

Future New Forest

Transforming tomorrow, together



Executive summary

New Forest District Council (NFDC) has an ambitious Corporate Plan for 2024 to 2028 to meet the needs of local residents and businesses. We will be delivering this plan in the context of a rapidly changing world and some significant challenges, namely:

- Our systems and processes need to keep pace with the advance of digital technologies and the impact these are having on people's lives and expectations.
- Rising costs and new burdens mean we face a potentially significant budget gap.
- We need new skills to deliver the changes we must make.
- Meeting national and local targets to reduce emissions and support nature will require us to change the way we use resources and deliver services.

The Future New Forest transformation strategy, covering the same four-year period, sets out how we will transform the council so we can meet customer needs, protect finances and embed sustainability. Our objectives are grouped into four transformation themes:



1



Customer and digital services

We will redesign services to improve customer experience, make better use of technology and reduce manual effort. Services should be digital by design, irrespective of how customers contact us.

2



People and capabilities

We will review how we organise and develop our people, making sure roles, structures, behaviours and skills evolve to meet new service designs and needs.

3



Assets and accommodation

We will make better use of assets, improve sustainability and change the way we work. This includes the spaces that staff work in and customers visit as well as the stores and depots.

4



Finances and delivery

We will strengthen how we manage finance, strategy and performance. This includes how we manage the delivery of financial and non-financial benefits from transformation and how we develop a data-driven approach to strategy and performance.

All council services, teams, business processes, systems and operational buildings are in scope of the transformation strategy and the delivery programme. We will need to invest to meet our ambitions, but transformation will deliver financial savings to justify the investment, as reflected in our success measures.

This strategy has been informed by customer research and staff engagement and we will continue to involve staff and customers in the delivery of the action plan so that we can transform tomorrow together.



1. Introduction

This transformation strategy sets out how NFDC will need to change to meet the aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 in the context of significant challenges facing local government.

The focus of the strategy is the organisation itself – our people, culture, structures, processes and systems. It provides the strategic framework to underpin a transformation programme that will more effectively align the organisation's capacity

and capabilities to the ambitions expressed in the Corporate Plan as well as modernising services to improve customer experience and unlock the potential for savings.

The overarching goal of the transformation strategy is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the council, responding to known financial challenges and freeing up capacity to respond to future, unknown pressures and strategic choices.

The transformation strategy covers 2024 to 2028 and provides a direction of travel for the organisation over that period, with a detailed focus on action planning for 2024/25.

Between 2024 and 2028 the economic, political, technological and environmental context is likely to change significantly, so the strategy and objectives set out within it will need to be flexible to respond to those changes.

This strategy has been informed by council plans and extensive staff engagement, customer research and data analysis. The implementation of the strategy will be supported by further planning and analysis activity which will be developed after the adoption of the strategy.



Inputs

Customer research

- ~4000 telephone surveys
- ~120 website surveys
- ~70 face-to-face surveys
- Resident focus groups

Benchmarking

- Analysed NFDC spend across 21 different services and benchmarked against nearest neighbours

Leadership workshops

- Maturity assessment with 27 managers
- Case for change
- Strategic objectives

Staff engagement

- 130 employees attended workshops
- 75 views from depots
- 250 suggestions

Data analysis

- ~360k contacts analysed across channels
- Deep dive into 2000 emails

Council plans

- Medium Term Financial Plan
- Corporate Plan

Transformation Strategy 2024 to 2028

Outputs

Transformation programme plan

Detailed analysis of activities and processes

Detailed benefits case



2. Case for change

The council's new corporate plan establishes the priorities for the next four years, focusing on delivering the changes that matter to the people of the New Forest, putting the community first. To maximise our chances of delivering the outcomes required by the corporate plan, we are going to need to change as an organisation, responding to four key challenges which will impact every aspect of our operations.

2.1. Modernising services

Our systems and processes need to keep pace with the advance of digital technologies and the impact these are having on people's lives and expectations.

There is growing demand for digital access to council services, accompanied by a high level of access to the internet and growing capability among our residents. We need to improve the customer experience by joining up our data and systems, some of which are now outdated. Services across the public and not-for-profit sectors are often poorly signposted and integrated and we need to make it easier for customers to find the services they need.

