

Somerset Council – Digital Strategy



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## Foreword

We face many challenges and opportunities as we build a new council for Somerset, and I want us to be ambitious in how we design our new organisation. There are many ambitious models of improvement that organisations struggle to implement because their existing culture does not allow them to change, we don't have that restriction. I want us to design into the culture of our new organisation huge ambition and a drive for rapid improvement.

Digital is leading the way in this. The smart application of the right technologies and information can revolutionise the experience for customers, and empower our staff and members, while driving down cost, and reducing carbon. The Somerset response to the pandemic has demonstrated the power of Digital to rapidly stand-up new services, harness the resilience in our communities, support the most vulnerable, and enable new ways of working.

This strategy sets out an ambitious scope for Digital, covering how we serve customers; how we support our own staff and members; and how we join up across partners to create a digital place for Somerset. We won't leave anyone behind, so the strategy also emphasises the need to tackle 'inclusion' so that everyone benefits.

Our ambition to be financially stable will be key, so we'll need to drive out savings and efficiencies, while continuing to support an aging population with complex needs, meeting our customers' expectations, protecting the environment, and inspiring growth and opportunity for the County.

Technology or data on their own won't deliver this. Digital is about the culture of the organisation and encouraging participation. As Chief Executive, I am a champion for Digital, and a keen advocate of the principles and ambitions set out in this strategy.

## Introduction

Digital has been defined as:

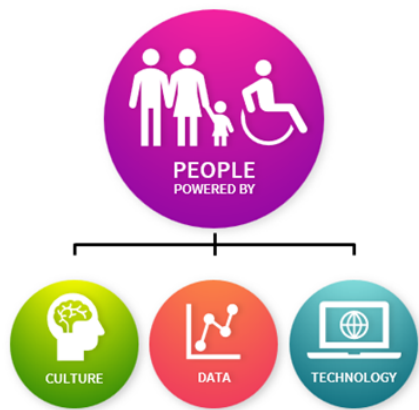
*'Applying the culture, processes, business models and technologies of the internet era to respond to people's raised expectations.'*<sup>1</sup>

Many of us now use internet banking and online shopping; we drive using a sat-nav with traffic updates, and we connect with friends, family and those with shared-interests using social media. The pandemic has accelerated the use of video-conferencing for both business and pleasure, and for many, working from home is the new normal.

These services, which are now mainstream, are relatively recent; ten years ago, they would have seemed like science-fiction.

Digital is at the heart of a culture of continuous improvement, taking incremental steps towards a bold future. 'Digital' is about People, empowered by Culture, right-quality Data, and re-useable Technologies; to meet the raised expectations of the Internet Age.

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Many of our customers have embedded digital into their lifestyles, with a raised expectation for convenient, real-time access to services, and control over their private data.

Those customers who have not embraced digital themselves, have come to expect the quality of service that a modern workforce can provide when a digital culture is supported by the tools and skills for collaboration and innovation.

There are already some great examples of Digital in Somerset such as

- freeing up hospital beds by keeping track of care providers with space to take in patients who are ready for discharge
- The Somerset Integrated Digital eRecord – a safe way for health and social care staff to access medical information.
- Report a Problem on the Road – send us a picture of a pothole and get regular updates about the repair
- Business Grants – rapid identification and application processes during the pandemic

However, being a 'digital council' is no longer sufficient. Somerset is served by many organisations; from government agencies, through to the many community and voluntary groups that build strength and resilience. Digital for the 'place' of Somerset can create a trust framework in which the needs of individuals and of communities are understood and addressed via secure data sharing, shared casework, and through investments in smart solutions and connectivity.

For the digitally excluded, we have a role to provide support and opportunity. Digital Inclusion is about reducing digital exclusion and ensuring that people and organisations have the right access, ability, motivation, and trust to use the internet and other digital channels to truly feel the benefits of Digital.

Digital is not standing still; the pace of innovation is ever increasing, for example

- we are starting to see an explosion in real-time-data from sensors, wearable devices, and drones.
- digital Identity will allow the public to take control of how their data is used and customise their relationship with support networks.
- 5G networks can improve access to real-time data in rural communities

Digital is fundamental to tackling Somerset Council's biggest challenges. It will be central to how we address the needs of health and social care, the climate emergency, achieving financial sustainability, improving public services, and supporting the most vulnerable. One of our biggest challenges and biggest demand on resources is around care. The use of digital technologies in health and social care is rising exponentially. Remote monitoring and diagnostics are allowing individuals to remain independent for longer – contributing enormously to their physical and mental wellbeing at the same time as reducing pressure on fixed health and care facilities.

