DIGITAL
STRATEGY

2024-2030

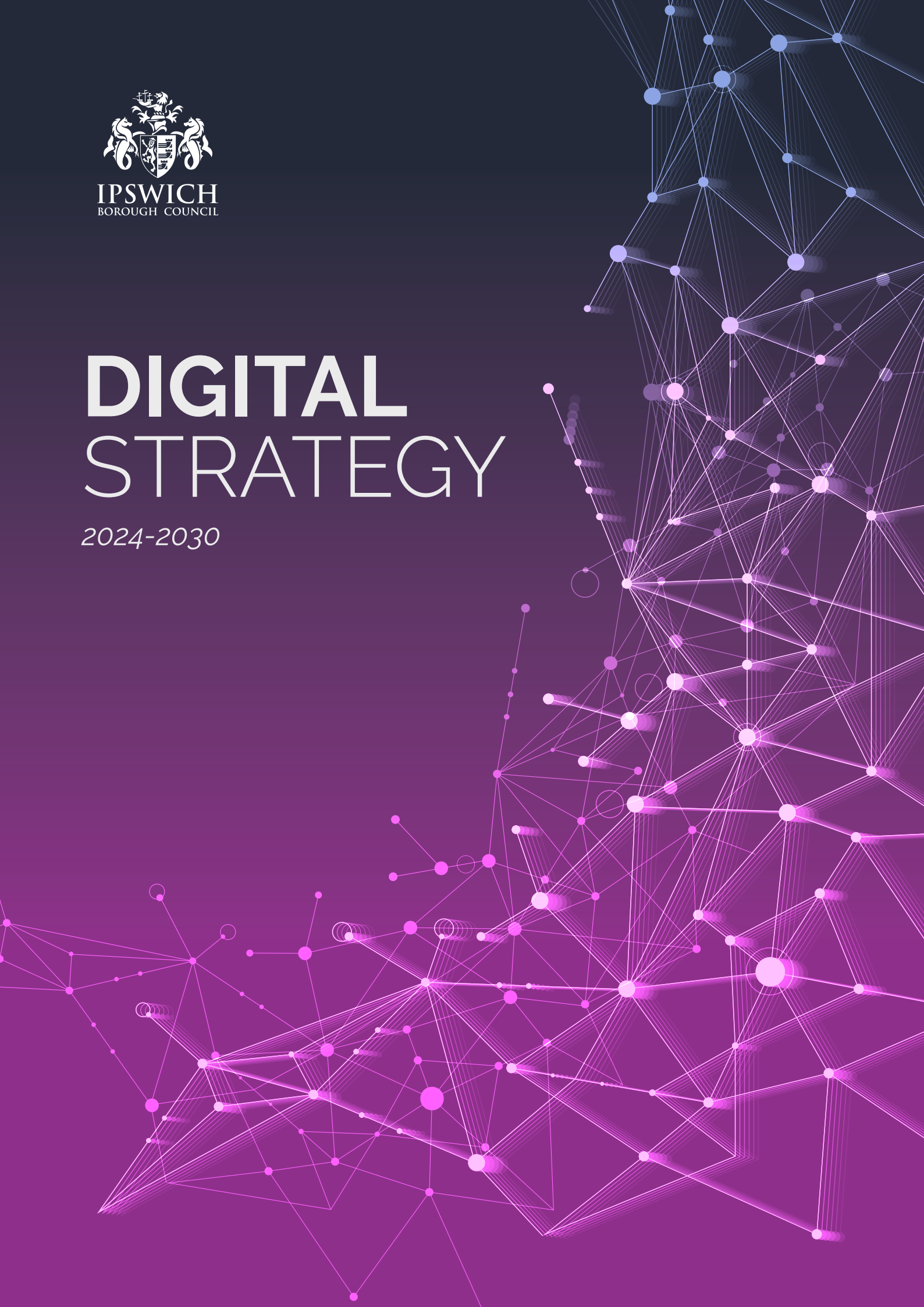**IPSWICH**
BOROUGH COUNCIL

FOREWORD

Our vision is to revitalise our town and to champion our communities. To do this we have to grasp the digital agenda and take the opportunity to transform our service delivery, meeting our communities needs in a customer friendly way.

We want to be digitally inclusive and ensure that those who cannot access digital services are not excluded.