The evidence for this includes:

- 99% of the UK is online and since the pandemic 65% of those have tried something new online, such as shopping or paying bills, and most (90%) have sustained this (Source: UK Consumer Digital Index 2022)
- The UK Consumer Digital Index also reports that 63% of the population has High or Very High digital skills and 27% of the population has Very Low digital skills. Age and income are the greatest determiners of digital capability, although 24% of people who significantly increased their skills between 2021 and 2022 were aged 60+
- 93% of NFDC residents use the internet (Source: Residents Survey 2022)
- 90% of customer demand currently arrives into the council via phone or email, even if an online form is used (Source: analysis of customer contacts 2023)
- 47% callers to the council told us they could not find or do what they wanted online (Source: customer research 2023) while 82% said it was easy to phone (Source: Residents Survey 2022)
- Customers told us they will use online services if they are easy and they can track their request (Source: customer research 2023)



2.2. Financial constraints

Rising costs and new burdens mean we face a significant and growing budget gap.

Rising costs of service delivery combined with new challenges and burdens means we are facing potentially significant budget deficits over the next four years. We must continue to prioritise and find ways to reduce the cost of delivery. We must embed financial responsibility into all that we do.

The evidence for this includes:

- External factors have put significant strain on council budgets, for example:
 - » National pay awards and Living Wage increases
 - » Reduced central government funding
 - » Other price increases eg energy, vehicles, insurance
- The combined effect is a general fund budget gap that grows to £3.6m by 2027/28, or 15% of the net budget
- The housing revenue account (HRA) faces the same external challenges as well as other pressures associated with meeting energy performance and greener housing targets which could cost £125m between now and 2050
- The council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) requires annual savings through transformation of £1.25m by 2027/28 to the General Fund and £500k for the HRA

Source: NFDC Medium Term Financial Plan 2023



2.3. Capacity and capability

We need new skills to deliver the changes we must make.

The world is changing fast with the rapid growth of technology and artificial intelligence (AI). The council needs new skills to respond to the opportunities and challenges we face. However, most councils are facing recruitment and retention problems. We need to release capacity from parts of the organisation to enable increased focus on strategic priorities. We need to develop a more agile workforce to respond to a changing local government landscape and a digital world.

The evidence for this is:

- 94% of councils nationally say they are experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties (Source: LGA 2022 Local Government Workforce Survey)
- At NFDC the percentage of vacancies filled first time has fallen from 92% to 81% over the past year
- District councils are struggling to recruit and retain planning, legal, property, ICT and environmental health staff, as well as facing skills gaps around digitalisation, people management, managing change and commerciality* (Source: LGA 2022 Local Government Workforce Survey)
- Recent recruitment challenges at NFDC include key roles in housing, waste and environmental health, both at manager level and 'on the ground'
- We need to grow our skills and capacity to support transformation, for example change management, enhanced digital delivery, customer engagement and research
- Workforce and succession planning is a key issue with an average workforce age of 48, slightly higher than other south-east councils (46)



2.4. Climate and sustainability

Meeting national and local targets to reduce emissions and support nature will require us to change the way we use resources and deliver services.

The council declared a Climate Change and Nature Emergency in 2021 and is committed to leading efforts to tackle the impacts of extreme weather and climate change in the New Forest, reducing emissions to reach net zero and supporting nature recovery. We must work in partnership with residents, businesses and other public services to make a real impact.

