Customer & Digital Strategy 2022 - 2026

Redditch Borough Council

Date of Issue: June 2022
Review Date: March 2026

Contents

1. Foreword

The council recognises the huge technological changes that have taken place over the last few years and believes that to be successful it must embrace and exploit the opportunities presented by continuing technological advancement.

Through this strategy the council will focus on a 'digital first' approach. Working to identify opportunities to improve access to services, change working practices and improve service delivery by increasing the digital offer to our customers.

The public sector has seen significant changes in recent years, particularly during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. This changed landscape is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, requiring the council to become more adaptable and agile in its approach. Embracing and exploiting new ways of working and delivery of services will require the shape and size of the council to change but the need to provide high levels of service to our citizens will remain. These new challenges will present new opportunities for technology to enable the council to achieve efficiencies whilst keeping pace with citizens' changing needs and expectations.

These opportunities will also provide ways to reduce costs whilst offering more choice of access to our services. This strategy provides a clear direction of travel for a digital future and a clear focus on how we will use technology and digital access to help address some of the challenges faced by our organisation and our communities. This strategy is designed to ensure that our customers' needs are at the heart of our approach to greater digitisation.

2. Management Summary

The government's digital strategy aims to 'provide digital services which are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use digital services will choose to do so, while those who can't are not excluded'. Redditch Borough Council's Customer & Digital Strategy seeks to build upon this aim by providing a framework for the council's future service delivery and engagement with customers using digital technologies. In addition, technology and digital services will underpin and support the delivery of the councils vision and five strategic purposes, as set out in the Council Plan 2020 – 2024:

- Run and Grow a Successful Business
- Finding Somewhere to Live
- Aspiration, Work and Financial Independence
- Living independent, active, and healthy lives
- Communities which are safe, well maintained, and green.

The challenges faced by public services present new opportunities for digital technologies to be used to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and expand access to services.

Digital technology also has the ability to transform the way services are organised and delivered. As such, technology is no longer just a tool for enabling service delivery; it has become a critical service in its own right. If technology is unavailable or not working effectively, the organisation cannot operate or deliver services to its customers. The use of technology has the ability to transform the way services are organised and delivered. It has a fundamental role to play in improving efficiency and reducing costs whilst underpinning the delivery of services that meet our customers digital expectations.

To ensure the council maximises the use of technology for the benefit of the organisation and the wider community, this strategy has been divided into four strategic themes: digital customer, digital workforce, digital leadership, and digital infrastructure. These themes are explored in more detail further in the document.

3. Digital Vision – Digital First

This strategy describes how the council will use modern digital tools and technologies to enable, enhance and fundamentally change how services are delivered to both internal and external customers. Over the last twenty years, the use of technology has become mainstream, particularly the use of home computers, smartphones, and social media. These changes in the way society views technology and the continuing growth in processing power, network connectivity and storage capacity has placed digital technology at the centre of modern life. From business to banking, travel and shopping, all aspects of life now benefit from the use of digital technologies.

Customers and businesses expectations regarding access, ease of use, functionality and availability of services have been raised by the level of digital connectivity offered by large private sector organisations such as Amazon. Technology is already mainstream for younger generations. Older generations are also embracing new ways of doing things, including the delivery of essential services such as health or social care, via digital devices in the home.

As part of this evolving digital landscape, it is clear that our customers expect to be able to access local government services from multiple digital locations, at times and in ways that suit them.

Understanding the changing technological needs and abilities of our communities provides greater opportunities for technology and digital services to enhance and enable greater transformational change across the council. This change will provide a base from which to exploit initiatives such as commercialisation and 5G.

This 'digital revolution' is continuing to transform the way that many people live their lives, from the way we purchase goods and services to the way we communicate with others. It also represents a significant opportunity for local authorities to harness new and emerging technologies to redesign public services in a way which meets the expectations of customers.
This strategy sets out the council's approach to the required changes and sets out a vision for 'digital first' in which the council will:

- Make it as easy as possible for residents and citizens to access our services 24/7/365.
- Work with partners to be a digital borough.
- Encourage as many people as possible to use online services.
- Ensure as many people as possible enjoy digital connectivity.
- Support businesses to exploit digital services to enhance business opportunities and growth.
- Ensure our area is well placed to take advantage of technical advancements e.g., full fibre and 5G.

In order to deliver this vision and affect the changes required to do so, technology needs to be fully embraced by all service areas across the council and harnessed effectively for our customers.

While we must increase our digital offering to keep up with the pace of change in society, we also need to do this in an inclusive way that supports all customers to exploit the additional ways of accessing our services, whilst also ensuring more traditional channels to our customers are maintained.