Digital connectivity...
- Supports the efficient and effective running of our Council.
- Can save us money without compromising outcomes.
- Enables us to partner well with others.
- Help us to innovate and try new things.
- Makes our services simpler, easier to access and more straightforward to use.

Residents and users of our services rightly expect a user experience which is comparable to their experiences in other parts of their lives.
- They need ways of getting things done 24/7, in ways that suit them.
- They need it to be as simple, intuitive, and as quick as possible.

We run a large, complex range of services, many of which face significant financial pressures and increasing demand.

Our digital strategy will achieve the right balance of keeping operating costs down whilst maximising the security, quality, and effectiveness of our services.

Our service delivery will fundamentally change with the use of improved technology, supported by a culture that makes sure we adopt it, use it well and bring our communities with us on this digital transformation.

As we move forward, it is important that we leave no-one behind. Accessing digital services requires people to be digitally enabled, and we will work to help tackle digital exclusion in our communities.

Our improving digital capabilities will seek to support digital equity and free up capacity to support those who struggle to access digital services and still need to contact us in other ways.

Councillor Bryony Rudkin
Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Transformation

INTRODUCTION

We want to deliver good services supported by the digital entry points. Our use of digital tools and technologies will drive continuous improvement, and support the efficient, effective running of our council.

We remain committed to having a secure, resilient, and inclusive IT environment, one which enables us to engage with residents and join-up across the council and with partners.

We will plan and implement our digital initiatives in ways that helps accessibility, and we will work pro-actively to maximise inclusion and tackle inequality.
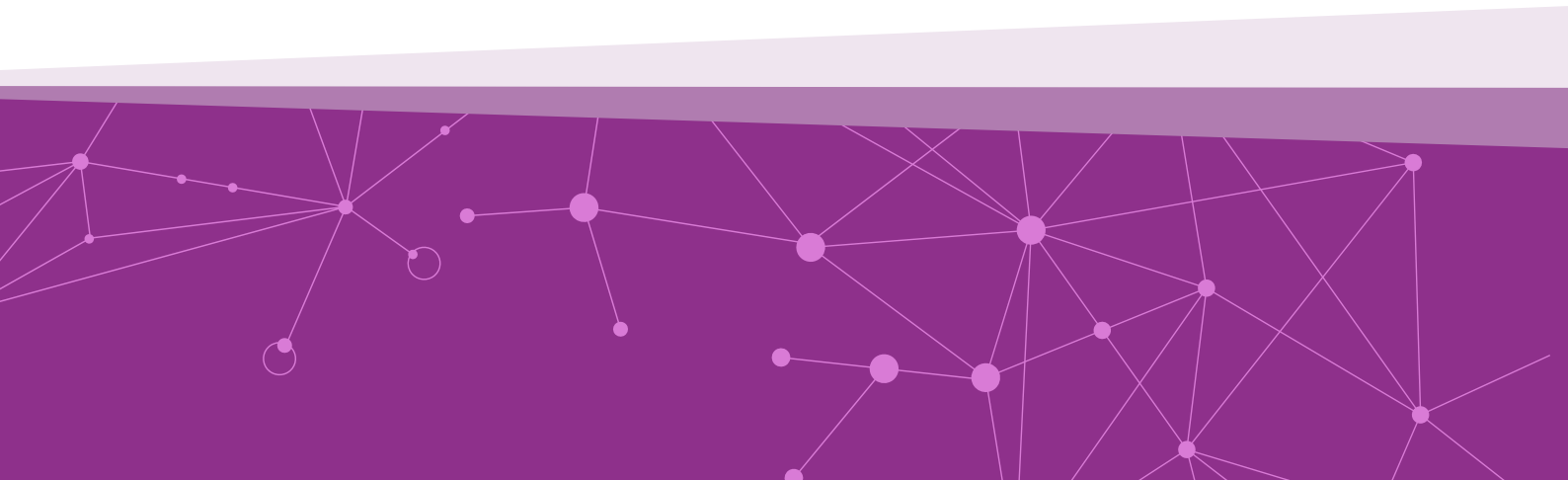
This Digital Strategy is part of a wider framework that supports the delivery of our overarching Proud of Ipswich Strategy, and it shares important links with our Customer Access Strategy. It aims to consolidate and improve our core technology platforms that provide the building blocks for running our services and creating digital engagement with residents and partners.