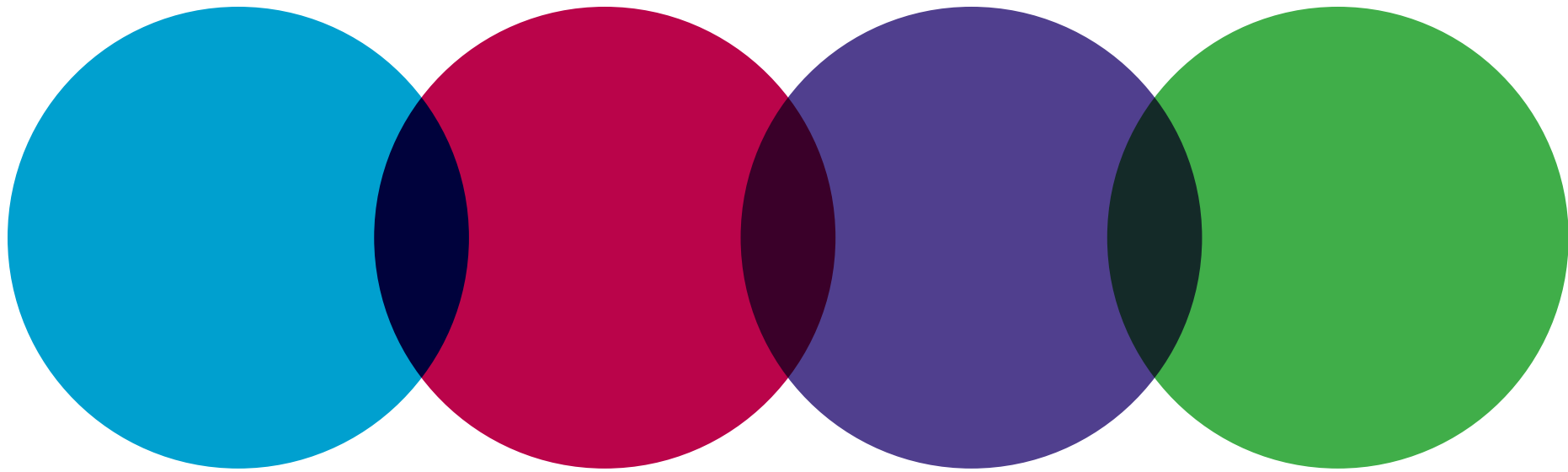
These changes will affect all aspects of council operations, including service delivery, the health and wellbeing of staff, the suitability of our housing stock, the lifespan of our assets and the condition of our habitats.

The evidence for this is:

- 75% of New Forest residents feel worried about the impact of climate change (Source: Residents Survey 2022)
- New Forest has the highest domestic and industrial emissions in Hampshire and the second highest transport and commercial emissions (Source: UK Government, 2023)
- Due to climate change, sea levels are predicted to rise by 1.03m across Christchurch Bay and Harbour over the next 100 years and 1370 properties along the NFDC coastline between

Christchurch and Milford on Sea are expected to be at risk from coastal erosion. (Source: Christchurch Bay and Harbour Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy).

- Climate change is the biggest long-term threat to the New Forest National Park. The impact of climate change on the New Forest is likely to be wide reaching, with warmer, wetter winters, hotter, drier summers, rising sea levels and an increasing frequency of extreme weather events (Source: New Forest National Park Authority)



3. Vision, objectives and scope

In the context of these four challenges, which cut across all our services, we have established a vision for a transformed, future New Forest council. We have grouped the changes required to realise that vision into four transformation themes and developed a set of transformation objectives for each theme.

3.1. Vision

“Future New Forest: Investing in our people and services to meet customer needs, protecting our finances and embedding sustainability to preserve our unique place by transforming tomorrow, together.”

3.2. Objectives by theme



Customer and digital services

This theme is about how we redesign services to improve customer experience, make better use of technology and remove manual effort. Services should be digital by design, irrespective of how customers contact us.

Objective C1

Our customers will be at the heart of our digital-by-design approach.

Objective C2

We will use data and insight to plan services, manage performance and direct our focus for transformation.

Objective C3

We will have the right systems, processes and devices to ensure work can be done in the right place, right time and the most efficient way.



People and capabilities

This theme is about how we organise and develop our people and culture, making sure roles, structures, behaviours and skills evolve to meet new service designs and needs.

Objective P1

We will ensure our values, behaviours and culture are aligned and support the future organisation.

Objective P2

We will invest in our people to ensure we have the skills, experience and equipment that we need.

Objective P3

We will ensure the work is done in the right way in the right place, reviewing roles and structures as necessary.



