NEWARK & SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

DIGITAL FOR ALL: SEAMLESS, SMART AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES

DIGITAL STRATEG Y
2025-2028

"Empowering communities through connected, customer-first digital innovation"

Contents

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Foreword

Sanjiv Kohli

**Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Resources and
s151 Officer**

The previous Digital Strategy laid a strong foundation, enabling us to connect with our communities, especially during a time of need and we ensured no customer was left behind. Building on this success, we are committed to leveraging the efficiencies that can be made from the use of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, automation, and data. These technologies have the potential to transform our operations, making them more efficient and cost-effective. By automating routine tasks and harnessing data-driven insights, we can make more informed decisions, allocate resources more effectively, and ultimately deliver better outcomes for all.

Cllr Paul Peacock

Leader of the Council

Our residents are at the heart of what we do. Our Digital Strategy is not just about technology; it is about people. We are dedicated to ensuring that every member of our community can benefit from the advancements in digital infrastructure and services. We are committed to bridging the digital divide, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring that our digital initiatives and services are accessible to those with the biggest need. Together, we can build a future where technology empowers our community, drives sustainable development, and enhances the quality of life for everyone in Newark and Sherwood.

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Executive Summary

The previous Digital Strategy successfully connected with communities and ensured no customer was left behind. The new strategy builds on this foundation, emphasising the use of digital technologies, improving the service users' journey, and looks to the future with artificial intelligence, automation, and data to transform operations. The focus is on automating routine tasks, making data-driven decisions, delivering better outcomes for all and ensuring we are prepared for Local Government Reorganisation.

At its core, the strategy is about people, aiming to bridge the digital divide, promote digital literacy, and ensure accessibility. We envisage a future where digital transformation empowers the community, drives sustainable development, and enhances the quality of life for everyone.

The strategy outlines commitments for the next **three** years to:

- Improve service delivery
- Produce strong results with digital, data, and technology (DDaT)
- Strengthen day-to-day operations
- Prepare for local government reorganisation
- Continue with a no customer left behind ethos

Past achievements include:

- Investment in IT infrastructure and digital workforce
- Enhancements in cyber and information security
- System investments that are now resilient
- Professional standards, qualifications, and training