4. Strategic Themes

Digital Customer

What it means: Supporting our customers to get the services and information they need online by adopting a digital first approach to the provision of services and information. Whilst ensuring we provide choice of access for those who are not digitally connected or skilled. Providing as many services online as possible so our customers can book, order, pay and connect with us using digital channels. Utilising automation and self-serve options where appropriate to enhance customer access.

Digital Workforce

What it means: Ensuring our workforce have the digital systems and skills needed to deliver services to our customers as effectively and efficiently as possible. Working to ensure that our digital service delivery provides positive outcomes for our customers by giving staff access to data and appropriate technology alongside the skills needed to use it effectively. Exploiting and extending the use of collaborative tools to enable more remote and flexible working for employees. Ensuring our geographic data is accurate and available for use across different systems. Exploiting collaborative technical tools in order to support flexible working.

Digital Leadership

What it means: Providing the technology and support required to meet Councillors needs in a modern council. Our Councillors are increasingly working in a more mobile and agile way. To do this effectively they require access to appropriate technology, software, and information. Ensuring we exploit collaborative software applications to enhance the decision making process by using digital technologies to collaborate with partners and the business community. Engaging our customers in the local democratic process can be enhanced by focused use of digital communications, particularly for the younger more technology driven members of our communities.

Digital Infrastructure

What it means: Working to maximise the use of digital infrastructures, including cloud technologies, to enhance customer and business access. Encouraging residents and businesses to access high speed fibre and wireless technologies to deliver growth in the local economy. Also working with technology partners to support the use of high speed, high quality networking and mobile infrastructures. Whilst ensuring our infrastructure can securely process the increased demand placed on it by the expanding use of IoT devices.

5. Strategic Actions

Digital Customer	Digital Workforce
• Provide transactional services and information online in a user friendly and inclusive way that does not exclude any of our residents. • Use digital technologies to offer greater choice of access for our customers. • Develop customer account services on the council's website. • Help customers to access services and information online. • Promote 'Digital First' as the preferred option for people to contact us, whilst continuing to give people a choice. • Expand our use of digital technologies such as AI, chatbots & robotics to improve customer access. • Expand the number of council services available online.	• Ensure access to appropriate digital tools and technologies to support service delivery e.g., mobile devices, data dashboards, software etc. • Support our workforce with the digital skills they need to deliver services more efficiently and effectively, whilst also reducing the use of paper documents. • Create a digitally-enabled workforce that isn't fixed in one location, by increasing the use of remote and mobile technologies. • Ensure our recruitment processes support the recruitment of a digitally skilled workforce. • Exploit geographic information to enhance services where possible. • Ensure data, information and insight is used to improve services.
Digital Leadership	**Digital Infrastructure**
• Ensure Councillors have access to appropriate technology that is fit for purpose and supports modern Councillor development. • Ensure the corporate team promote 'digital first' to the wider organisation. • Utilise digital channels to promote local engagement. • Ensure Councillors have the necessary digital skills to take advantage of new technologies. • Create a culture within the council where customer insight and intelligence is used to develop customer centric services. • Ensure we can contribute to the governments digital ambition to place the UK at the forefront of technological exploitation and development. • Exploit digital technologies to collaborate and work more effectively with partners. • Support technology providers to deliver full fibre and 5G to residents and the local business community.	• Ensure investment in digital infrastructure leads to improved and enhanced customer access & services. • Ensure our digital infrastructure remains fit for purpose in order to allow the council to contribute to the national digital challenge. • Support and contribute to the government's full fibre and 5G network initiatives. • Redevelop the councils website to ensure it is designed to utilise digital technologies. • Exploit opportunities to develop an integrated technical infrastructure with other partner agencies. • Ensure we exploit our previous investment in technology. • Ensure our infrastructure and data are protected from cyber threats. • Make use of cloud technologies where appropriate. • Support residents and businesses to access digital services through the provision of full fibre and wireless networks e.g., 5G

6. Information Security

A vital part of the provision of technical services is ensuring that the council can transact its business in a safe and secure environment, while not inhibiting the development of digital delivery. This requirement is set against the need to adhere to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the fast pace of technological change, greater use of online and digital services by our citizens and the recent surge in the use of collaborative and partnership working technologies due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Against this backdrop, the council will continue to adopt a pragmatic balance of information governance and risk, with emphasis placed on how to enable and support the business. The internal Information Management resources will continue to provide support and guidance to the wider organisation to ensure everyone manages and uses data in the most appropriate and secure way.

