

Cabinet – 2 April 2025

Digital Strategy 2025-2028

Purpose	For decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>This report provides the council's proposed digital strategy for 2025-2028.</p> <p>The current digital strategy expires in 2025 therefore it has been updated in line with the corporate suite of documents to ensure alignment with the Corporate Plan, Transformation Strategy and Customer Strategy.</p>
Recommendation(s)	<p>It is recommended that Cabinet:</p> <p>1. Recommend to council the adoption of the Digital Strategy 2025-2028</p>
Reasons for recommendation(s)	<p>To support the delivery of the corporate plan, transformation strategy, customer strategy and people strategy.</p> <p>To support the strategic vision for digital at NFDC and best position it for local government reorganisation.</p>
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Jeremy Heron – Finance and Corporate
Strategic Director(s)	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Transformation (Section 151 Officer)
Officer Contact	<p>Rich Bird Data, Development and Delivery Manager Rich.Bird@nfdc.gov.uk</p>

	<p>Kim Gray ICT Operations Manager Kim.Gray@nfdc.gov.uk</p> <p>Sponsored by:</p> <p>Alan Bethune Strategic Director Corporate Resources & Transformation Section 151 Officer alan.bethune@nfdc.gov.uk</p> <p>Rebecca Drummond Assistant Director - Transformation Rebecca.drummond@nfdc.gov.uk</p>
--	--

Introduction and background

1. The Digital Strategy 2025 – 2028 has been developed following the adoption of and in support of the Corporate Plan, Transformation Strategy and Customer Strategy. This inward facing strategy enables the implementation of these outwardly focused strategies by setting out focused digital principles and to leverage new modern technologies to support our residents, staff and members in our digital journey.
2. The proposed strategy will run from 2025-2028 with a mindful focus on activities and priorities in line with local government reorganisation (LGR).
3. The digital strategy enables the delivery of the six digital principles:

a. Principle 1 - Customer first, digital by design

Customer needs will be at the heart of the digital services that we deliver using full end to end digital process models.

b. Principle 2 - Data driven

All services will proactively use data to inform decision making and report performance.

c. Principle 3 – Digital transformation

Digital Transformation will deliver modern digital technologies, automate manual processes and enhance our digital culture

d. Principle 4 – Secure by design

Digital services will be secure by design to protect the council's data, systems, people and residents.

e. Principle 5 - Robust and resilient infrastructure

The core foundations of our digital services will be robust and resilient to ensure we are working, and our services can be accessed, in the right place, at the right time and with the right device.

f. Principle 6 – Digital skills for all

Digital skills for all will support our staff and members through learning and development to safely benefit, effectively contribute to and access the councils' digital services.

4. Our digital strategy is mindful that the technology landscape can change quickly in today's modern digital world and to support local government reorganisation (LGR), so it will remain agile in its activities through regular strategic review points and the supportive guidance of the council's governance groups.
5. The proposed approach to digital is consistent with many other organisations, public and private. The development of the strategy considered the best practices currently being adopted across public and private sectors as well as needs and ideas unique to NFDC.

Corporate plan priorities

6. The digital strategy supports delivery of the Future New Forest programme.
7. The digital strategy aligns with the 'Customer and digital services' theme within our Transformation strategy.
8. The digital strategy links closely to our customer strategy with alignment throughout.
9. The digital strategy supports the 'empower' theme within our people strategy including a 'Digital skills for all' programme.

Options appraisal

10. The current digital strategy expires in 2025 and therefore required a refreshed strategy.

Consultation undertaken

11. The digital strategy is a joint delivery by the ICT Leadership team sponsored by the Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Transformation (Section 151 Officer) and Assistant Director - Transformation.
12. Assessment against other public sector strategies was undertaken.
13. Internal consultation with our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) contributed to the strategy content.
14. Internal consultation with the Executive Management Team (EMT) contributed to the strategy content.
15. The strategy was considered and supported by the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel in March 2025.

Financial and resource implications

16. The annual ICT budget and Transformation business case will be funding the activities of this strategy. Transformation for example refers to the digital transformation projects and associated resources.
17. No additional resources are being requested at this time beyond what was included in the original transformation business case. A point in time review of skills and resource needs was completed in February 2025 with confidence in the approach and roles to be recruited. Future resource needs will be agile and proportionate.
18. All proposed resources are still required. Operational and Delivery activities continue to progress with resources being diverted to the highest priorities and a realistic and proportionate approach to timelines, quality and task completion.

Legal implications

19. None arising directly from this report. Applicable digital strategy activities will be appropriately assessed and taken under advisement of the Council's Legal team.

Risk assessment

20. Recruitment of the right skills and in a timely manner remain a challenge across the public sector.

21. The ICT service maintains and regularly reviews its service risk register to feed into the corporate principal risk register. Individual ICT projects maintain a risk log detailing specific tactical risks.
22. The technology landscape often changes at an accelerated pace and our strategy will remain agile to evolving internal and external factors such as LGR. We will prioritise, be open to opportunities and strategically review our direction to realign if needed within the guidance of our governance processes.
23. We will need to prioritise delivery of new digital solutions, whether planned or unplanned. The ICT work programme highlights regular strategic review points to align on strategic priorities and the service follows a demand management process.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

24. Recycling of old ICT equipment is embedded within ICT Operational processes.
25. Digitising processes and reducing manual paper prints contribute to a positive climate and environment.
26. Adoption of cloud-based systems reduces the on premise footprint and usage of power and air conditioning as examples.
27. Through the provision of online self-service options, we facilitate reduced travel to our offices and therefore reduced emissions from vehicles.

Equalities implications

28. The digital strategy includes the 'digital skills for all' programme in partnership with the transformation strategy to promote a workplace where the digital training needs of all our staff and members are inclusive and considered.

Crime and disorder implications

29. None arising directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance implications

30. None arising directly from this report. Changes impacting the collection and use of personal data will be appropriately assessed and taken under advisement of the Council's Information Governance team.

New Forest National Park / Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

31. None identified

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Digital Strategy 2025-2028 v0.5

Background Papers:

None

Digital Strategy

2025-2028

ICT Services

Document publish date: 11/03/2025

Version number: 0.5

Version	Author	Date	Changes made
0.1	Data Development Delivery Manager ICT Operations Manager	23/10/24	Initial draft. Informal feedback.
0.2	Data Development Delivery Manager ICT Operations Manager	05/11/24	Senior Leadership Team (SLT) feedback.
0.3	Data Development Delivery Manager ICT Operations Manager	20/11/24	Consultation with SLT and ICT management team
0.4	Data Development Delivery Manager ICT Operations Manager	02/12/24	Incorporated feedback from SLT, Executive Management Team (EMT), Resources and Transformation Panel.
0.5	Data Development Delivery Manager ICT Operations Manager	11/03/25	Internal consultation. Approved by EMT.

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Where are we now	4
Strategic Planning and Alignment.....	5
Digital Vision and Principles.....	6
Principle 1 - Customer first, digital by design	7
Principle 2 - Data driven	8
Principle 3 - Digital transformation	9
Principle 4 – Secure by design	10
Principle 5 – Robust and resilient infrastructure	11
Principle 6 – Digital skills for all.....	12
Digital Pillars.....	13

Introduction

New Forest District Council (NFDC) has a Corporate Plan for 2024 to 2028 to meet our customer needs, protect finances and embed sustainability.

Our Digital Strategy covering 2025 to 2028 is an internal document intended to guide the organisation through digital decision making and best practice with commitments and actions that support delivery of the more outward facing customer and transformation strategies.

Our strategy will be delivered with 6 digital principles at its core:

- 1. Customer first, digital by design**
- 2. Data driven**
- 3. Digital transformation**
- 4. Secure by design**
- 5. Robust and resilient infrastructure**
- 6. Digital skills for all**

Previous digital strategies have delivered the foundations of our technology stack today including the use of a leading cloud server platform, reliable end user devices with remote access and the beginnings of cloud-based solutions supporting digital business processes.

Our updated strategy places our customers at the centre of the digital experience, and we are ambitious to embrace further the modern technologies of the future to offer a more immediate, personalised and convenient customer experience.

Customers who are unable to navigate our digital solutions will still be able to contact us in a range of different ways, according to their needs, including by phone and face to face.

Our strategy sets out plans to digitally transform, make better use of data and grow our digital skills together through a collaborative approach with staff, members, partners and other public sector organisations.

We will be realistic with our journey and visionary in our ambitions to meet the needs of a digital council.

Where are we now

The ICT service catalogue today has circa 200 digital services supporting the delivery of council services and providing digital tools to our staff.

The council's digital landscape is one where investment has allowed flexible working from any location through a resilient and accessible server infrastructure, staff have access to a variety of devices to best suit their needs and our software portfolio has seen a reduction in legacy applications with greater use of modern cloud platforms.

We continue to make use of platforms such as Microsoft 365 to support day to day working and reduce manual effort through automation. We are mindful there is more to do in this area alongside the introduction of new back-office systems.

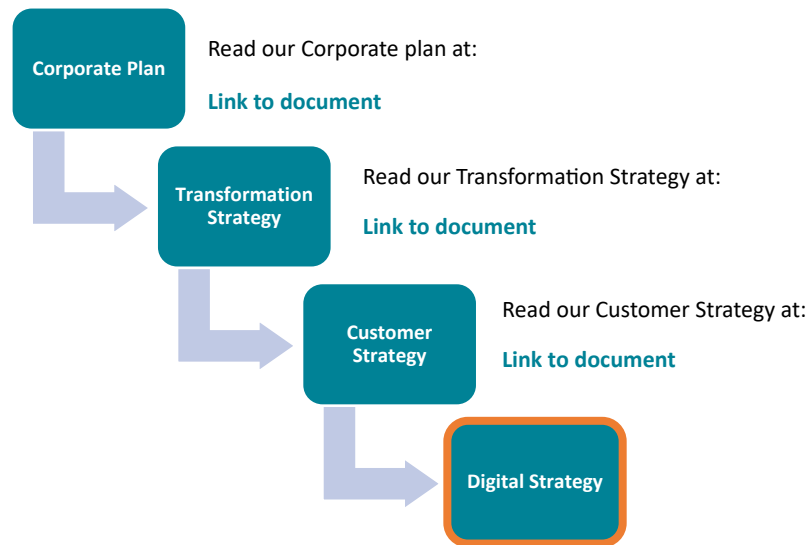
Our ICT Service team skillset has and continues to grow in all areas as we work to keep pace with an ever-changing digital world. This is equally true for our staff and members, where the adoption of digital systems has accelerated, and we must be mindful of this change impact and the need for further support to maximise the use of technology.

We have supportive ICT processes in place for, but not limited to, demand management, technical assurance, change management, project delivery, service delivery and cyber security which continues to be an ever-growing threat with increased and more sophisticated attacks on local government organisations a reality rather than a possibility.

We continue to balance our resources and plan appropriately to support and deliver growth in our digital maturity across the organisation.

With our new strategy in place, we are well placed to embark on a journey of digital transformation whilst fortifying the foundations put in place by previous strategies.

Strategic Planning and Alignment



Our digital strategy aligns with our overarching corporate plan and fits with the 'Customer and digital services' theme within our Transformation strategy.

Our digital strategy links closely to our customer strategy by supporting the growing demand from our customers for access to digital services by:

- Focusing on customer needs and outcomes when redesigning services.
- Supporting customers to self-help through online services.
- Updating systems and processes to keep pace with advancing digital technologies.
- Improving customer experience by integrating data and systems.
- Making it easier for customers to find services and connect at their convenience.

Our digital strategy supports the 'empower' theme within our people strategy including a 'Digital skills for all' programme that aims to support digital learning and development for all staff and members.

Collaboration and enablement are part of our digital strategy to support the delivery of departmental service plans so all our services can realise the benefits that modern technology can bring.

Digital Vision and Principles

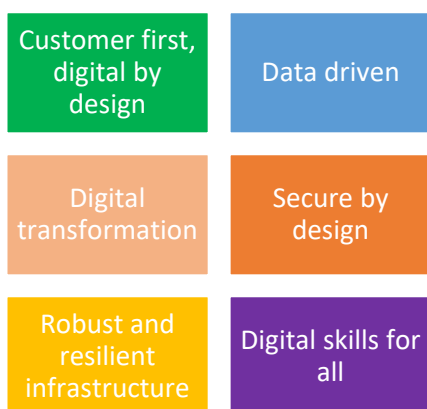
Our 6 digital principles are the foundation of our digital strategy, all contributing to the overall digital vision to be a digital council that embraces the opportunities of technology and modern digital service design to empower our staff with best-in-class digital tools to efficiently deliver an effective 'customer first' experience for its residents.

Our principles will drive how digital technology is adopted and used across the council with clear alignment to our corporate plan and transformation strategy.

Our Digital Vision:

"to be a digital council that embraces the opportunities of technology and modern digital service design to empower our staff with best in class digital tools to efficiently deliver an effective 'customer first' experience for its residents"

The 6 Digital Principles



Principle 1 - Customer first, digital by design



Customer needs will be at the heart of the digital services that we design and deliver.

Our digital services will be inclusive to the needs of all our customers including residents, staff, members, partners and local businesses.

Through a 'customer first, digital by design' approach the council can offer services that are accessible twenty-four hours a day, allowing our customers to apply for, pay for, view and report at times that are convenient to them.

By working in partnership with service areas, ICT can be an enabler of digital across the council, helping individual teams realise their digital benefits.

We will:

- design services to improve customer experiences, make better use of technology and reduce manual effort through automation
- enable customers to interact and access services digitally at a time that suits them
- implement a customer relationship management system that keeps customers informed on progress and instils confidence in service delivery
- increase the number of services available online

- ensure customers will still be able to contact us in a range of different ways alongside digital, according to their needs, including by phone and face to face.
- be a strategic enabler for services across the council to enable them to realise their digital goals through collaborative and two-way partnership working
- build a 'Customer First, Digital by Design' mindset and shared understanding in the council.



How will this be measured:

- Resident satisfaction with Council services
- effectiveness of collaboration between ICT and service areas identified through regular feedback and senior leadership participation
- reduction in use of paper to digital methods for high transactions
- increase in online payment options for high transactions
- increase online service and self-service options for high customer contact and key transactions

"Customer needs will be at the heart of the digital services that we deliver using full end to end digital process models."

Principle 2 - Data driven



All services will proactively use data to inform decision making and report performance.

The council securely stores various datasets to support the services it delivers. Typically, data is based on a person, a place or a thing.

Through a council wide Data Framework that incorporates the best practice of Master Data Management (MDM), data can be extracted, transformed, stored and made available to those who need it and are permitted to access it.

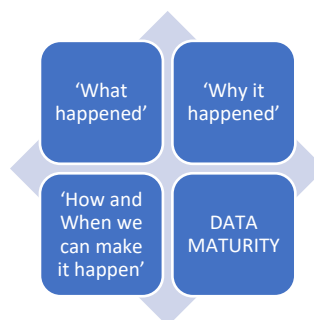
We will hold a central and accurate record relating to each of our customers and assets which can be relied on for informed decision making.

With accurate data, council staff will be able to see a '360 view' of our customers and assets providing an integrated and consolidated view of data from multiple systems.

The introduction of a Digital Data Platform will provide the technical foundations for storing data held by the council. The platform will store the council's data securely, will provide access to those who need it and facilitate visually rich reports and dashboards for analysis and business intelligence.

As the council's data maturity position evolves, it will describe 'What

happened', diagnose 'Why it happened' and in time predict 'How and When we can make it happen'.



We will:

- deliver a Data Framework to be adopted across the council that outlines our approach to data including policies, processes and systems
- deliver a Digital Data Platform based on modern technology for the secure storage of council data and to act as a data warehouse
- make use of digital tools such as Power BI to visualise, analyse and report on data
- develop the skills of our staff to use data in the most effective way

How will this be measured:

- adoption of a council wide Data Framework
- real world examples of where data analysis has helped inform and improve service delivery
- the number of datasets available online

"The Data Framework and Digital Data Platform will ensure our data is Manageable, Accurate, Searchable and Compliant"

Principle 3 - Digital transformation



Digital Transformation will introduce positive change through the design of modern and innovative digital services.

Digital Transformation (DT) will create new or modify existing business processes, culture, and deliver exceptional customer experiences.

The ICT work programme will deliver digital change through various projects that support our wider Transformation programme and put our customers at the forefront of service design.

