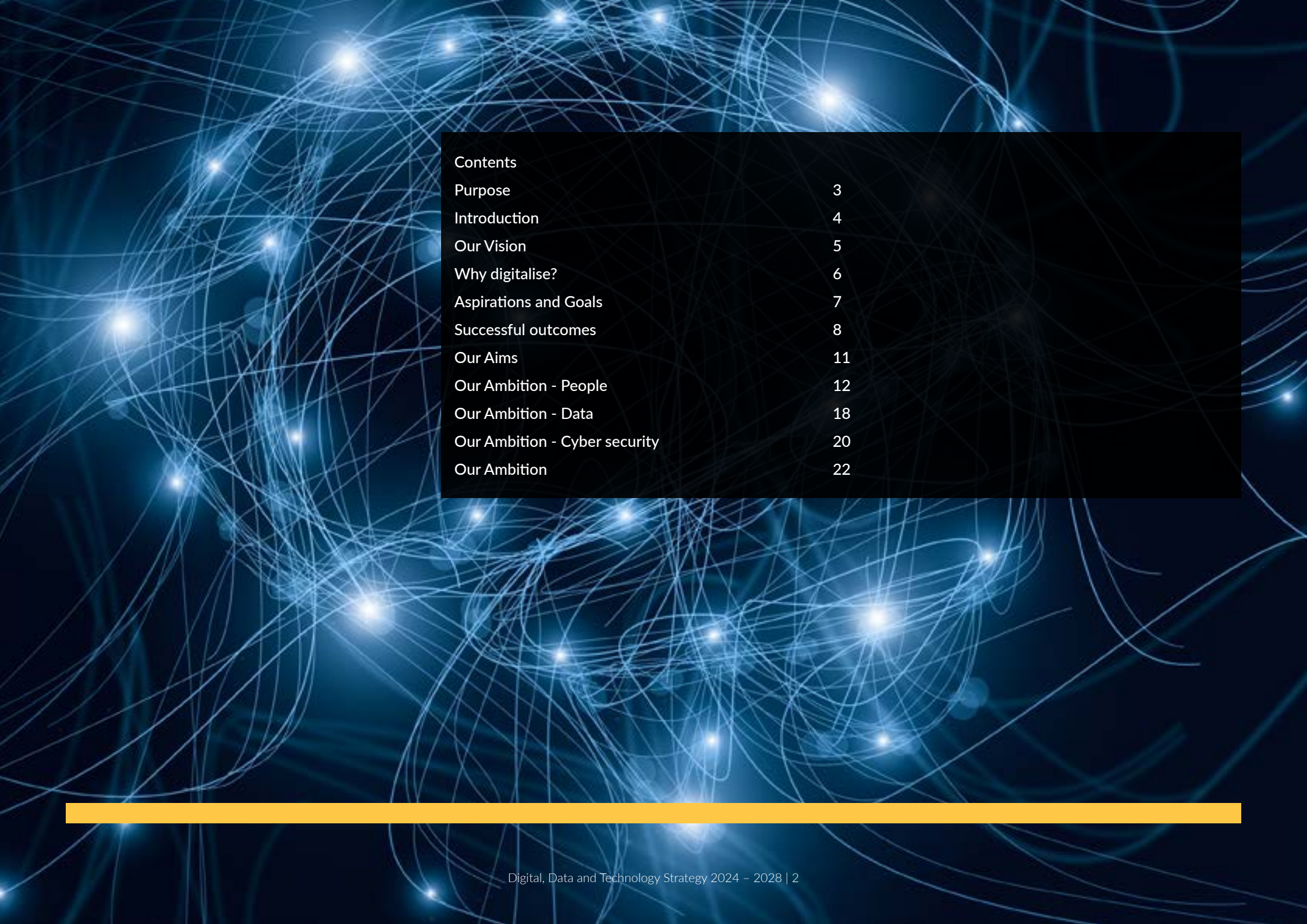


Digital, Data and Technology Strategy

2024 - 2028



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Purpose

The Herefordshire Council Digital, Data and Technology Strategy has been established in order to provide guidelines that will support our ambition to digitalise and become a digital-first organisation. It contains the principles that will enable Herefordshire Council to deliver benefits by exploring new ways of working, increasing service accessibility, and improving customer service. This strategy outlines how Herefordshire Council will modernise our services with the introduction and development of new digital capabilities which will make the most of our data and technology to deliver improvements for our customers and our staff.