7. Data, Information & Insight

The use of data and information to provide customer and service insight should continue to be widely adopted across the council. The exploitation of data should be seen as an iterative process, used to support learning, and understanding prior to making long term business decisions. The valuing of customer insight will require the council to place greater emphasis on customer engagement and the use of information gained through this connection to our communities. The difference between data, information, and insight is briefly explored below:

Data are facts and figures captured in day-to-day activities or by use of customer surveys and questionnaires. Generally, data is used to measure something e.g., customer satisfaction, expenditure, income etc.
Information is data that has been processed in some way in order to provide better understanding. It can help to uncover issues and promote learning.
Insight is gained by analysing data and information to understand what is going on with the particular situation of interest.

Access to data and information is also key to enabling our services to understand and monitor their performance. In order to provide this access data dashboards will continue to be used. The corporate dashboard is an online tool used for the dissemination and integration of data throughout the organisation, as well as for measuring and managing performance. The council will continue to provide a corporate performance dashboard where a variety of datasets and measures will be maintained.

8. Cyber Security

The increasing global threat to the delivery of online services and the growing risk of information being stolen, requires the organisation to allocate a proportional amount of its resources to the protection of its data assets. As the threats change we need an environment that remains secure for staff, members, and customers to operate within.

To prove the integrity of the security level, regular testing, auditing, and adherence to the PSN (Public Services Network) standards will be maintained. The need to protect the valuable data assets held by the council is an ongoing and constant requirement. The threat of data loss, hacking or cyber ransom attacks are ever present. Extensive schedules of security patching, software updates and threat detection systems and software form a major part of the work undertaken by the ICT service to protect the technical and data infrastructure.

The use of the current hybrid of on premise and cloud infrastructure also affords the organisation some resilience in relation to the complete loss of systems and data in the event of a major cyber incident.

9. Cloud Technologies

Cloud computing is the delivery of on-demand computing services, from applications to storage and processing power, typically using the internet to provide access.

Cloud computing services cover a vast range of options, from storage, networking, and processing power to artificial intelligence and software applications.

Cloud computing can be broken down into three models:

- Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) refers to rented physical or virtual servers, storage, and networking.
- Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) refers to development tools and software used to build applications on the infrastructure, including middleware, database management and operating systems.
- Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) refers to the delivery of applications-as-a-service and is the most widely used version of cloud computing. The end user accesses the service via a web browser or app.

Many of the large system and software suppliers now provide SaaS requiring organisations to use the internet to access their software. This model of cloud technology is already used by the council and over time, as more systems are replaced, it will become more extensive. The other models of cloud computing will also be explored by the council to assess their suitability for use.

10. The Future

Having made significant investment in ICT infrastructure, it is vital that further progress is made in exploiting these technologies to help deliver transformational change throughout the council. However, we cannot be complacent, more will need to be done in the future, including:

- Continuing to exploit our investment in technology to facilitate different ways of working.
- Identifying opportunities to integrate our infrastructure with partner agencies.
- Identifying and realising savings.
- Exploiting new technologies in order to automate as many processes as possible to release resources to undertake value work for our customers e.g., automation, blockchain, robotics.
- Continuing to use a hybrid infrastructure that exploits cloud computing as much as possible.
- Training and empowering staff to use technology to deliver improved service with greater efficiency.
- Allocating future funding to continue to develop our technical estate and resources.
- Using technology to help to realise different service operating models.
- Using customer information and data insight to understand our communities in order to provide services that meet their needs.

11. Summary

The successful delivery of this strategy will depend on it being integrated with other corporate policies and strategies in order to align them with the digital ambitions of the council. It will require the commitment and engagement of all employees, managers, and members to ensure its delivery.

Whilst all parts of the strategy are important, the order and timescales for moving them forward will vary depending on the needs of the business, and the impact of other changes, both internal and external, on the council. The ICT Service team will help to deliver, support, and drive the use of technology and digital services across the organisation. Working collaboratively with services to bring about the best outcomes for the organisation and for our customers. It is essential that the use of digital be designed with the customer at its heart in order to provide services that meet the needs of our communities.

Version Control

Title	Customer & Digital Strategy
Description	Corporate Technology and Customer Strategy
Created By	Head of Transformation, OD & Digital Services
Date Created	2021
Maintained By	Head of Transformation, OD & Digital Services, ICT Transformation Manager
Next Review Date	March 2026

Version Number	Modified By	Modifications Made	Date Modified	Status
V.1.0	D.Poole	Reference to IoT security. Resilience of cloud technologies.	05/03/2021	Approved