These initiatives have established a solid foundation for the future, enabling our workforce to operate securely from any location and deliver exceptional services to the communities served.
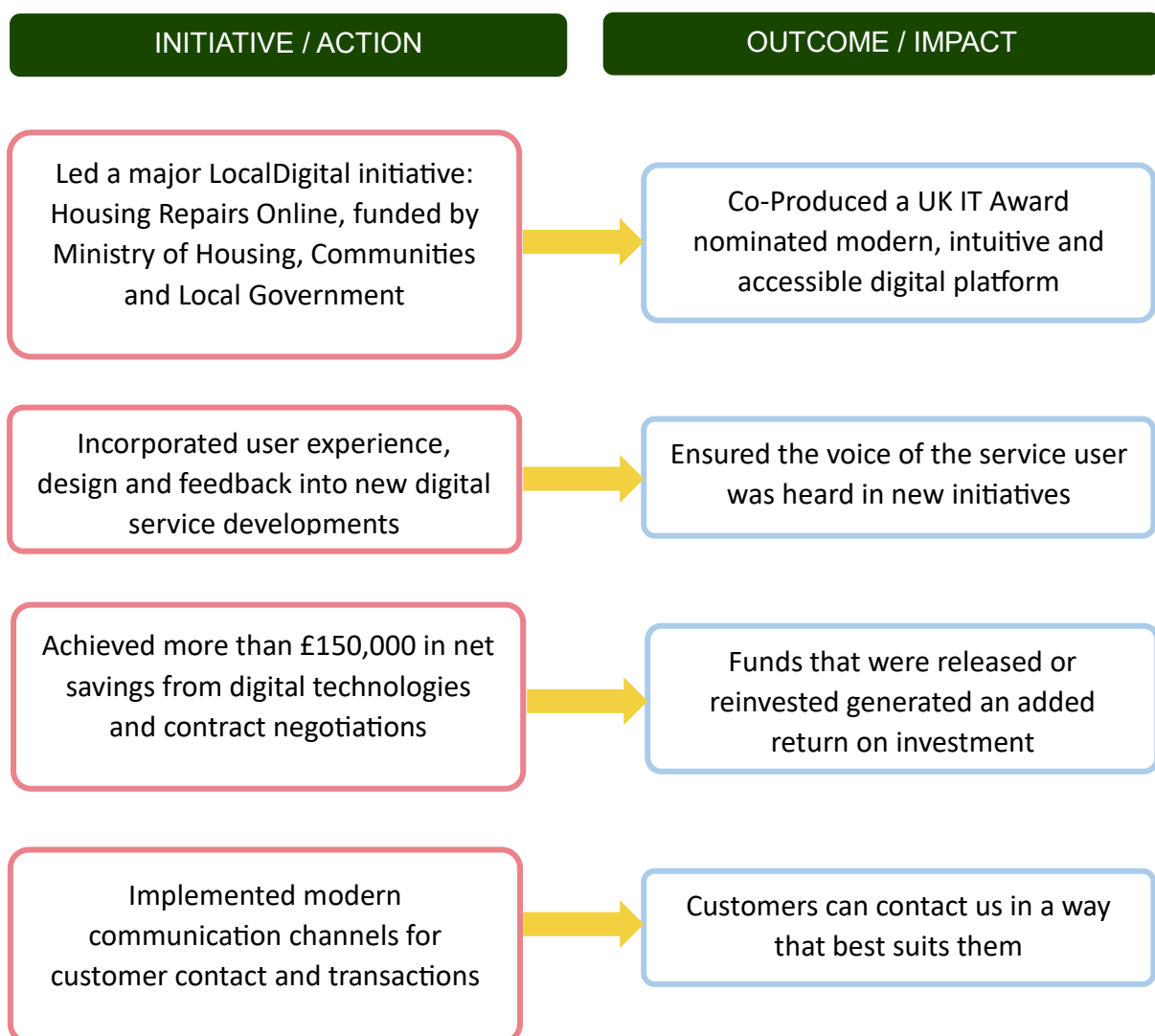
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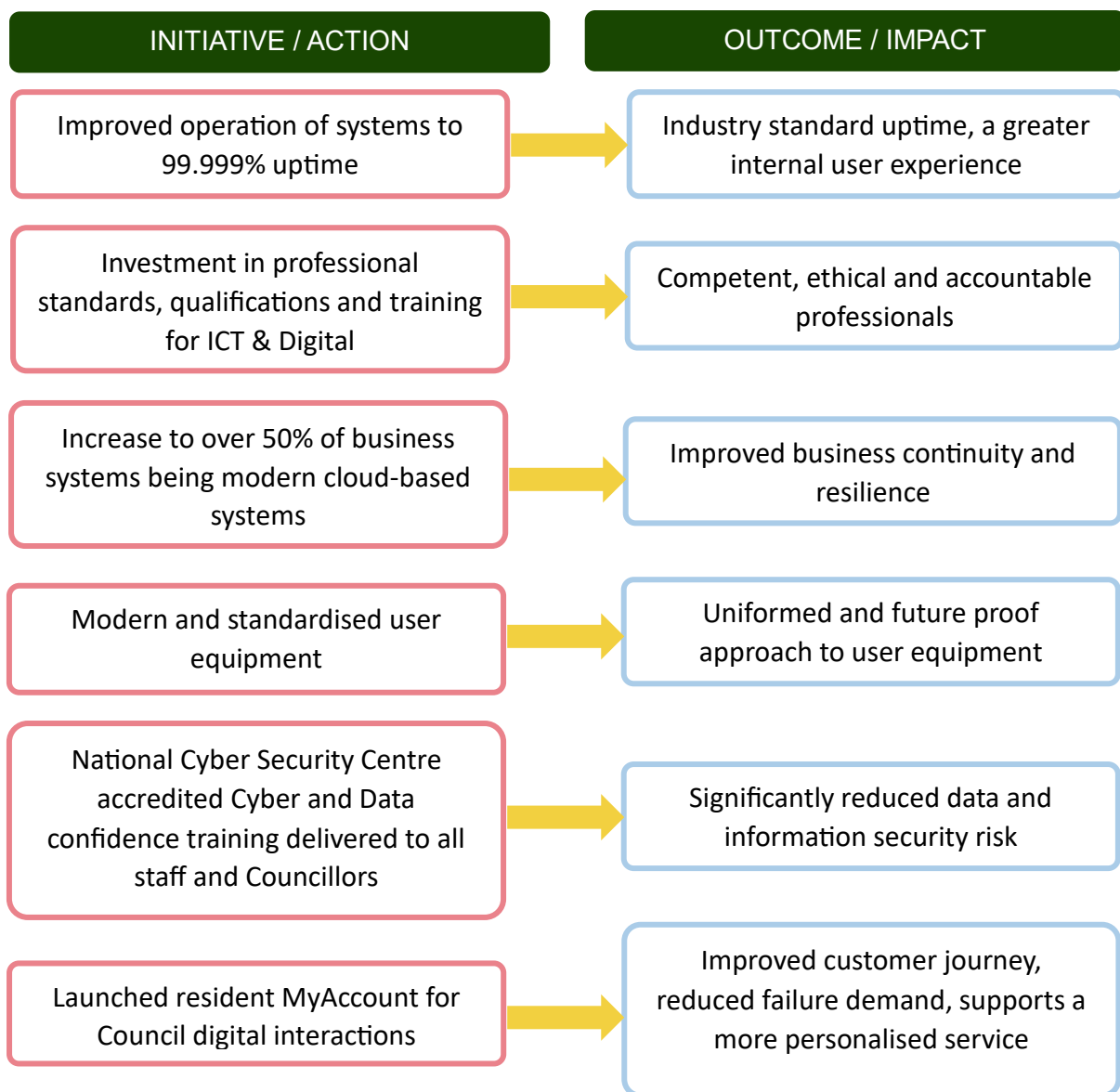
What we achieved between 2021 to 2024

The Council has built a robust framework through investment in IT infrastructure, line-of-business systems, digital workforce, and the implementation of contemporary work practices aligning to best practice.

Additionally, significant enhancements in our cyber and information security culture have minimised the increased risks to services, systems and our communities' data.

These initiatives have enabled the workforce to operate securely from any location, equipped with the necessary tools to complete tasks efficiently, thereby delivering exceptional service to the communities we serve. This provides us with a great foundation for the future.

What the previous Digital Strategy delivered:

INITIATIVE / ACTION	OUTCOME / IMPACT
Led a major LocalDigital initiative: Housing Repairs Online, funded by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	Co-Produced a UK IT Award nominated modern, intuitive and accessible digital platform
Incorporated user experience, design and feedback into new digital service developments	Ensured the voice of the service user was heard in new initiatives
Achieved more than £150,000 in net savings from digital technologies and contract negotiations	Funds that were released or reinvested generated an added return on investment
Implemented modern communication channels for customer contact and transactions	Customers can contact us in a way that best suits them

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INITIATIVE / ACTION	OUTCOME / IMPACT
Improved operation of systems to 99.999% uptime	Industry standard uptime, a greater internal user experience
Investment in professional standards, qualifications and training for ICT & Digital	Competent, ethical and accountable professionals
Increase to over 50% of business systems being modern cloud-based systems	Improved business continuity and resilience
Modern and standardised user equipment	Uniformed and future proof approach to user equipment
National Cyber Security Centre accredited Cyber and Data confidence training delivered to all staff and Councillors	Significantly reduced data and information security risk
Launched resident MyAccount for Council digital interactions	Improved customer journey, reduced failure demand, supports a more personalised service

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Strategic Framework

A comprehensive range of frameworks were evaluated in the development of this Digital Strategy; including factors such as artificial intelligence[1], government design principles[2], digitalisation standards[3], and considerations related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)[4]. This approach has ensured our strategy aligns with best practices and supports the Council's objectives for enhancing digital public services.
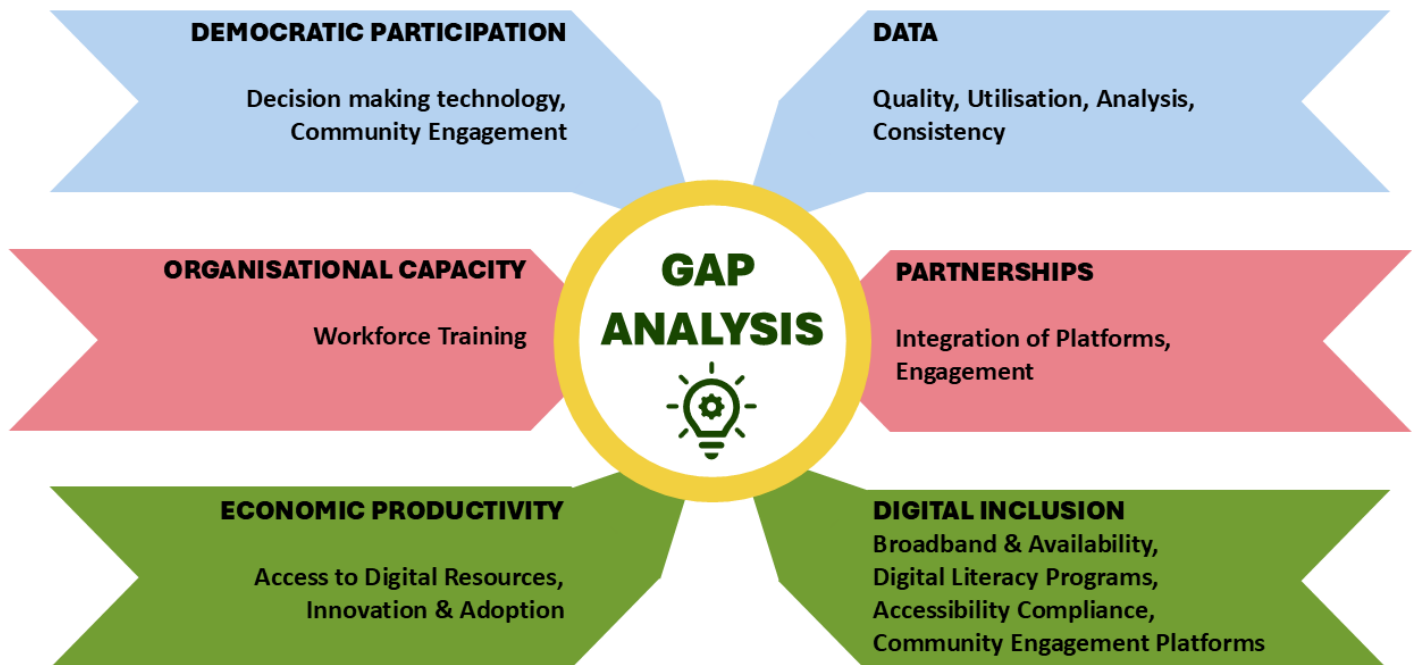
In developing our strategy, we have applied a strategic lens to thoroughly understand how various factors impact our delivery and overall approach. External and internal factors such as digital expectations, digital exclusion, and legislation changes play a significant role in shaping our strategy. Geo-political events and local authority funding are crucial in determining the resources and support available for our initiatives. We also consider changes in government policy and strategies[5], as they directly influence our operational landscape.

The anticipated increase in digital transactions and the growing importance of the green agenda, emphasise the need for efficient and sustainable practices within our operations. The integration of AI and the focus on security and compliance are pivotal in ensuring that our services are not only innovative but also safe and reliable. Lastly, Local Government Reorganisation is a key factor that necessitates continuous adaptation and resilience in our strategic planning. By addressing these elements within our strategy, we have created a robust and dynamic framework capable of delivering impactful digital public services, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for our community.
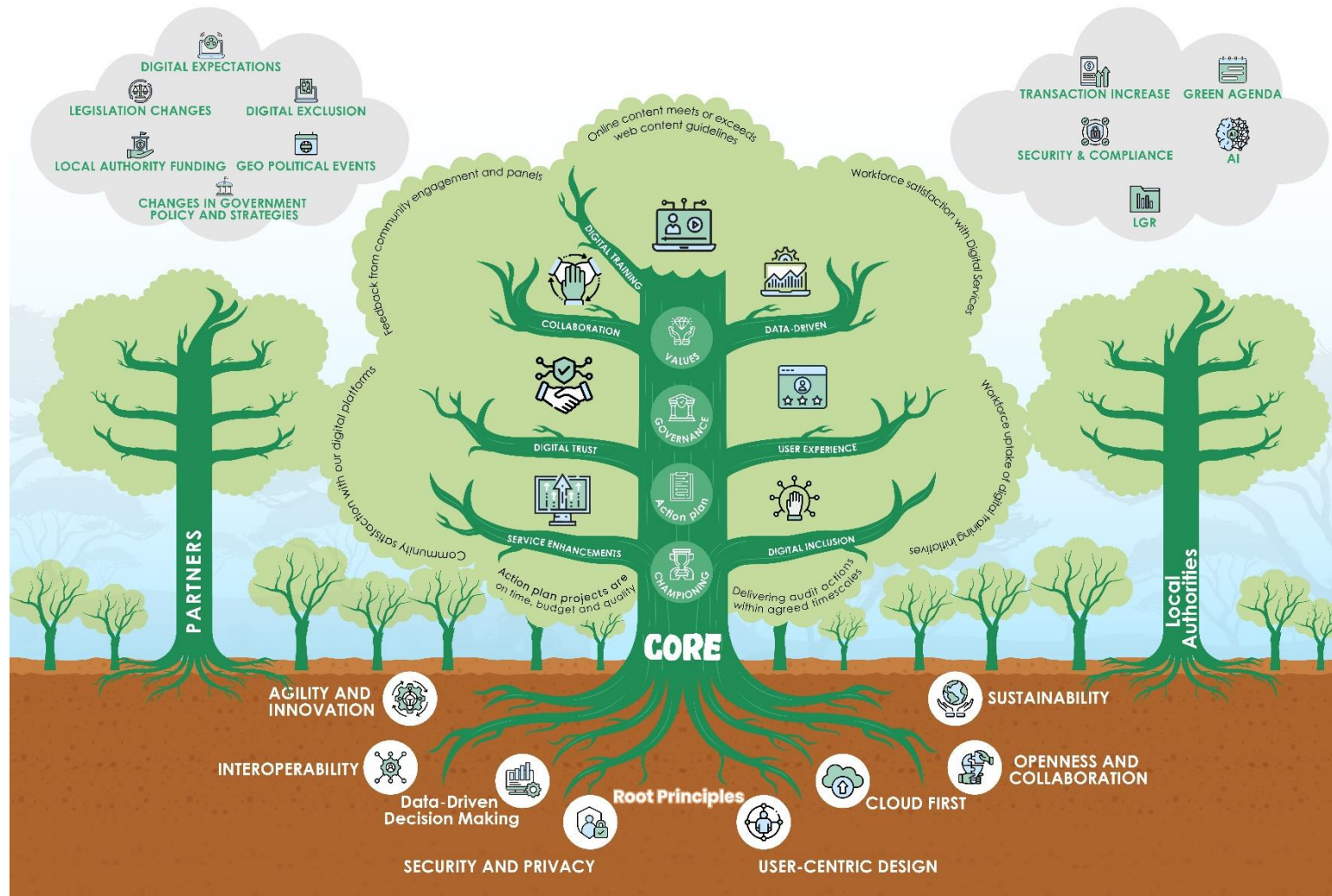
In addition, the Council and its digital standing were benchmarked against frameworks and the Local Government Digitalisation Almanac[6] to produce a

gap analysis of the Council's current position. These gaps are mentioned below and will figure throughout the strategy.

Gap Analysis

DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Decision making technology, Community Engagement

DATA

Quality, Utilisation, Analysis, Consistency

GAP ANALYSIS

ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

Workforce Training

PARTNERSHIPS

Integration of Platforms, Engagement

ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY

Access to Digital Resources, Innovation & Adoption

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Broadband & Availability, Digital Literacy Programs, Accessibility Compliance, Community Engagement Platforms

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Future thought Forest

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Our Future Vision

"Digital for All: Seamless, Smart and Inclusive Services"

To enable an inclusive community where all residents have access to seamless, efficient, and innovative digital public services, enhancing their quality of life through fostering a no customer left behind ethos.

Our Mission

"Empowering Communities through Connected, Customer-First Digital Innovation"

To leverage digital technologies and data-driven insights to deliver customer-centric services that empower our communities, and build a resilient, sustainable, and connected district.

Who will benefit from this strategy?

"ALL OUR COMMUNITIES"

Our Community, Our Customer, Your Council

Stakeholders were surveyed to understand their views on digital services, skills and pain points. We used the outcomes of these surveys with the Ofcom Online Nation report 2024[7] to help us create stakeholder profiles covering key information based on their feedback and themes.

Profiles

DISTRICT RESIDENT

DIGITAL COMFORT:
Basic to moderate

DIGITAL ACCESS:
Smartphones, home internet, occasional computer use

DIGITAL PREFERENCE:
Mobile-optimised websites, intuitive online portals

MOTIVATIONS:
Easy access to services, clarity, time-saving processes.

FRUSTRATIONS:
Difficult navigation, poor mobile experience, unclear instructions.

NEEDS:
Simple interfaces, mobile-friendly design, clear guidance, responsive support.

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS:
Clear layouts, large fonts, voice assistance.

DIGITAL INCLUSION BARRIERS:
May not have high-speed internet, limited digital literacy.

COUNCIL TENANT

DIGITAL COMFORT:
Basic to moderate

DIGITAL ACCESS:
Smartphones or computers, regular internet access

DIGITAL PREFERENCE:
User-friendly tenancy portals, online payment systems

MOTIVATIONS:
Manage tenancy online (repairs, rent, communication).

FRUSTRATIONS:
Complex forms, lack of support, inaccessible systems.

NEEDS:
Clear instructions, accessible portals, training/support where needed.

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS:
Smartphones or computers, regular internet access.

DIGITAL INCLUSION BARRIERS:
May lack consistent internet or computer access, limited experience.

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COUNCIL EMPLOYEE

MOTIVATIONS:
Efficient service delivery, streamlined operations, digital innovation.

FRUSTRATIONS:
Outdated systems, insufficient training, unclear digital processes.

NEEDS:
Advanced training, user-friendly software, clear communication channels.

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS:
Requires accessible software interfaces and options

DIGITAL INCLUSION BARRIERS:
May face difficulty with legacy systems.

DIGITAL COMFORT:
High

DIGITAL ACCESS:
Office computers, internal networks, standard digital tools.

DIGITAL PREFERENCE:
Office suite, collaboration tools, internal portals.

ELECTED MEMBER

MOTIVATIONS:
Effective governance, community engagement, informed decision-making.

FRUSTRATIONS:
Inconsistent systems, unclear ICT policies, lack of training/support.

NEEDS:
Clear digital guidelines, reliable hardware/software, responsive ICT support.

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS:
Needs accessible documents, proper vision and hearing accommodations.

DIGITAL INCLUSION BARRIERS:
May struggle with new interfaces if not user-friendly.

DIGITAL COMFORT:
Moderate to High

DIGITAL ACCESS:
Council-provided laptops, reliable internet.

DIGITAL PREFERENCE:
Office suite, secure communication platforms, internal portals.

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Our Principles

In order to achieve our vision with maximum effectiveness and efficiency, it is essential that we adhere to our digital design principles.

Principle	Description	Rationale
Agility and Innovation	Regularly evaluate and refine services based on user feedback and systematic testing.	To ensure service offerings effectively address the needs of our communities.
Interoperability	Select systems designed for seamless integration, straightforward upgrades, and future expansion.	To facilitate efficient data sharing, collaboration, and operational effectiveness.
Data-Driven Decision Making	Leverage data analytics to guide strategic decisions and enhance service delivery.	To decrease uncertainty, improve accuracy, and drive overall decision quality.
Security and Privacy	Uphold stringent security measures and integrate privacy as an essential component of all services.	To mitigate risks associated with data breaches and malicious activities.
User-Centric Design	Prioritise understanding and fulfilling user requirements, ensuring all services are accessible and inclusive.	This leads to solutions that are intuitive, usable, and well-received by diverse user groups.
Cloud First	Evaluate public cloud solutions as a primary option when financially prudent.	For cost-effectiveness, scalability, enhanced security, and greater agility.
Openness and Collaboration	Embrace open-source solutions, transparent work practices, and collaborative partnerships where appropriate.	To reduce duplication of effort, foster innovation, increase efficiency, and promote digital inclusivity.
Sustainability	Integrate sustainable practices throughout the technology lifecycle.	To minimise environmental impact, conserve resources, and support long-term ecological resilience.

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Ambitions

Our digital ambitions are to create a seamless, smart, and inclusive digital ecosystem that empowers communities and enhances lives. By 2028, we aim to deliver connected, customer-first services that are responsive to evolving needs, underpinned by robust governance and a culture of innovation.

We envisage a future where digital transformation is not just a technological shift but a catalyst for social and economic inclusion—ensuring that all our communities can benefit from intuitive, secure, and accessible digital services.

Through strategic alignment with the Community Plan and a commitment to continuous improvement, we will embed digital thinking across the Council, championing data-driven decision-making and fostering a digitally confident workforce.

Our ambitions for 2025-2028

Delivered **service enhancements** across various online platforms.

Purpose: To provide communities with user-friendly, accessible services available digitally and through multiple channels.

Approach: Conduct service reviews and invest in system improvements to enhance accessibility.

Ensured **digital trust**, security, and reliability.

Purpose: To enable staff, councillors, and communities to operate in ways that address their specific requirements.

Approach: Integrate privacy and security measures throughout the entire systems and project lifecycle, with ongoing communication to stakeholders.

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Prepared for **collaboration** with other local authorities.

Purpose: To facilitate Local Government Reform (LGR) through the integration of digital services ensuring the establishment of new authorities that are safe, legal, secure, and sustainable. Continue to be a lead digital council.

Approach: Lead and engage proactively, embracing the challenges associated with change, reusing technology, data, and services.

Enabled access to **digital training** and knowledge resources.

Purpose: To equip individuals to adapt effectively within an evolving digital environment and remain future-ready.

Approach: Focus on workforce development and providing signposting to our communities.

Leveraged **data-driven insights** to inform and support strategic change.

Purpose: To guide decisions related to service delivery, design, and investment—focusing efforts where impact will be greatest.

Approach: Utilise business intelligence and artificial intelligence technologies that provide cost benefit.

Improved the **user experience** by designing adaptive and accessible digital platforms that proactively address evolving community needs and emerging challenges.

Purpose: To effectively support service users as their requirements change.

Approach: Incorporate feedback loops, accessible design, regular reviews, and scalable features in platform design.

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Ensured **digital inclusion** is essential for building a fair and connected community where everyone can benefit from technology.

Purpose: To bridge the digital divide by providing equal access to digital resources and services, thereby empowering all individuals regardless of their background or technical ability.

Approach: Work in partnership with public entities, private sector stakeholders, and local communities to identify gaps and co-create solutions. Signpost to targeted training and support to help individuals develop digital skills.

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How will we achieve this?

Through our values, championing, digital governance, leadership and oversight of performance and the Digital Strategy action plan.

Values

Ambitious & Forward Thinking

By embracing our core values, we are committed to guiding our service delivery, design, and investment efforts towards impactful outcomes.

Caring & Compassionate

Our approach leverages innovative and cost-effective technologies to enhance efficiency and user experience.

Commercial & Business-Like

We will prioritise creating adaptive and accessible digital platforms, ensuring digital inclusion, and future-proofing our operations.

Professional & Trustworthy

Our commitment to transparency, data security, and user-centric services builds trust within the community.

Therefore, through efficient operations and collaborative partnerships, we will streamline processes to reduce operational demands.

Welcoming & Responsive

Whilst remaining dedicated to addressing the evolving needs of our communities, we strive to leave no one behind in our digital initiatives.

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Championing

The Digital Champions (DCs) initiative at NSDC, launched in 2019, aims to enhance digital transformation by improving the adoption of tools and digital literacy while reducing support demand.

However, NSDC faced challenges including engagement, lack of formal structure, and uneven representation. This strategy proposes a revitalised, structured DC network with clear roles, performance metrics, enhanced visibility and engagement.

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Digital governance

A Digital Transformation Board (DTB) has been established to ensure that digital projects are prioritised in alignment with the Council's Community Plan objectives. The Board uses a structured scoring matrix to evaluate and prioritise projects based on a range of weighted criteria, ensuring that investments deliver measurable benefits and value to both communities and employees.

Key Prioritisation Criteria Include:

- Delivery of the Community Plan and LGR

- Political, organisational, and reputational considerations

- Number of communities and employees who will benefit

- Full lifetime cost of the project

- Legislative and compliance requirements

- Internal and external resource requirements

- Resources released (e.g. FTE savings)

- Technological complexity and risk

- Future-proofing and ongoing support

- Time sensitivity

- Other justifiable factors not captured elsewhere

These criteria are used to score and rank projects, ensuring transparency and strategic alignment in decision-making.

In addition, the Digital Transformation Board feeds into the strategic Corporate Information Governance Group (CIGG). The role of CIGG is to oversee and guide the secure, lawful, and efficient management of data and information across the Council, ensuring compliance with legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements, and embedding a culture of information security and risk awareness.

Measuring Success

Our outcomes will be addressed by focusing on performance in the following areas:

Community satisfaction with our digital platforms

We will implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework that leverages both quantitative and qualitative metrics.

Feedback from community engagement and panels

By regularly collecting feedback through service user surveys, we will gain insights into user satisfaction and areas for improvement.

Online content meets or exceeds web content guidelines

By tracking the compliance of our online content with web content guidelines to ensure accessibility for all service users.

Workforce satisfaction with digital services

We will perform comprehensive analysis of survey data, either directly or through digital champion initiatives.

Workforce uptake of digital training initiatives

Offer digital training via our learning management system and apprenticeship schemes, monitoring participation and collecting feedback to improve programs.

Delivering audit actions within agreed timescales

We will achieve this by identifying clear objectives for each audit action and establishing realistic timelines. This will involve strong governance frameworks, proactive risk management, and continuous monitoring of progress.

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Action plan projects are on time, budget and quality

We will achieve this through clear objectives, realistic planning, strong governance, proactive risk management, engaged stakeholders, continuous quality assurance, and an agile approach.

Percentage of digital transactions completed without the need for assistance

We will track user interactions and support requests through our digital platforms. Analysing data to identify the frequency and type of assistance required either in person, telephone or by another channel. By monitoring these metrics, we can gain insights into user behaviour and the effectiveness of our digital services, allowing us to implement improvements where needed.

Increase in users accessing digital services for the first time

We will achieve this by enhancing our outreach programs to raise awareness of our digital services and their benefits. This includes providing easy-to-follow guides, analysis of new digital accounts in online platforms, conducting community workshops, and collaborating with partners to support communities.

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Digital Strategy Action Plan

The purpose of the Digital Strategy Action Plan is to operationalise the Council's Digital Strategy by translating its vision and principles into a structured, prioritised, and measurable set of actions that support the delivery of the Community Plan.

The action plan is a working document aligned with the business planning cycle. It is shaped by priority matrices and principles established by the Digital Transformation Board (DTB), and each digital project is evaluated and reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The plan ensures that digital transformation is:

- Governed effectively, with risk and resource considerations embedded.
- Responsive to evolving needs, adapting to new technologies and organisational priorities.
- Accountable, with clear evaluation mechanisms and reporting structures.

In essence, it serves as the Council's delivery mechanism for digital change—bridging strategic intent with practical implementation.