Asset and accommodation

This theme is about how we use assets, improve sustainability and change the way we work. It includes the spaces that customers visit and staff work in as well as the stores and depots.

Objective A1

Our assets will support efficient and effective delivery of our future service provision.

Objective A2

We will continue to challenge our asset portfolio to reduce environmental impact and enhance their financial contribution.

Objective A3

Our accommodation will meet the needs of our staff, customers, culture and ways of working.



Finances and delivery

This theme is about how we manage finance, strategy and performance. It includes how we manage the delivery of financial and non-financial benefits and how we develop a data-driven approach to strategy and performance.

Objective F1

Through transformation, we will deliver agreed levels of savings in line with MTFP targets and council priorities.

Objective F2

We will adopt a more commercial mindset, open to innovative service models and guided by strategic priorities.

Objective F3

We will shift to a more empowered and accountable, management culture.

3.3. Scope for change

This section outlines what is, and is not, within the remit of the transformation strategy.

Customer and digital services

In scope

The redesign of all service processes to identify ways to improve customer experience, enhance performance and release capacity.

Partnership working across the public and not-for-profit sectors to join up services and processes to make access to key services better for our residents, businesses and visitors.

Redesign includes changes to processes, technology, channels and ways of working.

All software applications supporting front- and back-office operations are in scope. This could mean optimising the use of those applications, replacing components of them with enterprise solutions (eg customer portals), integrating them or, in some cases, replacement.

Out of scope

Decisions about how capacity released through service design is realised.

Changes to formally documented policies that have been adopted by elected members.

People and capabilities

In scope

People strategy development.

All services and teams.

Changes to existing roles and job descriptions.

Changes to organisational structures to better align capacity and capability to priority services/processes.

Training and development plans.

Aligning performance with new organisational structures, roles and capabilities to improve transparency and accountability.

Meeting our capacity and capability gaps by working in partnership with other organisations across the public and not-for-profit sectors.

Out of scope

Changes to pay and grading structures.

Assets and accommodation

In scope

Asset strategy development.

All operational buildings including disposal decisions.

Changes to customer and/or staff accommodation including office moves.

Out of scope

Decisions around commercial asset management / investment portfolio.

Finances and delivery

In scope

Strategic reviews of services.

Benefits management.

Service planning.

Financial planning and budget management processes.

Leadership, management and performance culture.

Out of scope

Leadership decisions on the method of realising benefits identified and estimated through the activities of the transformation programme.

3.4. Challenges

The table below illustrates the possible impact of the challenges across each of the four themes.

		Challenges			
		Modernising services	Financial constraints	Capacity and capability	Climate & sustainability
Themes	Customer and digital services How we design services and use technology	We will need to focus on customer needs and outcomes when redesigning services and seek feedback to improve.	We will need to reduce service costs through redesign and encourage adoption of lower cost channels.	We will need to release capacity through our use of technology.	We will need to redesign services to be delivered in ways that promote positive environmental impacts.
	People and capabilities How we organise and develop our people and culture	We will need to review roles and structures to ensure we provide the support customers need.	We will need to restructure to ensure work is done in the right way in the right place.	We will need to consider new ways to recruit, train and retain staff.	We will need to upskill staff to be climate aware and to develop solutions for their service.
	Assets and accommodation How we use assets, improve sustainability and change the way we work	We will need to identify when customers benefit from face-to-face contact and how we can most efficiently provide it.	We will need to reduce the costs of running operational buildings and increase income through sales/rents.	We will need to develop new ways to connect and collaborate and design spaces to enable this.	We will need to invest in buildings and other assets to reduce CO2 emissions and ensure long-term sustainability.
	Finances and delivery How we manage finance, strategy and performance	We will use data to inform strategic decisions on policy and service planning.	We will need to act commercially, prioritise better and manage benefits robustly to ensure delivery.	We will need to invest in people and performance management to build an empowered workforce.	We will ensure a clear strategic focus on the future environmental sustainability of the council.



4. Measuring our success

It is essential that we can measure progress during the life of this strategy, to understand whether our actions are effective. The table below shows how we will monitor progress across the four transformation themes. Some of these measures are new and we will need to define how they are calculated and what the targets will be. Measures and targets may need to be amended during the life of this strategy as priorities change.

Customer and digital services

- Customer experience (% rating Good or above)
- Residents satisfaction with council services (% satisfied)
- Number of fully digital services (definition and baseline to be confirmed)
- Customers choosing digital channels (% requests received via digital channels)

People and capabilities

- Long term vacancies (% vacancies filled first time)
- Staff agree they have the skills and tools to do their jobs (% agreement)
- Staff who would recommend NFDC as a place to work (% net promoter score)

Assets and accommodation

- Lower net cost of operational and community assets (£k reduction against baseline tbc)
- Reduced emissions from operational council assets (% reduction against baseline)
- Staff satisfaction with workplace (% satisfied)

Finances and delivery

- MTFP savings realised (% of transformation target)
- New service and financial planning process implemented (definition to be confirmed but to include specification of data required)
- Managers agree they are empowered to manage resources to deliver their target outcomes (% agreement)

5. Roadmap



	2024				2025				2026				2027			
	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec
Modernisation																
Mobilise programme																
Detailed programme planning																
Assemble programme team																
Establish governance																
Customer and digital																
Define digital architecture and capabilities																
Align customer and digital strategies																
Customer journeys and design patterns																
Assess existing customer datasets																
Establish digital building blocks																
Procure new tools/capabilities																
Implement new tools/capabilities																
Prioritise redesign of services																
Develop using testing approach																
Standard service redesign approach																
Design, prototype, build, deploy cycle																
People and capabilities																
Review organisation design																
Organisation design principles																
Activity analysis																
Organisation design workshops																
Implement organisation design changes																
Detailed design																
Consultation																
Recruitment / restructure																
Organisational development																
Write People strategy																
Training and talent creation programme																
Culture change programme																
Assets and accommodation																
Asset strategy																
Develop Asset strategy																
Integrate asset objectives into service planning																
Operational assets review																
Investment and disposals programme																
Address compliance risks																
Implement environmental improvements																
Asset disposals																
Office moves																
Financial and delivery																
Establish data-led service reviews																
Develop strategies service review approach																
Design service and financial planning approach																
Define target management culture																
Implement strategic service reviews																
Complete service reviews																
Develop delivery proposals																
Implement changes to service models																
Programme benefits management																
Benefits definition and estimation																
Establish benefits management system																

The roadmap provides a high-level view of the transformation programme and timeline over the next four years.

The activities are aligned to each of the four themes and more detail will emerge each year as we move through the programme.



6. Transformation delivery

6.1. Leadership

A critical success factor for all transformations is strong leadership that is visibly and consistently aligned with the outcomes of the transformation strategy.

Aligned leadership extends from elected members to senior and middle managers. Members set the strategic direction for the council and therefore must understand and

support the need for the organisation to change to meet strategic goals. Senior leaders must present a united front, communicate the case for change and direction of travel clearly and set an example. Middle managers play a vital role in ensuring the change is translated into everyday team behaviours and ways of working.

It is important to understand that benefit realisation decisions, such as whether to remove cost from the organisation or reinvest released capacity, are a function of leadership, not the transformation programme. These decisions are often difficult but they are

a necessary consequence of delivering successful transformation and leadership must ensure that the exercise of their discretion in this aspect of the programme is clearly communicated to the wider organisation.

However, leadership is not the sole domain of elected members and managers. Effective transformation programmes involve staff in the change process: "People own what they help create" (Myron Rogers). We will involve staff in design of new services, processes and teams and provide opportunities for them to shape the future council.