Supportive governance and best practice project delivery including detailed planning, risk management, financial management and resource planning will look to mitigate risks of not delivering on time and on budget.

Our technical enterprise architecture will bring together different technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and automation to standardise and apply common design patterns to increase efficiency and release capacity across the council.

“Digital Transformation will deliver modern digital technologies, automate manual processes and enhance our digital culture”

We will:

- standardise and apply common design patterns and platforms across the council to release capacity and deliver efficiency benefits
- maximise the use of new technology and keep our software up to date
- maximise the use of M365 technology
- explore the safe, compliant and ethical use of AI
- explore the use of low code platforms and the benefits of developing in house solutions alongside ‘off the shelf’ products
- build services that are device agnostic, working on all laptop and mobile devices
- enable digital goals to be met through service led design whilst maximising the benefits and expertise of the central ICT team
- benchmark against industry best practice and other local government organisations

How will this be measured:

- percentage of annual ICT work programme delivered on time and on budget
- benefit realisation from ICT investment
- resident satisfaction score with the quality of NFDC digital services
- staff satisfaction score with NFDC ICT services

Principle 4 – Secure by design



Digital services will be secure by design to protect the council's data, systems, people and residents.

All digital services that we offer will be secure by design. This prioritises security from the outset of product design and throughout its lifecycle.

The council will need to take a holistic approach to cyber security prioritising it as a core business requirement rather than a technical feature.

The management of cyber security risk is an organisational wide responsibility, not limited to the ICT service. ICT will provide expert technical advice for the organisation to mitigate or accept.

Security for projects within the ICT work programme will be technically assured throughout its lifecycle and sustained through its transition into live service.

There are obligations that the council must meet in relation to cyber security and information security as well as standards that the council will commit to maintaining. These obligations and standards should be met with a minimal impact on delivering good quality services.

We will:

- design services in line with security best practice ensuring that the council maintains compliance to Public Services Network Code of Connection and DWP Memorandum of Understanding
- affirm the council meets industry standards for security through recognised accreditations like Cyber Essentials
- follow the corporate approach to risk management and align with its appetite to risk
- ensure the council has a robust and fit for purpose cyber security policy and staff awareness plan
- undertake a proactive approach to cyber security event prevention and response management

How will this be measured:

- minimised impact from security incidents
- accreditations and compliance gained year on year
- less vulnerabilities being captured within the internal and external scans
- 100% of staff undertaking the mandatory security and information governance policy training

“The council will need to take a holistic approach to cybersecurity prioritising it as a core business requirement”

Principle 5 – Robust and resilient infrastructure



Digital services will be underpinned by robust and resilient infrastructure.

Delivery of all services is increasingly reliant on ICT systems and connectivity therefore it is essential that the underpinning infrastructure is robust and resilient but also flexible and agile to meet changing business requirements, technology advancements and the ever-changing landscape of cyber security threats.

The technical (servers, networks, end-user devices) and non-technical (operating model, policies, licencing, training, roles & responsibilities) infrastructure must become flexible and responsive to meet the accelerating pace of technology changes being embraced by the council.

The council already makes use of Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) and Platform as a Service (PaaS) via the Microsoft Azure stack, reducing our on-premise server footprint and maximising the benefits of a globally recognised platform.

Service areas will maintain their own business continuity plans to invoke in the event of a disaster affecting digital services.

We will:

- provide secure, robust and reliable systems and support that underpin service delivery
- ensure there are robust ICT disaster recovery and ICT business continuity plans in place for ICT systems
- ensure staff and members have the right end user device for their role
- be a 'cloud first' council, making use of Software as a Service (SaaS), Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) and Platform as a Service (PaaS) platforms where appropriate

How will this be measured:

- the percentage of unscheduled downtime for critical systems will be less than 5%
- regular testing of the disaster recovery plan to ensure its fit for purpose
- reduction in hardware-based incident tickets

“The core foundations of our digital services will be robust and resilient to ensure we are working in the right place, at the right time and with the right device.”

Principle 6 – Digital skills for all



Staff will be supported through learning and development in digital skills to safely benefit from and contribute to the councils digital services.

Through our 'Customer First, Digital by Design' principle, we will be introducing new digital technology for staff, members and residents to make use of.