Digital technology underpins practically all elements of council operations. It helps colleagues to work efficiently and focus our efforts on the practical things people need from us.

We have identified a need to rationalise our ICT applications and to re-procure our main systems such as those deployed to manage the Council's finances and housing service. We are also in the process of redeveloping our aging website to enable greater functionality and easier use.

We have already adopted an enterprise level Microsoft 365 environment and have recently moved our telephony so that it integrates with Microsoft Teams. Such changes have significantly improved our ways of working, resulting in additional flexibilities and efficiencies.

This Strategy sets out the next phase of our digital development and maturity and will be supported by strong programme management and governance arrangements, sponsored jointly by the Deputy Leader and the Director of Strategy & Change.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND OBJECTIVES

To us, digital transformation means securely and ethically using technology, tools, and information to deliver services better, faster, and cheaper and never losing sight of the need to be **digitally inclusive** - our services are about people and will continue to be so.

It goes beyond basic improvements to current systems and working practices, and will tackle inequality, design, and deliver services more effectively, improve access and participation, and reflect residents' preferences.

It will make sure we can turn our strategic intent into reality describing how we will operate across service delivery, process, technology, people, data, and governance. Improved use of technology systems and applications will help **drive decision making** through the provision of robust data and reporting. The use of sound business intelligence, data analytics and insight enable a better understanding and an initiative-taking approach to managing our service delivery.

This is a major task, and made more challenging in ways which are important to recognise and address:

- A continued pressure on services with less financial and staff resource available to meet demand. This puts a financial imperative on increasing people's access to (and use of) digital services, which can benefit them whilst costing us less.
- We have a large IT estate. There is a continued need to simplify and modernise in many areas, to make sure things keep working and are secure.
- Increasing our digital presence and reliance on digital services also increases our 'attack surface.' There is a high and increasing threat to cyber-security, requiring continual investment in technologies, training, and awareness to protect people's data and our services.
- Technology used to focus more on capital investment to buy physical hardware. Now it is more focused on consumption-based subscriptions, changing the way we pay for it. This makes it even more vital to carefully manage our consumption, supplier contracts and third-party spending.
- Global issues including multiple supply chain crises, post-pandemic changes to ways of working and an ever-increasing pace of technological change make for an unpredictable environment.
- There are greater opportunities for different organisations and agencies to work together and work anywhere, meaning we need more flexible technology provision. The same is true of hybrid and flexible working options which are now more widely available to many of our staff.

Our investment in technology and capabilities must allow us to focus our limited time, people, and money on delivery of our corporate priorities and doing the work that only people can do. In line with our Corporate Strategy commitments, it must also have practical outcomes that encourage the inclusion and enablement of all residents.

To achieve our aims and address our challenges, we have identified four strategic ambitions for our digital transformation work:

1. **Easy, engaging, and inclusive.** Provide easier digital access to services and encourage people to use it. Take a user-centred approach to design and maximise accessibility. Take action to improve digital inclusion.
2. **Simple, stable, and secure.** Work in a prioritised and systematic way to simplify and modify our digital estate to make it as secure, resilient, and dependable as practical.
3. **Well-used and used well.** Support colleagues to make the best, fullest use of the tools and technologies available to them, developing high levels of digitally skilled collaboration. Provide robust data and insights to ethically improve effectiveness and efficiency.
4. **Ready to partner, willing to share, and able to innovate.** Adopt the right technologies, systems, processes, culture, and governance to provide a safe and productive environment for wider collaboration and problem-solving using technology.

Ambition 1 -

EASY, ENGAGING, AND INCLUSIVE

Provide easier digital access to Council services and encourage people to use it. Take a user-centred approach to design and maximise accessibility. Take action to improve digital inclusion.

Why this ambition?

Whether we are doing our shopping, ordering a take-away, booking a holiday, arranging healthcare, or any number of other daily tasks, it is now widely expected that we can do this easily and intuitively online. Whatever device is being used, wherever we are and whatever the date or time, an always-on approach to goods and services is the norm.

We need our services to meet these expectations. Whilst many Council services are already accessible digitally, there is a wide scope for improving these further.

It is not only about providing digitised services. People expect a range of contact options and methods, with online services easy enough to use that most people prefer them to calling, writing, or visiting. With limited resources available to us, we need this to allow us to focus our face-to-face and phone-handling efforts on the people who need them most.

