in several ways. For example, it would:

- supply more accurate information leading to better outcomes.

- improve public services - for example personalising public services to adapt to individual circumstances.

- automate simple, manual tasks which frees up time to spend on innovative ways to improve services.

AI cannot be imaginative or consider the emotional aspects of a situation. In some cases, the financial aspect of releasing an AI process may be unrealistic as a form, with some simple logic, may be quicker and cheaper to provide.

AI systems also need to be compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018. For AI to work and to support ongoing business decisions it needs access to relevant data. Our data will need to be assessed for its quality, accuracy, validity, relevancy, completeness, and consistency.

Emerging voice technologies such as 'Alexa' Google, and 'Siri' will be developed and integrated with applications such as waste to enable customers to ask questions, for example 'Alexa when is my bin being collected'.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of the digital strategy for the shared service requires a coordinated and collaborative approach, strong leadership, and ongoing commitment to innovation and excellence in service delivery. By leveraging technology to enhance efficiency, transparency, and engagement, we can become a more connected, resilient, and responsive organisation that meets the needs and expectations of our communities now and in the future.

Summary

Key Messages

- Provide the same experience to internal and external customers.

- Recognising that data collection and sharing is key to achieving organisational aims.

- Staff become experts in our business, our customers, and the use of our systems.

- Specialised staff become experts in our data, turning it into information we can use.

- Security controls are transparent from the start, focusing on visibility, not deniability.

- Ensuring that "green" decision making is embedded throughout the technology decision making process.

Overall Outcomes

- To shift to a digital customer service experience within a data driven environment.

- Focusing on serving customers, mobilising the workforce, and increasing the level of organisational expertise.

- Automate cloud-based services and solutions reducing the reliance on the internal infrastructure.

- Make the most of our data, interrogating it to provide value to all while also supporting the business.

- Where possible, we will use the same system for all that we do, reducing platforms and tools while improving skills to meet demands from our customers.

- Customers can see their own data and self-service.

- Reduced carbon footprint from the use of technology.

- Reduce avoidable contact to the contact centre to allow officers time to deal with other aspects of the role.

Key work streams that need to be fed into the overall transformation program:

1   Improving Services and Customer Access

2   Leadership of Place

3   Support Members to be effective community leaders.

4   Empower Staff to deliver Services.

5   Reducing costs and Increase Income.

6   Quality Assurance

Acknowledgements

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References/Sources: