

# Digital Strategy – Draft

Foreword – Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, NEDDC Leader and Managing Director

*"It's not enough for government to just 'keep up' with the scale of change happening all around us. We have to understand it, use it, and shape it. And we must grasp every opportunity to drive greater value for money for the taxpayer."* **Secretary of State for SSIT.**

*"A key principle of our Digital Strategy is that it's not about technology, it's about great service design, utilising the tools of the digital age to make it easier, faster, inclusive and a more fulfilling experience when residents and businesses work with us."* **Lee Hickin, Managing Director.**

As an organisation we embrace innovation, creativity, new ideas and new ways of working to ensure our Council succeeds. We challenge functional barriers, encourage, coach, and empower our colleagues to engage, develop talent from within, create an environment where people want to be successful and take ownership and most importantly – be ONE TEAM.

I truly believe that the adoption and development of our ONE TEAM ethos, coupled with our 'collaborative leadership' approach, sets the organisation up to succeed in helping to shape the future of the communities that we serve.

The digital agenda provides an opportunity to grow, to innovate, to make data led decisions through analysis and evaluation. It can provide digital inclusion to our communities, which in turn can support us becoming a smart, well-connected and inclusive district.

Digital supports the efficient and effective running of our business. It can generate efficiencies in ways of working, help innovate and enable us to partner well with others. It can make our services simpler, easier to access and more straightforward to use. Users of our services, regardless of age, gender, race, ability or disability rightly expect a user experience from their council that is fair and comparable to that which they experience in other parts of their lives and we aim to meet this expectation.

***"Customers need ways of getting things done 24/7 in ways that suit them. We recognise the importance of the 'customer journey' with us and recognise that it needs to be as simple, intuitive, accessible and efficient as possible. "***  
**CLlr Nigel Barker Leader of the Council**

We run a large, complex range of services, many of which face significant financial pressures and increasing demand. Navigating this complexity and challenge to deliver our digital ambitions in an

ever-changing world is no small task, and one which this strategy helps us address. Our digital plans over the next five years are carefully designed to achieve the right balance.

We need to keep operating costs down whilst maximising the security, quality, and effectiveness of our services. Improved technology will fundamentally change how we deliver our services, and we will support this with a culture that ensures we use it well. our Council Plan, sets the roadmap for this, ensuring we engage with our residents, our businesses, and our staff. Our ONE TEAM ethos is at the core of everything we do, along with ensuring our decisions are data driven, evaluated and feedback is sought and then acted on

There is more work to do, but we are in a strong position to improve in ways that will make a real difference. As we do this, it is important that we leave no-one behind. Accessing digital services of course requires people to be digitally enabled, and we will work to help tackle digital exclusion in our communities whilst respecting individual choice over how customers and residents choose to access council services.

We will seek to support digital equity by providing our residents with more effective digital options, as well as supporting those who struggle to access digital services and still want to contact us in other ways.

**Cllr Nigel Barker, Leader of the Council and Lee Hickin, Managing Director**

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## Introduction

Digital transformation is a fundamental reality for local government today.

Our digital strategy is essentially a roadmap of how we will use digital technologies to support the ambitions of our council plan making North East Derbyshire a great place to live, work, access public services and care for the environment

This strategy will update and evolve as the changing world around us does. We set out a five-year plan to improve how we serve our residents and businesses in a digital world, not just for now, but also for the future.

As we learn from feedback and evidence we gather, we will adapt, using the action plan that forms part of this strategy to monitor our achievement and adapt to changes.

Digital technology underpins practically all elements of council operations. It helps colleagues to work efficiently and focus their efforts on the practical things our residents need. It supports access to services and provides the systems that capture the information we need to understand how we are doing and how we can improve.

In recent years we have invested significantly in our technology, developing an enterprise-level Microsoft 365 environment. This has already begun to improve our technological foundations, and it is on this base that our next phase will be built. This strategy sets this continuing digital journey out.

***"Our ethos and ONE TEAM culture means we are agile and can look inwards at what we do. We are confident to self-critique our processes together, so we follow best practice.***

***We remain innovative and always open to change, we balance risks with innovation, with our goal to be well equipped, capable and forward thinking to provide outstanding services now, and in the future." Lee Hickin, Managing Director***

## Where we are now -

- Over 50% of transactions with us are digital
- 14,000 residents (out of 50,000 homes) in the district signed up to receive our email news bulletins
- Collectively over 22,000 people follow us on our social media channels
- Our website has 750,000 interactions each year
- Accessibility ratings of over 90% on our website
- 54,000 calls answered annually
- Answered 11,000 emails annually
- 7,700 online forms completed annually
- Manual based transactions are common place across the organisation
- Digital working is still being embedded
- Culture change is still needed to embrace the digital revolution
- There are skills and knowledge gaps across the council in digital expertise
- Progression with speed is a barrier due to back office complexities and security restrictions
- Staff survey perceptions (snapshot) RS add detail
- Residents survey perceptions (snapshot) RS add detail

## Current Strengths

1. **Comprehensive Vision and Goals:** Our strategy outlines a clear vision for digital transformation, aiming to enhance service delivery, boost efficiency, and engage citizens effectively
2. **Action Plan:** The inclusion of a detailed action plan with specific goals, timelines, and measures is commendable
3. **Focus on Digital Inclusion:** Addressing the digital divide and promoting digital literacy is a strong point
4. **User-Centric Design:** Emphasizing the importance of user experience and accessibility in service design is crucial

## Our Digital Vision:

Our vision is simple, to embrace digital transformation to provide better services and outcomes for the residents and businesses of North East Derbyshire.

### Our approach to digital improvement

#### **Prioritising customer needs**

Service improvement will focus on meeting the needs of our residents and businesses, particularly those who are most vulnerable. By using research and data to better understand this in our district we will use this to develop services and ways of working to meet those needs.

Our services will be accessible to all and will be working to improve digital inclusion. Services will be simple, intuitive and support those who aren't online to be digitally enabled.

#### **Creativity and Innovation**

Embracing new ways of delivering improvements to our services, backed up by research, data and feedback. We will invest in reducing manual based tasks and paperwork, utilising AI and embracing new technologies, enabling quick, data driven decision making.

#### **Driven by data**

The data we collect about our residents, businesses and staff will support every aspect of our digital engagement and improvement. We will engage through research and analytics which will guide what we do and when. We will invest in meeting the ambitions in our council plan and ensuring we invest our resources effectively, ensuring successes are measured and continuously improve our services through feedback and evaluation.

#### **Leadership and Culture**

We will become a digital council by facilitating cross functional project teams, sharing goals and working in a more collaborative way. Employees will be given the space to deliver, be empowered to share knowledge and work together rather than in silo's to best support our needs and those of our residents and businesses

## Digital Ambitions

We have a clear understanding of the needs to our residents, local businesses, partners and visitors, both qualitatively and quantitatively, so that we can improve outcomes for and with them.

This understanding helps set our digital ambitions which cover four key areas, underpinning what we want to achieve over the next five years and beyond:

### **Our Aim: Easy, engaging, and inclusive.**

To do this we will:

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.

### **Our Aim: Simple, stable, and secure.**

To do this we will:

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

### **Our Aim: Well-used and used well.**

To do this we will:

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.

### **Our Aim: Collaborate, share, innovate.**

To do this we will:

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

## **Our digital vision and ambitions translate into real digital enhancements:**

### **Real-Time Interactivity**

We will integrate more real-time communication tools, leveraging the power of ai by looking to utilise live chat, government digital service ai resources such as 'minute' for removing the need for human manual tasks to free up capacity to focus on adding quality and value to our digital services.

We will also ensure we are providing more interactive social media campaigns to enhance resident engagement which align to our council plan outputs and what resonate with our residents by analysing the data from our social media channels to provide interesting, engaging and relevant campaigns.

### **Data-Driven Decision Making**

We will incorporate more robust data analytics tools (ai) and provide training for staff to leverage data for informed decision-making

- **Example:** Using AI-driven data analysis to improve decision-making processes, as seen in Camden Council's RentSense system

### **Cybersecurity and Data Privacy**

Our strategy includes comprehensive cybersecurity measures and protocols to protect residents' data

- **Example:** Implementing multi-layered security measures including firewalls, anti-virus software, and regular security audits, similar to the approach taken by Howden Group

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

We will engage stakeholders, including residents, in the transformation process. Regular feedback and consultation will help tailor services to meet their needs

- **Example:** Conducting regular surveys (twice a year) to gather feedback from residents.

### **Agile Implementation**



We will adopt an agile approach to implementation, allowing for iterative processes and continuous improvement

- **Example:** Using agile methodologies to develop and deploy new digital services, as demonstrated by the AI implementation plan at NEDDC

### **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation**

We will establish a framework for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's impact. Key performance indicators (KPIs) will be used to measure success and make necessary adjustments

- **Example:** Regularly reviewing and updating the digital strategy based on performance data and feedback, similar to the approach taken by NEDDC and the Council Plan reporting and metrics framework

### **Digital Literacy Programs**

We will sign post to digital literacy programs and leverage funding and grants where possible to ensure all residents can access and benefit from digital services. Partnerships with local NGOs will help reach vulnerable populations

- **Example:** Sign posting to digital skills workshops in our printed magazine and via online channels, similar to the initiatives run by the Government Digital Service

### **Unified Digital Platform**

We will implement a unified digital platform, utilising cloud services such as OneDrive and ensure our data is of high quality and integrates all services, providing a seamless experience for residents and increased usability and interrogation for internal use and ai data decision making.

## Digital Inclusion

Ensuring that all residents have access to digital resources and can participate fully in a modern digital society is a key part of our digital strategy. Making sure that vulnerable groups are able to participate and learn digital skills are crucial to ensuring the future is accessible for all.

On the face of it, addressing digital exclusion should be easy – you simply need to identify who's excluded, find out why, put measures in place to close the gap and implement the change.

The challenge is that the reasons for exclusion are more complicated than this – and evidence increasingly points to exclusion as a spectrum. Rather than someone being either digitally included or excluded, they might be somewhere in between – and depends on context.

What we do know in the UK, is that the older you are and the poorer you are, the more likely you are to be digitally excluded.

People over the age of 70 are significantly more likely not to use the internet than younger age groups.

Other factors like disability, skills, income, motivation and confidence also play a part, and when someone has more than one of these factors, the likelihood of them being digitally excluded increases even more. (Source: [Four essential steps for delivering digital inclusion projects and initiatives | Local Government Association](#))

### Objectives

We have three clear objectives, where we will work with partners to reduce inequalities in the digital world in North East Derbyshire and help facilitate:

- Access to digital services
- Enhancing digital skills
- Increasing digital participation

### Inclusion Plan

In order to meet our objectives, we have set out a clear plan to understand who are digitally excluded, why that is and how we can help change things for the better. To do this, we will:

- Identify target groups – use resident surveys to identify those who are most likely to be digitally excluded such as older adults, low income households, people with disabilities and those with low digital literacy.
- Understand barriers - Assess the specific barriers these groups face, whether they are related to access, skills, confidence, or motivation.

### Implementation and Support

We will implement our inclusion plan by:

- Identifying digitally excluded groups through resident surveys and regional and local datasets
- Understand their needs from the data and engage with our partner organisations to signpost to digital training programmes to improve digital literacy and skills, tailored to the needs of specific groups of people.

- Provide a support service – support given to our residents to help navigate digital services and build confidence in understanding and undertaking online transactions such as paying council tax online, understanding how to report issues in the district for example. This will be done on an individual basis where customers interact with our staff to help them be more digitally confident.
- Lobby the government and regional EMCCA authority to ensure everyone has access to affordable and reliable internet services and digital devices.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

In a world that is increasingly reliant on technology – having digital literacy, access and connectivity is more important than ever. The 'digital divide' – which separates those who don't have access to digital technologies or the ability to use them from those who do – has real implications not just for individuals, but for communities and the public purse too.

There is an increasing reliance on digital participation in nearly every aspect of our lives – from securing and holding down a job, to accessing education and services. Without widespread digital inclusion our economic success as a country and our personal health, wellbeing and attainment are all at risk of compromise and existing societal inequalities risk being compounded.

When analysing the digital divide there is usually a close correlation between digital exclusion and poverty. 'Digitally literate' people will end up having more and remaining better off financially and socially; where 'digitally impoverished' people will be at an even greater disadvantage.

People who have characteristics that are protected under the Equality Act 2010 (age and disability in particular) are also more likely to be excluded. So, not only is there a strong economic and societal rationale for investing in inclusion – there's a moral compulsion too.

The United Nations has identified internet connectivity as a basic human right and yet, even in developed countries like the UK, there remains a persistent gap between people who can easily access the internet and have the skills to use it – and those that don't or can't.

When considering the business case for inclusion at a local level, it is critical to look at potential benefits in a holistic way and in the medium to long term. Although digitally included people are more likely to use online services, channel shift is only one of the benefits of inclusion and is rarely its core, or most impactful outcome.

## Action Plan

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.

<b>Easy, engaging, and inclusive</b>				
Action/Target	Outcome	Measure	When	Lead
Map current systems used at the council (major systems review)	Log of all our systems, how they interact with each other and if they are fit for purpose or need to change in line with technology advances, improved customer journey, efficiencies in time and money. Leading to an improvement roadmap	<p>Process map of systems in place across the council , what is used by whom and how they integrate together. Record of innovations possible and barriers to delivery.</p> <p><b>What it delivers against the ambition –</b> simplification of back office systems – increase efficiency, easier to use for the customer journey – goal to increase digital take up and streamline resources and efficiencies and understand where we are as a council and where we need to be</p>	Dec 2025	KOG
One gov keep on top of agenda so we can utilise as it gets expanded	Improved customer journey, simplified sign on for council transactions	<p>Customer satisfaction</p> <p><b>What it delivers against the ambition –</b> ease of use for the customer – streamlined datasets, centralise data – higher quality data – enabling use</p>		

		with ai/automation functions. Customer journey improved by simplification – increase digital take up of online transactions		
Measure customer satisfaction with digital services	Understand the needs of our residents, businesses and staff (for those who take part)	Satisfaction survey statistical data and comments qualitative data  <b>What it delivers against the ambition</b> – gives us a greater understanding of our customers wants and needs, helping to shape policies plans an strategies and forward vision. Completes feedback and evaluation loop of best practice	Ongoing each year	Customer Services/Informatio n & Improvement/Com ms
Seek hard to reach groups (non digital residents) identify them and provide digital skills through partners	Engage on digital transformatio n Ensure/improv e compliance with Accessibility regulations	Decreasing percentage of people not accessing digital surveys through our own surveys and census data <b>What it delivers against the ambition</b> – inclusivity, inclusion and accessibility of services to all	Ongoing	Information & Improvement/Com ms
Simplify our digital services for the customer single sign on for all services	residents and businesses can effectively engage with council services when and where it is most	Numbers using services (quantitative) user surveys/feedback integrated into forms (qualitative) <b>What it delivers against the</b>	December 2027	All service managers

	convenient for them (Improve customer journey)	<b>ambition</b> – ease of use for the customer – streamlined datasets, centralise data – higher quality data – enabling use with ai/automation functions. Customer journey improved by simplification – increase digital take up of online transactions		
Providing quick and easy access to information and online services. Simplify our website to access info within 3 clicks	High performing, accessible website with less than 3 clicks to information. AI bots to help guide users	Google analytics, user feedback  <b>What it delivers against the ambition</b> – improves customer journey – increases confidence and ease of use. Increases accessibility and inclusivity to all	December 2027	Comms
Implement a tell us once service	Remove the need for residents to complete several forms to inform separate services of changes in their circumstances and support an improved customer experience.	Feedback on the service, survey data, usage stats <b>What it delivers against the ambition</b> – improves customer journey – increases confidence and ease of use. Increases accessibility and inclusivity to all (customer journey improved through simplicity. Datasets centralised for	December 2028	TBD