Introduction

This Strategy is part of a wider framework that supports the delivery of our overarching County Plan 2024-28. It shares important links with our Customer Services Strategy, Workforce Strategy, Finance Strategy and is a key enabler for our whole Council Thrive Transformation plan. It aims to streamline and improve our core technology platforms that provide the building blocks for our vision to enable our staff to have the ability to access our ICT Systems, from any device and any location, while ensuring that these solutions are well integrated, highly available and remain protected by layered security.

As technology and the digital world is always evolving, it's key that the Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy and the associated operational technical road map are reviewed and updated annually. As part of the flexibility of this review period, we may carry out several annual reviews. This will allow any new technologies and digital initiatives to be included and enable us to adapt plans quickly to support changes or pressures in the council's budget and financial plans while being in sync with the annual Service Level Agreement (SLA) review we have with our ICT partner, Hoople Ltd.

While this strategy sets a high-level framework for where we are going and how we will move forward over the next four years, it is underpinned by an operational technical road map which sets out at a high level the mechanisms and components of how we aim to deliver our vision.



Our Vision

To become a digital-first organisation, that drives innovation through technology. By using data effectively, we improve our service delivery and provide customers with the right information at the right time.

Why digitalise?

The modern digital world has changed the way we go on with our everyday life, usual routines and practices. Whether we're doing some retail therapy, ordering a pizza, booking a cinema ticket or looking for a new car, it's now widely expected that we can do this easily and intuitively online from any digital device. If we want to find information, request services or report problems quickly, easily and at our convenience, wherever we are and whatever the date or time, an always-on approach to goods and services is the norm.

We need our services to meet these expectations while making sure it can be used by as many people as possible, including those with impairments to their vision, hearing, mobility, thinking and understanding. As a council, we already offer online access and automated services in a number of areas, but we need to do more. We will design our digital services around the needs of customers so they will be accessible and appealing, encouraging those who can to use them so we can support a shift away from the traditional, more expensive contact methods such as telephone and face-to-face contact.

We recognise that not every citizen will be able to use digital services so we will always ensure that there is an accessible route for them to interact with us. Non-digital channels such as telephony and face-to-face will continue to be provided and improved to ensure everyone has equal access to council services. With more of the high-volume, low-value contacts being completed digitally at our customers' convenience, this will enable our staff to focus our face-to-face and phone-handling efforts on the people who need them most.

Aspirations and Goals



Aspiration

DIGITAL FOR ALL

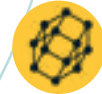
Goal

Everyone can benefit from the council's digital transformation including customers, residents, businesses, rural communities and community sectors



ONE DIGITAL

The strategy and solutions will cut across services and communities, ensuring joined-up working, driving efficiencies and improving customer experience.



DIGITAL BY DESIGN

We will design services to be as efficient as possible to improve the customer experience. Services will be designed to encourage customers to choose the digital option first, but not to exclude those who do not.



DIGITALLY INNOVATIVE

We will use digital tools to collaborate, influence culture and communicate to become a better 'one organisation' and we will be innovative, adopting opportunity



SAFE DIGITAL

Security and resilience will be at the core of all our digital developments. The safety of customers' personal information and data will be paramount.



TRANSPARENT DIGITAL

We will develop and adhere to a set of ethical principles for the use of digital technology. We will use digital technology to make the council, its decision-making and the information it holds more accessible for all.



INNOVATIVE DIGITAL

We will embrace new technologies, testing our ideas and adopting an agile approach to service delivery. Innovation will be continuously informed by customer feedback.



DIGITAL FOUNDATIONS

We will ensure that we have the technology, governance, delivery mechanism, leadership, skills, and culture to deliver against the strategy.