We know that our residents want to transact digitally with us and have access to services at a time that is convenient to them so the need to keep pace with the ever-changing technology landscape is important to maximise the use of technology and ensure we are realising the benefits that digital business processes can bring.

Cyber threats continue to evolve in the digital age so equipping our staff with the right skills to use technology safely and ensure our data is secure is fundamental.

We must be mindful that our staff have varying levels of digital skills so investment in skills development, training and career progression opportunities will help ensure an appropriately skilled, resilient and positive wellbeing workforce.

We will:

- ensure ICT staff have learning and development objectives that align to the current and future technology landscape
- explore Digital Skills training for all council staff and members
- embed training for staff as part of digital projects to ensure appropriate skill levels at the point of service transition

"Digital Skills for All will be inclusive and mindful of the specific digital learning needs of all staff"

"Digital Skills for All will support our staff through learning and development to safely benefit, effectively contribute to and access the councils' digital services"

How will this be measured:

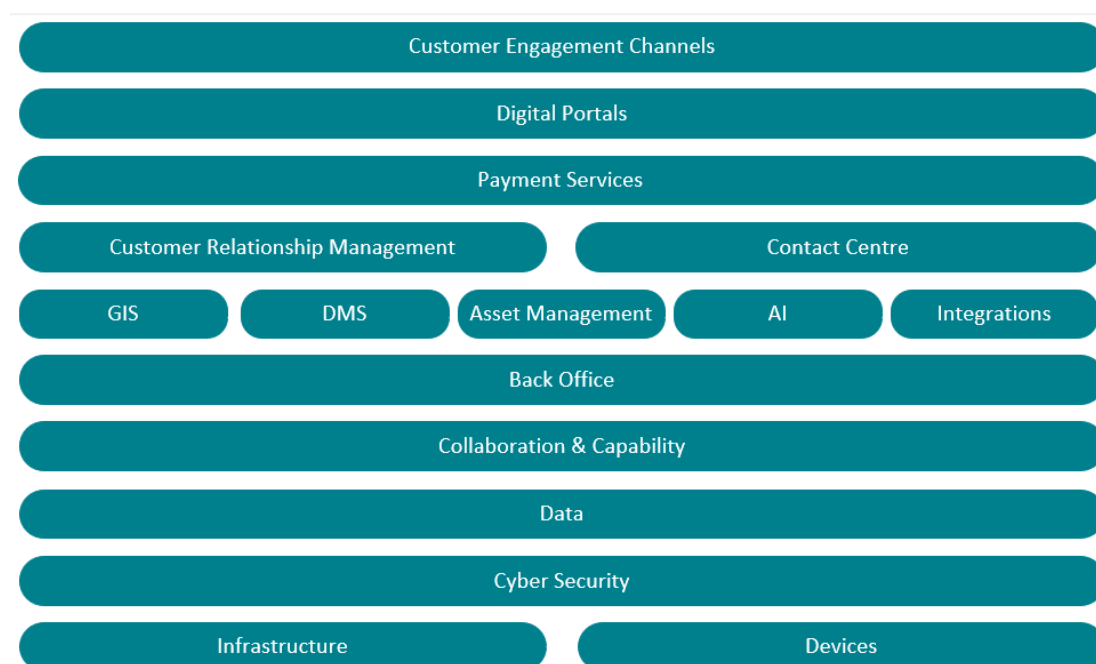
- digital skills maturity assessment of staff before and after the 'Digital Skills for All' programme
- increased efficiency in services through the more efficient use of technology demonstrated by real work examples
- Staff satisfaction score with NFDC ICT services

Digital Pillars

The development of customer first, digital by design services will be facilitated through the provision, operation and enhancement of our digital pillars.

These digital pillars will comprise of many technologies and systems brought together in a consistent and integrated suite of products and services.

The digital pillars will facilitate our enterprise architecture, where our approach is to reuse and maximise value of technology across all council services, providing a consistent customer experience with simplified and automated processes.



“The Digital Pillars will align to and support our organisational design principles with an holistic systems thinking approach and corporate enterprise architecture design”

“The Digital Pillars are a suite of integrated digital products and services providing the technical foundations for our council services.”