Tackling digital inclusion can help address inequalities in Ipswich, so it is vital that our digital transformation journey supports meaningful digital inclusion.

There are many reasons for digital exclusion. Not everyone can afford a device, or if they can, maybe they cannot afford the data or internet subscription, people might have the financial means but lack confidence or the right skills, and others will have impairments – none of these issues should be a barrier if we offer the right options and adjustments.

We aim to:

- Improve our digital services so that people choose to use them, learning from the best public and private sector organisations and tailoring our solutions to the needs of our citizens, and involving them in co-design. Services should be as simple and intuitive as possible, available 24/7 and meet the government Service Standard and Design Principles. Our digital offer should be preferable than any other available options, and broadly comparable to digital services enjoyed in other areas of people's lives.
- Provide a wider range of ways to access services digitally. These should meet diverse needs and preferences, including options with maximum accessibility for disabled people.
- Design and configure our services for digital consumption, affecting our choices about which systems to buy and processes to follow. This must reduce and automate the steps needed in customer transactions to make things quicker and more reliable, seeking full automation of processes.
- Support corporate and partnership planning and action to tackle digital exclusion in its various forms.
- Work closely with our partners in delivering digitally enabled services.
- Provide engaging and accessible online content across our web and social media platforms.
- Adopt the Carnegie Trust's 12 Step approach to tackling Digital Exclusion (details in Appendix 2)

High level actions

1. Introduce new contact channels such as apps, chat and more. Ensure choices are informed by user feedback and leverage technical and data services so that new channels can be trialled and iterated quickly.
2. Work to promote digital channels and maximise take-up.
3. Review and enhance existing online services, with a preference for full process automation and ensuring they can be fully accessed by citizens using any device.
4. Work to migrate more online services to a single MyIpswich account where this is proportionate and cost-effective, providing unified access to as many online Council services as practicable.
5. Complete the modernisation of both our website and telephony platforms, providing more reliable, feature-rich entry points for information, advice, and guidance, and to other citizen-facing services.
6. We will work to meet or exceed legal accessibility standards on our own platforms and press external suppliers to improve where necessary. Seek active feedback from users and ensure we have mechanisms in place to respond.
7. Partner across the Council and beyond to help plan for and deliver improved digital inclusion across Ipswich.

Measures of success

- Increase the percentage of channel shift achieved, including reduction in telephone and face-to-face transactions.
- Increase in speed of resolution times for service requests.
- Online content meets or exceeds Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA
- User sentiment and feedback on the ease of accessing online services.
- Increase in services using MyIpswich.
- Increase in enrolment for MyIpswich

Ambition 2 –

SIMPLE, STABLE, AND SECURE

Work in a prioritised and systematic way to simplify and modify our digital estate to make it as secure, resilient, and reliable as practical.

Why this ambition?

We are all increasingly reliant on technology, and the impacts of it going wrong are no longer just an inconvenience. For the Council, large-scale disruption could become a major crisis which impacts our ability to deliver critical services that keep people safe.

Institutions are increasingly targeted by cyber-criminals, and in the UK and abroad whole municipalities have been the victim of ransomware attacks that bring public services to near-standstill and take months or years to recover from. Increasingly it is a case of when an attack is successful, not if one will be.

There are many other things that can cause problems aside from malicious attack. We have hundreds of systems and some of these are nearing the end of their useful life and do not work well on newer platforms. Physical kit can become outdated quite quickly or fail with age, creating further risks to our digital operations.

Recognising these drivers, we have been transforming the way the technology is delivered and operated. The long-established need for IT to be available, secure, and adaptable has changed with the increasing use of 'cloud' computing. This is where the delivery of technology services no longer requires physical in-house data centres and council-owned infrastructure. Instead, it is based on configuration rather than hardware, and is typically paid for by subscription rather than capital expenditure on physical kit followed by maintenance and support.

We aim to:

- Downscale our on-premises IT estate and redesign our infrastructure to ensure we meet the Council's future needs. This shifts our ICT teams towards leveraging services and away from managing hybrid infrastructure.
- Rationalise to have fewer applications, technologies, and tools. Make sure those we do have are modern, secure and have robust measures in place to recover from any disasters. Keep any business disruption from unexpected events, including cyberattack, to a minimum.
- Complete roll-out of new platforms and products to remove the costs of operating a hybrid IT estate and exploit our new digital architecture. This will make it quicker for the IT team to respond to service needs.
- Strengthen and support compliance with Information Security policies.