This strategy defines a scope for Digital, and a set of Digital Principles so that we maximise impact and participation in a continuous drive that establishes Somerset at the forefront of innovation. The Digital Strategy, supported by Data and Technology, is at the core of enabling the strategic objectives of the organisation.

## The Digital Scope

To deliver on our ambitions, we have developed 5 main themes:

### Our Themes

1. Digital Customer – Providing a joined up digital experience for customers as they access council services.
2. Digital Council – Promoting a digital culture for collaboration and innovation.
3. Digital Place – Leading and inspiring the many agencies that serve Somerset to introduce smart solutions, infrastructure, and connectivity.
4. Digital Care – A focus on integrating health and social care to support collaboration, personalisation, and early intervention, to increase independence and wellbeing.
5. Digital Inclusion – A focus on reducing inequalities, supporting individuals and communities to access services online and increasing access to take full advantage of the benefits that being online and digitally confident can bring.

### 1. Digital Customer

Why does it matter?

Our customers' expectations of local Government delivered services are changing. Customers are demanding a faster, more joined-up, digital experience that puts them in control, at their convenience, and makes it easy to interact through their own devices and channel of choice in real-time.

Empowering our customers to self-serve and self-help, is key to becoming a sustainable Council, protecting resources for the most vulnerable, providing pro-active support across the system to connect people with the support they need as quickly as possible.

Customers benefit from of digitally designed services regardless of how they access them. Failing to embrace digital and deliver these new digital services and functions for our customers brings with it increased risk of dissatisfaction, higher costs, and damaged reputations.

Putting customers at the heart of designing digital services will ensure they are based on user need and are accessible to all. Continually seeking feedback from customers, shaped by the data collected on actual use, and responding to changing circumstances will keep digital services relevant and successful, as well as ensuring we maintain an excellent level of service.

What can we expect?

The Digital Customer theme, will:

- Offer our customers a contact choice, promoting a digital first approach.
- Allow the customer to access our services at their convenience and for some services, 24/7.
- Offer a consistent level of service no matter how our customers choose to access them.
- Give the customer greater efficiency, faster and simpler services, that represent value for money.
- Resolve our customers' queries at the first point of their chosen contact.
- Improve our communication between multiple channels, share data, and ensure it remains safe!
- Provide access to more online help, via signposting and tutorials.
- Join up our approach to customer services using intelligent services
- Empower our customers to act for themselves.
- Actively seek feedback from our users so we can continually improve our services and outcomes.
- Offer our customers an opportunity to influence and shape services, most notably via our Somerset Customer Panel.

## 2. Digital Council

Why does it matter?

A Digital Council is a workforce powered by a digital culture, data, and technology. Organisations with advanced digital cultures, use technology and data to collaborate, innovate to achieve strategic objectives and deliver business goals.

A digital council constantly reimagines how it operates. Collaboration across the organisation is valued above established hierarchies. Employees are encouraged and enabled to speak out, to make their own judgements, to break down siloes, and to make quicker and better decisions. Ultimately, empowered colleagues feel they work for the council, not just for a specific department.

A digital culture encourages innovation and participation. It enables organisations to foster a workplace that motivates employees to try new things whilst enhancing the learning of the workforce.

People increasingly want to be part of a digital culture that allows a collaborative and autonomous workplace, that encourages employee engagement and development. A digital council will attract new talent whilst retaining current employees.

To become a thriving digital council, we will connect and empower our workforce to extend across our Partnerships and voluntary sector. We will share data and processes to deliver the best outcomes, creating the digital infrastructure and network to enable joined up ways of working.

What can we expect?

The Digital Council theme, will:

- Provide opportunities for upskilling and professional development.
- Help the Council to attract new talent and improve retention.
- Provide us with Digital Leadership and strong Governance to drive a digital culture from top down.
- Support the building of strong networks and partnerships for integrated commissioning
  - VCSE
  - Partners
- Implement data led decision making (informed decision making)
- Help to identify what is appropriate for automation, against what human task(s) should be retained,
- Improve the sharing of data
- Improve outcomes for our customers

### 3. Digital Place

Why does it matter?

We are uniquely positioned to shape Somerset and to be the focus and drive for coordinating digital for the County. No other organisation has the legal obligation, authority, or reach, that the Council has to connect with partners, businesses, educational institutions, VCFSE, and communities.

Good digital infrastructure and skills will improve people's lives and give greater opportunities for businesses to prosper. The Council has a role to play by coordinating and accelerating investment and innovation.

Increasingly, the needs of our customers and communities are complex and cross organisational boundaries. In a digital place, collaborating partners will have a shared understanding of needs and be able to bring a coordinated response and shared outcomes.