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Resident Survey Feedback

NSDC RESIDENTS SURVEY ON DIGITAL 2025

NEWARK & SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

195 RESPONSES

25 responses were from NSDC tenants

45% of responses were from Over 65's
36% of responses were from ages between 50-64
14% of responses were from ages between 30-49

DIGITAL INCLUSION

87% are confident using the internet

Only 5% received help or training to use online services

77% are confident using the Council's online services

DEVICES & CONNECTIONS

95% have regular access to a device

95% have a reliable internet connection

INITIATIVES & SERVICES

76% rate the design of the Council's online services as excellent/good

83% had no barriers in accessing Council online services

11% require accessibility tools to help utilise the Council's online services

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

USABILITY & DESIGN

Design shows room for improvement with specific feedback on navigation issues, confusing terminology and losing progress in forms.

DIGITAL SKILLS

95% of respondents have never received any help or training on using digital services, indicating a gap in digital literacy support.

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

11% of respondents use accessibility tools such as screen readers, magnifiers, or larger fonts.

Comments from the respondents highlight the need for better support for users with dyslexia, neurological conditions, or visual impairments.

Many in-person respondents were non-native English speakers.

TRUST & INTERACTION

Respondents expressed frustration with the lack of timely human responses. Some felt unsure about what services are available and how to access them.

SERVICE AWARENESS & USAGE

Many services have high 'never used' responses, indicating a lack of awareness or perceived relevance of these services.

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Our Digital Commitment

For Our Communities

Our Digital Strategy is here to make life easier, inclusive, and more connected for all. We're working to make sure services are simple to use and work for everyone—no matter your age, ability, or access to technology. Whether you're booking a service online, checking local updates, or getting support, it should just work.

We'll support local community centres and outreach programmes to help people get online and build confidence with digital tools. And by using data smartly, we'll shape services around what our communities really need.

This is about "Digital for All"—so you can expect clearer communication, quicker services, and more chances to have your say in shaping the Council's digital front door.

For Our Employees

We're building a smarter, more connected digital workplace that helps you spend less time on repetitive tasks and more time on the work that really matters. Our strategy is all about making your day-to-day easier—through better training, simpler processes, and access to the right tools when you need them.

We know flexibility is key, so we're supporting secure use of devices and pushing for systems that cut down on manual work through automation. By linking digital improvements with our business planning and using the Digital Transformation Board to guide decisions, we're making sure your voice is heard, and your needs are met—so you can deliver great public services with confidence.

For Our Elected Members

As elected representatives, you will benefit from enhanced digital tools that strengthen democratic engagement, improve data transparency, and support responsive constituent service. This strategy is built on your feedback and that of your communities, ensuring our digital initiatives reflect the real-world priorities you champion.

You will have improved access to performance dashboards and clearer, more effective pathways to influence policy through digital channels. We are committed to supporting you in your role as community champions—

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equipping you with the insights and tools needed to advocate for your wards and contribute meaningfully to strategic governance.

For Our Neighbouring Councils

We are committed to working collaboratively with our neighbouring councils, in a supportive capacity throughout Local Government Reorganisation. Our shared goal is to ensure that, from day one, the new unitary authority is safe, legal, secure, financially sustainable and continues to deliver high quality services to our communities. At the same time, this strategy reflects our digital ambitions and the voices of our communities, ensuring they are recognised and embedded into the transformation journey.

Acknowledgements

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References

[1]AI opportunities action plan, ramping up AI adoption across the UK to boost economic growth, provide jobs for the future and improve people's everyday lives. AI opportunities action plan

[2]The UK government's design principles and examples of how they've been used. Government Design Principles - GOV.UK

[3]A vision for modern digital government The Blueprint is working to enable the following outcomes: Easier lives: delivering transparent, next-generation public services that do the hard work for citizens, can be accessed and used by everyone who needs them, and are designed around the user. A blueprint for modern digital government (HTML) - GOV.UK

[4]This report acknowledges the challenges and the opportunities of the process and offers suggestions for fostering successful change. It also highlights the support needs deemed critical by participants for enabling digital transformation through LGR. Local Government Reorganisation CDDaT Considerations

[5]The Local Digital Declaration is a shared ambition for the future of local public services. About the Local Digital Declaration | Local Digital

[6]Local Government Digitalisation Almanac for councillors and officers, containing simple steps, practical examples and resources to support councils on their digitalisation journeys. LGA Digitalisation Almanac

[7]"Digital Nation" that focuses on digital inclusion and exclusion in the UK. This report uses data from Ofcom and other sources to paint a picture of the digital divide and highlight the challenges faced by those who are excluded from online services. Digital Nation | The UK's Digital Divide | Good Things Foundation

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