High level actions

1. Continue to consolidate, simplify, and standardise our existing content, technology, tools, and applications estate, including:
   - Further optimisation and rationalisation of office productivity applications. Maximise the use of features that are now available to all staff, such as enhanced collaboration using Microsoft 365.
   - Standardise, upgrade, and renew Council-wide business applications used for service-specific functions. Prioritise this carefully according to risk and reward, whilst continuing the standardisation of core business systems and our enterprise approach to data. This includes specific work on our Customer Relationship Management system, Document Management systems, Housing, and Finance systems.
   - Continue to decommission legacy technology and systems - safely migrating or archiving data to our new integrated data and insights platform as required. This will reduce operating costs, remove vulnerabilities, and enable past data to enrich our insights.
   - For our online presence, reduce the use of sub-sites with duplicated or out-dated content and use our core platforms for updated content wherever possible.
2. Ensure the updates and maintenance processes of cloud-based services are prioritised to keep the platforms up to date.
3. Develop, procure, and install a modernised network which is secure and meets our needs for robust performance, high levels of flexibility and improved ability to collaborate remotely. Where appropriate, reduce the use of legacy building-to-building connectivity - as more services become internet connected, focus needs to shift to direct internet connection. This will allow both office and remote workers to share the same technologies and collaborate effectively whilst maximising the security and privacy of sensitive data.
4. Continue to horizon-scan and develop an iterative applications roadmap which meets emerging service needs and provides appropriate digital capabilities for now and the future.
5. Evolve our IT function(s), resourcing, financing, and services to meet the needs of our new strategy and estate, and to maximise the benefits from our investment in becoming a digitally enabled council. Within this, ensure that there is a clear career path for a diverse and inclusive IT workforce, and a mix of in-house and co-sourced skills aligned to the national Digital, Data and Technology Capability framework.

Measures of success

1. Achieve PSN/PCI accreditations for the Council, with milestones linked to better utilisation of security applications and the removal of vulnerable legacy technologies.
2. Overall reduction in the number of unsupported or unsuitable IT applications and systems retained by the Council.
3. Overall reduction in Business systems used in the Council.
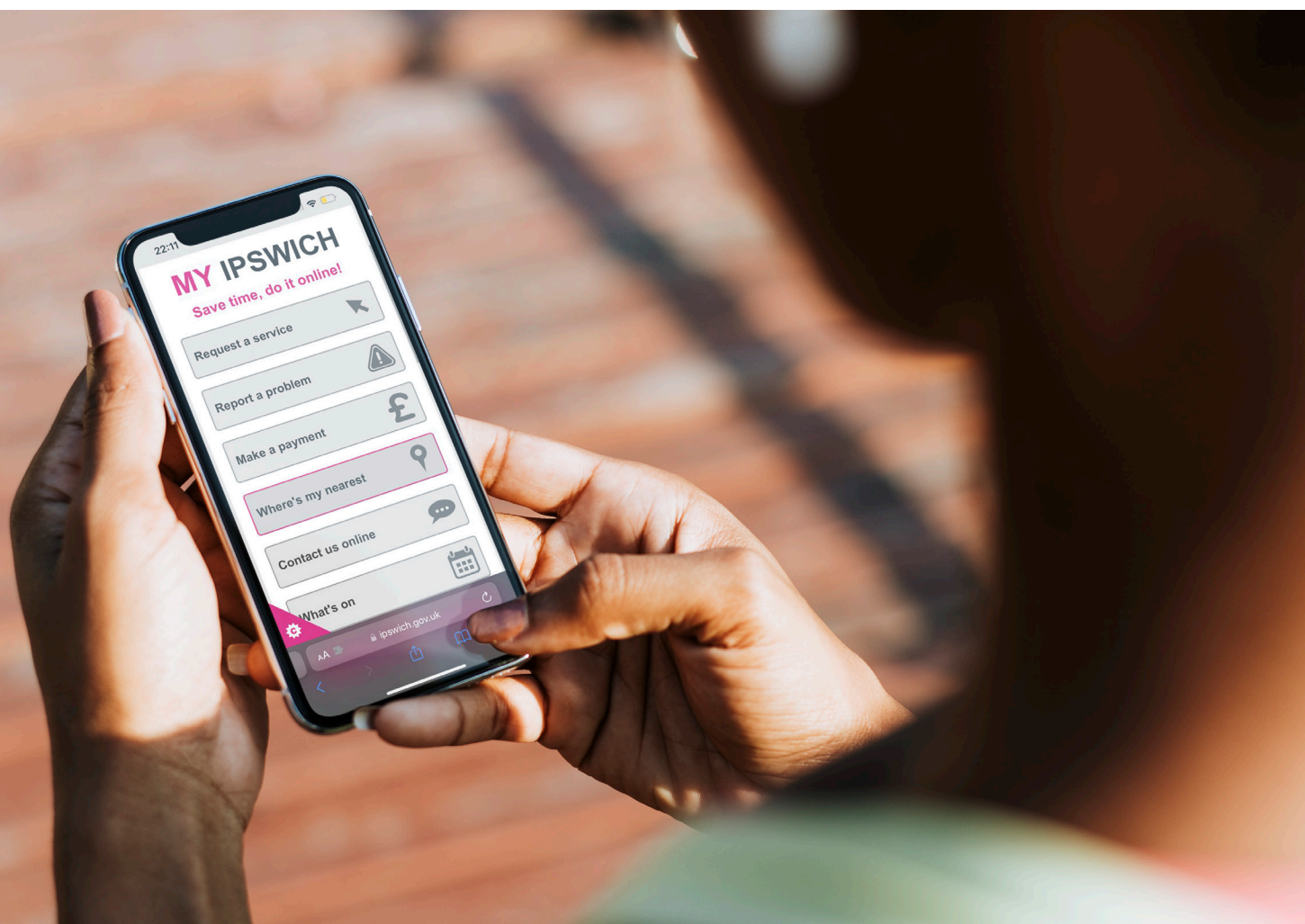4. Reduced calls to the IT Service Desk.

Ambition 3 –

WELL-USED AND USED WELL

Support colleagues to make the best, fullest use of the tools and technologies available to them, developing high levels of digitally skilled collaboration. Provide robust data and insights to ethically improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Why this ambition?

Our strategy will only be achieved if our culture supports it. This means that to make the most of our investment in new tools, technologies, and applications, colleagues must be supported to use them to their full potential. Developing a data-driven, technologically savvy culture takes real time and effort, and means asking already busy colleagues to make space for learning and change.

The recent pandemic accelerated the shift to more flexible and smarter working, but new tools were launched at pace, and we did not always have the luxury of time and resources to launch and embed them in the ways we would have wanted to. We need to improve and enrich the support for Council teams to collaborate, making services more responsive and efficient as people benefit from new ways of working together, anywhere.

Our Corporate Strategy calls for us to provide financially sustainable, good quality services and our operating model sets out how technology and our employees will work to achieve this. We not only need the right technology but for colleagues to feel comfortable in using it, to its best advantage, to meet the needs of our communitys.

We need the right skills in the right places to ensure digital inclusion.

We aim to:

- Provide training and increase the sharing of knowledge and skills to allow staff and councillors to have confidence to make best use of our organisational digital capabilities. This requires support to help them make the most of the platforms, and to become advocates and champions for these tools.
- Enable and support collaboration in line with our Council values, through providing digital tools, monitoring usage and both seeking and responding to feedback. Contribute to a positive organisational culture and behaviours.
- Streamline processes, providing tools and easier access to information and insights that can reduce process costs if they are used well.
- Enable anywhere, anytime access to an integrated ecosystem of flexible, individual, cloud-based solutions and applications. These solutions will be increasingly integrated, highly available and remain protected by layered security.
- Support the Council in becoming more data driven, with higher levels of data literacy. Support and enable delivery of the Data, Insight, and Information Strategy.
- High level actions

1. Invest in the digital skills, awareness, experience and capabilities of our colleagues and councillors through a continuing programme of adoption and change activities. This includes encouraging behaviour change, delivering training and supporting a high-performing champions' network. These help people gain confidence and get the most from the platforms we have invested in.
2. Accelerate the use of self-service internally, and the availability of self-help services as part of new digital service design.
3. Adapt business processes to exploit digital capabilities and boost innovation, whilst avoiding complex solutions that are hard to maintain.
4. Continue work to fully centralise data and insights capacity and deliver the Council's agreed programme of data and insight improvement work, evolving it over time. Ensure that robust, accurate data and that its correct and ethical use is embedded across the Council.
5. Pro-actively evaluate our usage and performance, allowing planned space in our programme for reflection and to adjust our course as required.