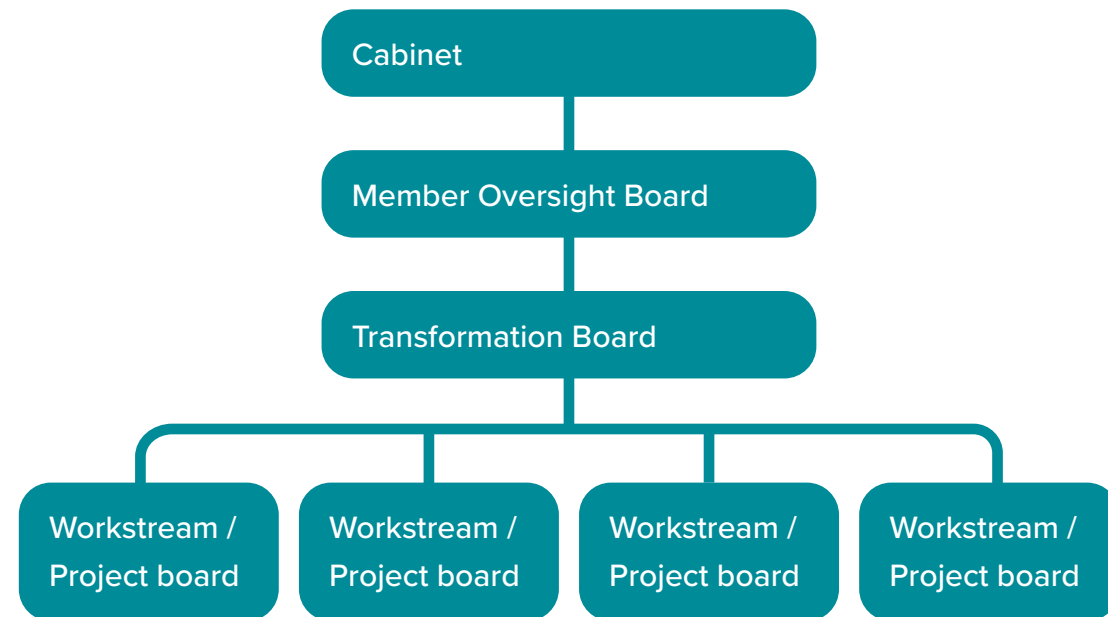


6.2. Governance

If it is to be successful in delivering all the objectives and delivering its scope, the transformation strategy must be implemented as a single, integrated programme. This is essential to ensure that individual workstreams and projects have a strong understanding of the wider impacts they will have, on other workstreams, projects or parts of the organisation.

A governance structure that oversees and encourages a joined-up approach, and has ultimate decision-making power across all workstreams, will be required. The detailed governance framework will be developed when the programme is mobilised, but an indicative governance framework is shown below.

At this stage, it is too early to allocate roles or individuals into this governance architecture, but this will be an important “next step” as the programme is mobilised, and will be important to help ensure that the leadership dynamic that has been outlined above is successful.





6.3. Delivery considerations

The vision and objectives in this strategy provide the direction for the council's transformation, but to make real change we will need to ensure that appropriate and sufficient funding is identified and agreed, mobilise our delivery team and develop a detailed plan.

A detailed risk analysis will be carried out as part of programme planning and mobilisation, however there are a number of **high-level risks** that are already known:

In-flight projects

- There are multiple projects underway that involve implementing new technology and processes, including new customer facing systems. Through no fault of those projects, they are operating independently of a unifying strategic framework for transformation and customer experience. There is a risk that some of the activity in these projects will conflict with the objectives of this and related strategies that are being developed, and that re-work may be necessary.

Lack of capacity and capability

- The council is highly unlikely to currently have the right capacity and capability in key transformation skills such as programme management, change management, business analysis, customer engagement and digital process design. An approach to identifying and sourcing the right capacity and capability to support the transformation programme, as well as then releasing the excess capacity and capability with minimal cost at the conclusion of the programme, will need to be developed urgently.

The roadmap shown in section 5 provides a high-level view of the transformation programme and timeline but does not illustrate the many dependencies that exist between the activities shown. These will also be drawn out during programme planning, but it is worth highlighting some of the important ones:

- The design and build of new processes will be heavily dependent on the delivery of the new digital tools and capabilities. An agile approach that moves quickly from design to build is most likely to build

confidence and deliver results but this will only be possible if key building blocks are in place and their capabilities are well-understood.

- Organisation design changes may be dependent on service and process design changes, which, as noted above, may be dependent on new technology.



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