DATA IS KEY

Our data is a valuable and key organisational asset. Understanding data, its power and application can enrich and empower everyone to make informed, data-driven decisions across our organisation, from the front line to our strategic leaders



What successful outcomes look like for Herefordshire Council by 2028?

A modern council that will

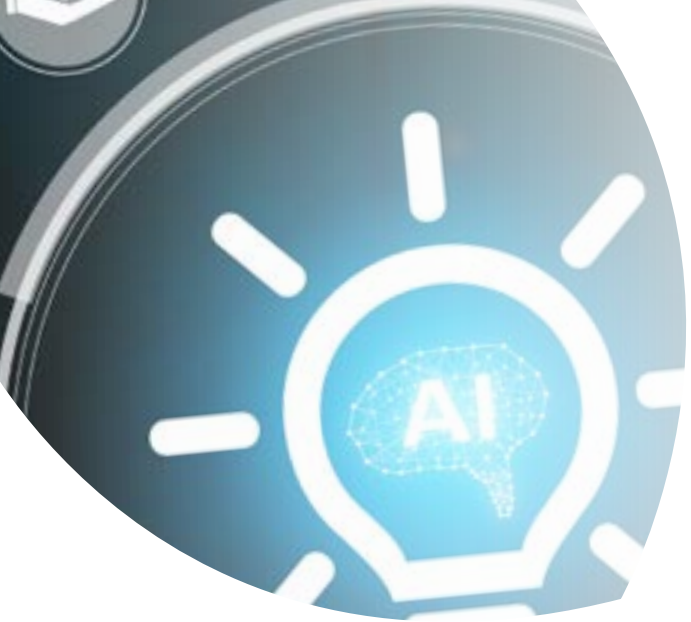
- Use the latest digital and technical capabilities to produce improved outcomes alongside a better customer experience and offers its communities 24/7 access to certain services.
- Will be an advocate and an early adopter of the latest technology and products, with the latest versions of software running on modern platforms to serve our citizens and communities.
- Result in a reduction in telephone contact due to improved digitalised services and on the occasions when a failure needs to be reported, most will opt to use one of our digital channels instead.
- Host data in a modernised manner (on Cloud).
- Achieve savings through digitalisation and on the renewal and reduction of ICT contracts.
- Be a proactive communicator who will fully utilise opportunities to update our residents through instant messaging alongside traditional digital channels such as emails and our social media platforms.
- Provide efficiencies in both front and back office process by utilising AI.
- Use the data held to make accurate and up-to-date decision making to improve how we commission and deliver services to our community.
- Drive efficiencies and public service transformation through the innovative use of data.



The potential role of AI

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is the science of making machines that can think like humans. It can do things that are considered “smart.” AI technology can process large amounts of data in ways humans cannot.

The Council will establish clear ethical guidelines for the responsible use of AI, ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability. No introduction of AI will commence without ethical considerations, data privacy concerns, and the need for the ongoing upskilling our workforce. We know that successful implementation is reliant on a careful balance between embracing innovation and addressing the associated risks and considerations.



Automation of Routine Tasks: We will explore the possibilities of where AI could handle routine administrative tasks and provide efficiencies in both front and back- office processes. This will then enable council staff to focus on more complex and value-added responsibilities.

Chatbots for Citizen Queries: Introduce AI-powered chatbots on our replacement website and telephony systems to provide instant responses to citizen queries, improving overall customer service.

Advanced Analytics: We aim to leverage AI for advanced data analytics, enabling us to make informed decisions based on real-time insights.

Predictive Modelling: Asses the feasibility of using AI algorithms to help predict trends and patterns. This will help us undertake better resource allocation and policy planning.

IoT Integration: Use AI integration with the Internet of Things (IoT) devices, facilitating the development of smart city initiatives for efficient traffic management, waste disposal, and energy consumption.



Our Aims



People

- Customers
- Wellbeing
- Our staff



Data



Cyber security



Investment in technology

Our Ambition - People

Improved Digital Services for our Customers



We will modernise how we interact with our customers and improve our channels of contact to add more value to the customer experience. The aim of this enriched experience is, where possible, to provide quick answers to our customers' queries and allow them to make their requests 24/7 so they are the main beneficiaries of the implementation of our digital vision. We will embrace new technologies, test ideas and develop a culture of innovation to improve services and deliver value for money.

How we will achieve our ambition?

By delivering a re-designed corporate website which makes it easy for customers to find information and access council services. By reviewing and enhancing our existing online services, we will provide a wider range of ways to access services digitally. These should meet different customer needs and preferences, using any digital device including options with maximum accessibility for disabled citizens to ensure compliance with the principles of WCAG2.2 Level AA. (The Government Digital Service's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

A new website with a modern look and feel will be easier to navigate and find resources and offer updated payment options. It will provide access to more online services and requests to save a customer's time and allow requests to be made 24/7 and avoid the need to request it after waiting in a telephone queue. We will introduce the latest online AI tools (such as bots and chat facilities) in order to signpost and answer queries our customer may have in a swift manner.

We will continue to modernise our telephony services so there are better options available and fewer numbers to navigate through to contact the council for those citizens that cannot or do not wish to use a digital contact route.

Our Ambition - People

Wellbeing



Having made strong progress with the success story of Fastershire improving connectivity in the region, this great work is now being extended in the delivery of Project Gigabit. Combined with the installation of 5G masts across Herefordshire, we know there is more to be done to allow us to maximise the opportunities that better broadband and mobile phone coverage gives our customers - particularly in line with their wellbeing.

How we will achieve our ambition?

Using modern technology to provide better care for our ever-increasing elderly community by moving from our current 'react and respond' telecare system to one that embraces the new digital world and can prevent and predict when a citizen requires help and intervention from a family member or a carer.

Our new digital offerings will aid in looking after our community when living independently, or during hospital aftercare, or those who are at high risk of falls or might be at high risk of becoming lost when they are out and about. The improved broadband and mobile phone coverage would allow for such technology to be implemented that would passively monitor changes in someone's daily routine to help identify: whether the person is okay or not; whether there are significant changes that suggest that their health could be deteriorating, checking that their environment is unsafe or whether something has gone wrong that requires immediate attention.

Our Ambition - People

Improved digital services for our staff



The council's vision is for our staff to have the ability to access our ICT systems, from any device and any location in order for them to carry out their role. It's key that we provide them with the right digital tools to enable them to fulfil their role with ease. This means providing them with the right ICT kit to allow them to carry out their roles effectively, revisiting our existing platforms and practices to ensure we have the most suitable systems and integrations in place and improve and replace these as needed.

How we will achieve our ambition?

By engaging with our workforce we can provide them with digital tools that are fit for their job roles and reduce process duplication.

The introduction of a Digital Factory to assess and implement the use of modern digital tools such as AI to review and streamline our back-office processes and improve our processes. This will reduce duplication and provide efficiencies, savings and ultimately deliver a better service to our communities.

To ensure our staff are connected, informed, supported, and engaged in an effective and proactive way which empowers them to conduct business and obtain information when and how they need it. By updating the look, feel, and capabilities of our intranet, we can provide a platform that with technological advances will give a positive and improved user experience. The introduction of a new modern and mobile-first intranet site will allow all news and resources to be accessible by all our staff, including those that are none-desk-based.

Moving our documents and files into the MS cloud to allow secure access to our staff from anywhere and enhances collaboration opportunities /features to share with fellow council colleagues or external partners. By migrating our data content into SharePoint Online, it will also improve resilience and retention management alongside reducing our on-premise storage requirements.

Our Ambition - Data

Data

The data we hold will be safe, secure and private (where appropriate) and of good quality so that we can make better decisions, handle and forecast customer demand and improve collaborative working. Data must be protected where it is personal or sensitive and the council must use it only for the purposes stated at collection, but it can be a powerful tool if it is combined, mined and presented in a way which engages relevant people and to allow council performance to be assessed.

How we will achieve our ambition?

We will implement the technology required to hold data centrally (e.g. Data Lakes) and ensure data is consistent, secure and accurate across the council. This data can identify and help us forecast trends to create better services for our customers and is key to understanding patterns of service demand by time or locality might enable a better response or reveal need for further planning. Using the data we hold will be pivotal in allowing us to use AI to update residents with ease on issues such as local flooding and bin collections.

Currently the council data repositories are aligned to services and held individually. Data that is compelling, comprehensive and highly usable can provide new perspectives and an enhanced appreciation of needs. Especially if it's combined with partner data (such as the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Shared Care Record) or to provide support in areas such as violence prevention and mental health.

Using our improved digital channels we will empower our residents to have access to the relevant data so they can be signposted or find the information they are looking for 24/7 so avoiding the need to contact the council. Digital services will be monitored to assess the user experience and levels of engagement. We will use the data that we gather to make continual improvements and to design the services around user needs.

To equip our staff to be competent and confident in gathering, safely using and handling data to sustainably improve services and ensure great outcomes are being achieved.

Ensure all projects to replace or remove ICT systems include activity to decommission legacy product(s) and safely migrate, delete or archive any legitimately required data. Once the retention period (according to the retention policies of the council) has expired, data will be securely disposed of.

Our Ambition - Cyber security

Cyber security

There is a high and increasing threat to cyber-security, requiring investment in security and privacy measures to protect data and the services we provide. We will continue to use the latest technology for device security and management.

How we will achieve our ambition?

This DDaT strategy and the operational technology roadmap supports this commitment by making sure that all new digital services have security built in by design. Furthermore, by moving to new digital systems and approaches we mitigate against the risks posed by old technology and legacy systems. By adopting a cloud-first policy and using SaaS (software as a service) products, we are then utilising the built-in security these models provide alongside the benefits of the manufacturer's multi-million-pound investment in securing our data and their products.

Our Ambition

Fully utilise our investment in Technology

Herefordshire Council has embarked on a digital transformation journey to redefine how service delivery will be achieved through the use of digital technology.

How we will achieve our ambition?

We will invest in technology needed to achieve our DDaT vision. Upgrading our digital infrastructure and systems such as Microsoft 365 and our Social Care systems (Mosaic and Civica) are central to supporting us all to work more efficiently and effectively, and in turn transform our services for local residents and businesses. We will review our current systems and assess whether it's prudent to upgrade and modernise current ones or to replace them completely to realise financial and resource savings.

By incorporating Microsoft 365 (M365) into the council in 2023, we have significantly enhanced our technological infrastructure. This strengthened technological foundation will serve as the stronger base that our next phase will be built on over the next four years to facilitate enhanced collaboration within internal teams and foster improved interaction with external partners.

As M365 products evolve and improve regularly, we are committed to positioning ourselves as a leading council in implementing the latest features in safe and sustainable ways. Our goal is to fully leverage these advancements and transform the way we work and business performance. We will maximise optimal value with what's included in our Microsoft subscription costs by using this built-in Microsoft technology in place of other vendors' products therefore saving the need to renew certain ICT contracts to achieve better value for money.



Adopt a cloud*-first approach - use cloud application wherever feasible and economic. This change in our approach will enable many benefits such as a reduction in CO² emissions and decreasing the council's electrical consumption. Furthermore, savings and efficiencies can be made on the maintenance and support of the physical hardware and its replacement costs. This will allow the focus to be on consumption-based subscriptions which will ensure that our technology platforms can be rapidly scaled up or down to ensure that the associated costs directly relate to service demand so we will only pay for services that we use.



Herefordshire Council will adopt technology as standard out of the box. This will reduce efforts and costs required to either adapt or integrate non-standard packages.

As mobile network coverage is expanding across the county, we endeavour to exploit the use of the IoT (Internet of Things) in order to make efficiency savings. We'll create further integrations using Robotic Process Automation (RPA) or Application Programme Interface (API) of digital forms to back-office systems, thereby producing efficiencies.

We will evaluate our current printer estate and printing policies to facilitate a move towards a paperless office.

* (Cloud hosting is the ability to make applications and websites available on the internet using the cloud so they are no longer hosted on the Herefordshire Council network)