Measures of success

- Take-up and completion of self-service training
- Levels of use of Microsoft tool functions
- Number of business processes reviewed and remediated annually.
- Reduction in user support requests
- Staff satisfaction with tools available to them
- Self-reported staff confidence in using digital tools available to them.

Ambition 4 –

READY TO PARTNER, WILLING TO SHARE, AND ABLE TO INNOVATE

Adopt the right technologies, systems, processes, culture, and governance to provide a safe and productive environment for wider collaboration and problem-solving using technology.

Why this ambition?

We recognise that we are one organisation in a hugely complicated system, where everyone has a role to play. People who use our services will also use others across the public sector. If we are to achieve our strategic goal of championing our community by promoting community well-being and fairness, then we need to collaborate with partners to deliver for residents. This includes – where appropriate and cost effective - linking digital platforms and promoting digital inclusion for all.

We recognise that whilst the Council has pockets of digital and innovation excellence, our overall level of digital maturity is low and, in many cases, it will be wiser to adopt existing, tested, and proven solutions.

In these cases, it will be important that we and our partners consider how to maximise interoperability and the potential for responsible innovation, consciously working to remove technological and cultural barriers to joint working. Where we do need to genuinely innovate and break new ground to get the best outcomes for our residents, it must be carefully planned, highly intentional in nature and able to fail safely.

If we do this well, real benefits for local people could be realised. For example:

- Using technologies to enhance independent living can support more people to continue living in their own homes for longer as they get older.
- Providing open data to residents and organisations can ensure people are informed and empowered to engage with the Council and organisations.
- Innovative monitoring technologies could ensure better asset management of infrastructure like solar panels and heat pumps, ensuring our housing stock is energy efficient and allowing remote access to troubleshoot issues quickly and save money.

We aim to:

- Co-ordinate effectively internally and partner across sectors to ensure we have a joined-up, prioritised and planned approach to technology and innovation that puts people first.
- Support this with the right levels of technical compatibility, ethical data sharing, and governance to ensure delivery.
- Draw from our past experiences of innovation, both success and failure, to learn and create safe spaces to tackle problems.
- Align our datasets – ensuring they are consistent, accurate and indexed so that they can form a 'single truth' of corporate data.
- Provide compelling, comprehensive, and highly usable open data.

High level actions

1. Configure the Council to support appropriate opportunities for innovation and improvement in our digital capabilities.
2. Ensure our core IT teams work in partnership with services and external organisations to develop new digital services that incorporate customer feedback.
3. Through our enterprise approach to data and insights, continue to make core system data available and easy to technically access: with ethics, informed consent, open standards, and strong governance at the heart of appropriate data-sharing.
4. Work closely with partner institutions on digital transformation, including the design and delivery of digitally enabled services.
5. Closely align our in-house innovation expertise with our policy expertise to ensure that we work together on prioritising and addressing key challenges that are recognised corporate priorities.

Measures of success

- Increased levels of interoperability between partner systems
- Levels of compliance with Information Security policy requirements in establishing collaborations

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Throughout this strategy there are terms that are used regularly and may have specific meaning, for the purposes of this strategy, this is how we define them:

Artificial Intelligence (AI): refers to systems or machines that mimic human intelligence to perform tasks and can iteratively improve themselves based on the information they collect.

Digital Engagement: how users interact with a software application or platform that is a route into accessing council services.

Digital Exclusion: the inability to access online products or services or to use digital technology.