		forward progression of automation/ai)		
Keep our systems and digital technology up to date and relevant to their purpose – ensure systems are using latest versions of software that are most appropriate to the functions performed	We will test the services to make sure they are simple and intuitive and follow best practices.	Maintenance of Major systems review data  <b>What it achieves against the ambition</b> – improves customer journey – increases confidence and ease of use. Increases accessibility and inclusivity to all (customer journey improved through simplicity. Datasets centralised for forward progression of automation/ai)	Ongoing	All service managers, ICT/KOG
<b>Simple, stable, and secure</b>				
Simplify and modify our digital estate to make it as secure, resilient, and reliable as practical	Systems being utilised to their full potential	Usage statistics for platforms  <b>What it achieves against the ambition</b> – robust, safe and secure for staff and residents	Ongoing	All SM's
Achieve/maintain compliance with relevant cyber accreditations	Secure and stable ICT infrastructure	Statistical data to evidence security/compliance <b>What it achieves against the ambition</b> – fit for purpose, safe and secure systems	Ongoing throughout	ICT
Back office systems and infrastructure that are resilient against cyber attack	Stability and security of data which is online and resilient to attack	Data breach analysis <b>What it achieves against the ambition</b> – robust, safe and secure for staff and residents	2027	ICT

<b>Well-used and used well</b>				
Improve staff customer journey Undertake surveys, review, consider outcomes	Through training videos on the intranet	New systems have walkthroughs on how to use – collaboration working to ensure systems are fit for purpose  <b>What it achieves against the ambition –</b> increase staff knowledge and confidence in using digital and automation	2026	All service areas
We will make further use of Power apps and AI to integrate channels, applications and workflows to enable seamless end-to end transactions across a wider range of services and maximise the first touch capability of council officers.	AI Roadmap and strategy with AI and automation integrated as part of the workflow	Cost savings, resource efficiencies, improved customer satisfaction/staff skills increased in digital  <b>What it achieves against the ambition –</b> increase staff knowledge, awareness, confidence and ability to innovate to streamline workloads and add quality to outputs	2026	DV/ICT/All service areas
Build a roadmap of digital services in a data-driven priority order, focusing on high-volume services, and highly manual processes	AI strategy delivered goals with automation and ai integrated into the workforce, with reduced manual processes	Measure to be identified <b>What it achieves against the ambition</b> developing high levels of digitally skilled collaboration. Provide robust data and insights to ethically improve	2026	KOG



		effectiveness and efficiency		
Transform the work of our customer service teams and across the council by continuing to utilise technology, ai and automation with one telephone number for those that must speak to an agent	Reduction in manual based interactions, increased automation	Stats to show reduction in calls, emails and webchats <b>What it achieves against the ambition</b> developing high levels of digitally skilled collaboration. Provide robust data and insight	tbd	Customer Services, Revs and Bens
Put payments online for all payable services, making the council cashless for all but the most vulnerable	Online payment systems	Online transaction monitoring <b>What it achieves against the ambition</b> Provides data and insight into our customers to better serve their needs whilst ensuring they have digital skills	2025	Customer services
<b>Collaborate, share, innovate</b>				
invest in reducing manual based tasks and paperwork, and enable quick, data-driven decision making.	Streamlines work processes, innovative and collaborative and upskilled workforce	Increase in outputs/quality measured through management dashboard and staff surveys for confidence in skills surveys <b>what this achieves against the ambition</b> automation and problem-solving, using technology.	2026	DV/all/Information & Improvement
Streamline the number of ways colleagues contact each other – reduce the need for deskphones, utilise microsoft apps and	Single points of contact/clear direction on staff contact and customer contact to	Contact methods reduced <b>What this achieves against the ambition</b> Adopt the right technologies,	2026	All/SMT

teams for calls to simplify and innovate with staff	minimise duplication and increase quality of data and outputs	systems, processes		
We will use research and data to better understand our residents and businesses needs identify new ways of working – align with ai/automation/national approach to digital and ai	use/build and develop products and services to meet simplify and automate	Reduction in number of back office systems, better utilisation of systems through feedback/evaluation surveys <b>What this achieves against the ambition</b> Adopt the right technologies, systems, processes	December 2026	Information & Improvement, Comms, Developers, Project Lead