Digital Inclusion: the ability to access and use information and communications technologies, regardless of any factor including protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation), income or current ability. In encouraging digital inclusion, we can help create digital equity.
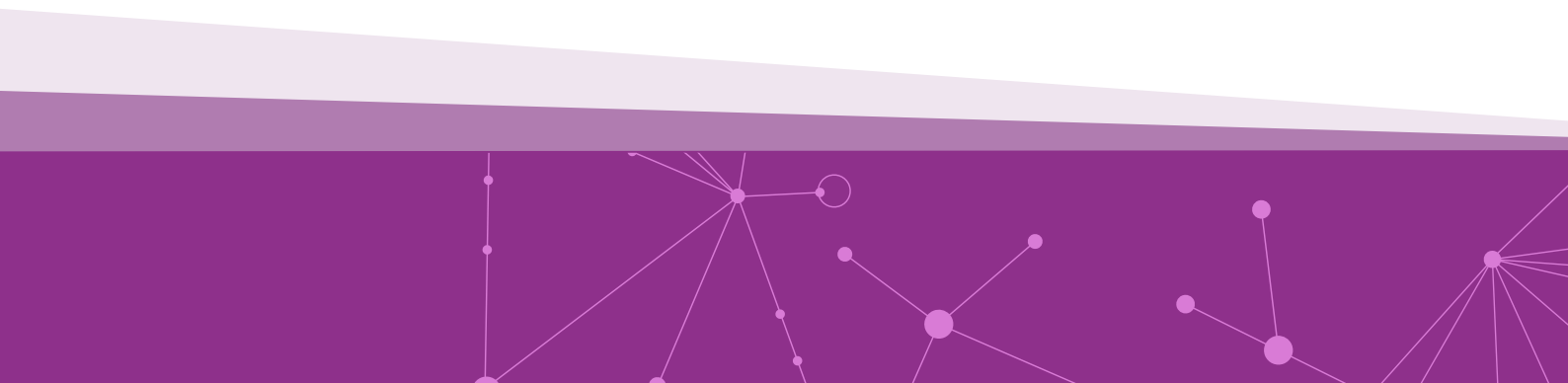
Digital equity: information technology needed for participation in day-to-day life covering all aspects. For example, employment, education, business and economic development, lifelong learning and access to essential services that are available to citizens regardless of their racial grouping, socioeconomic status, or cultural identity.

Digitised services: services provided to citizens that has been enabled and assisted by technology either through online information support to people delivering the service or through information automation or semi automation.

Evolution: improvement in systems and services achieved through incremental changes.

Inclusion: taking active steps to create equality, ensuring equal access and opportunity for all, and tackling discrimination and injustice. It is also about ensuring that people feel they belong and are encouraged and equipped to connect with others and to contribute to their community. Inclusive design creates environments that everyone can use to access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available in society. It enables people to participate, confidently, independently and with choice and dignity. Inclusive design avoids separation or segregation and is made up of places and spaces that meet the needs of everyone in society.

Information technology (IT): refers to the equipment, software and organisation that manages IT on behalf of an enterprise.

IT estate: collection of IT equipment, software and operating processes that provide information technology enablement of an enterprise.

Licensing: most software is licensed to be used on either an enterprise, application, or user basis. The licences may be perpetual which means they can be used for an up-front fee sometimes with support costs on top or increasingly as a subscription that entitles usage for a period.

Microsoft 365 or M365: suite of software that provides software capabilities aimed at groups and individual end users. It consists of an entire eco system of security, management, monitoring, and user features such as email, office software, information storage and office tools.

PCI: 'Payment Card Industry' – a mandatory set of security requirements for the processing of credit card transactions.

Platforms: a group of technologies that are used as a base upon which other applications, processes or technologies are developed or provide a set of integrated features that can be used by a business user.

PSN: central government 'Public Services Network' (used to access central DWP data etc) and subject to mandatory security compliance before use.

Telephony Platform: hardware, software and communications links that provide support for telephone services to end users and integration with other communication systems.

Transformation: delivering the current service or products, better, faster, and or cheaper.

Carnegie Trust – 12 Steps to Digital Inclusion

1. Commit to a digital inclusion strategy.
2. Prioritise co-production of strategies with those who have experienced digital exclusion
3. Collect quality digital data.
4. Establish a robust baseline for a Minimum Digital Living Standard
5. Embed digital inclusion across Council services.
6. Align with anti-poverty efforts to show digital inclusion could help.
7. Measure the impacts of programmes supporting digital inclusion.
8. Regulate for online harms to promote a safer online environment.
9. Invest and build capacity to support organisations trying to help digital inclusion.
10. Champion the role of business to promote digital inclusion.
11. Innovate for inclusion for those on low incomes.
12. Ensure a public safety net to provide internet access such as libraries, health and welfare services, and community groups.

IPSWICH
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