Digital solutions will be a key part of measures to address the climate and ecological emergencies. Smart use of technology will allow us to better monitor the effect of climate change and the effectiveness of our responses, enabling better policy decision making and

interventions. This data will allow us to reduce environmental impact in areas such as public realm energy use and on-demand public transport and, made public, will help citizens make greener lifestyle choices.

What can we expect?

- No resident or community will be excluded – skills, cost and connectivity
- A thriving digital sector driving business growth and innovation
- Tailored digital educations and skills growth - education skills partnership
- No resident will be left behind
- Data and analytics exploited to enable monitoring, forecasting and measurement of digital interventions
- Somerset connected regionally as digital place of choice – links with Gravity,

#### 4. Digital Care

Why does it matter?

A focus on integrating health and social care to support collaboration, personalisation, and early intervention, to increase peoples independence and wellbeing.

*“Enabling our communities and colleagues to access connected digital tools and data, that drive excellent communication, support, and care, will empower people to look after their own health and wellbeing.”*

What can we expect?

The Digital Care vision will:

- Enable people to live healthy independent lives, to prevent the onset of avoidable illness and support active self-management.
- Ensure safe, sustainable, effective, high quality, person-centred support in the most appropriate setting.
- Provide support in neighbourhood areas with an emphasis on self-management and prevention.
- Value all people alike, addressing inequalities and given equal priority to physical and mental health.
- Ensure systems have the capability for the proactive identification of individuals and their families, who are in need of support from frontline services.
- Improve outcomes for people through personalised, co-ordinated support.
- Ensure that individuals and their family are connected to local resources, by joining up a community resource database and enabling access through a support finder tool.
- Develop risk and demand modelling tools to assist business making decisions for the future. Commissioning for future demand and requirements as residents' needs change.



## 5. Digital Inclusion

Why does it matter?

Digital Inclusion is about making sure everyone benefits equally.

Being digital is about supporting people to engage with and/or participate with services regardless of how comfortable they are with digital channels and devices.

During the pandemic, many of our customers were thrust into a digital world without any prior knowledge, skill, or confidence to do so. They were often aided by a close friend or family member taking on the role of a 'digital champion', offering support as necessary, to stay in touch and manage everyday life, like shopping and banking. This has given us a foothold to build upon and we must continue the momentum, promoting empowerment and building skills, so that the benefits of being digitally enabled can be enjoyed by all.

Lack of digital skills is not the only barrier, and we must work to understand what factors are preventing people fully participating. Issues including rural isolation and poor connectivity, poverty, language, physical disability and neurodiversity are likely to play a part, and it is up to us, not the end user, to create an environment where everybody can engage.

By exploring the most effective ways to support all customer groups to become more digitally able, Somerset Council residents and businesses can benefit from improved digital skills and digital access channels.

What can we expect?

- To develop a deeper understanding of the barriers to digital inclusion
- Increased education opportunities via online activities and training
- Improvements in work/employment opportunities
- Advanced skill development
- Better work/life balance and infinite choice(s)
- Health Digital Outreach Teams (DOT) network
- Tackle digital poverty through library device and connectivity loan schemes
- Offering supported digital services through customer access points (face to face)
- Exceeding statutory obligations for accessibility of our digital services

### The Digital Principles

These high-level strategic Digital principles can be used to shape and assess ongoing work and can help to achieve better outcomes for our staff and customers.

We will use these principles to assure that our work has properly considered and embraced Digital. These principles will become pillars of the new authority.

They are:

## Understand and address user needs

Undertaking 'customer research' to learn the full context of what the user is trying to achieve, not just the part where they must interact with the Council, and continue to get feedback on designs, through to deployment, and beyond.

## Promote a digital culture

Leadership to champion and communicate a digital agenda.

## Be data led

Using data to make better decisions. Prevention via early identification and smarter interventions.

## Be Agile

Empowering teams to deliver requirements iteratively and incrementally.

Share, Reuse  
and Join Up

Sharing and reusing data, platforms, and processes to provide an efficient joined-up experience.

Focus on  
Value

Digital programmes and deliverables are founded on known goals and policies, and the impact can be measured.

Be Trusted

Encourage take up and adoption of Digital by building trust with stakeholders.

Include  
everyone

Ensuring that benefits of the internet and digital technologies are available and accessible to everyone.

### Challenges/risks

A key challenge in realising this vision is people's understanding of the term 'digital'. Digital is not another word for IT; it is not about wires, boxes and computer code; it is not about doing everything on-line. Digital is about people - but people empowered with a digital culture, useable data, and the right technology.

The adage '*culture eats strategy for breakfast*' is never truer than in the digital sphere. It is not the purpose of this strategy to lay out Somerset Councils Digital Culture in detail, but collaboration, openness, teamwork, an appetite for risk and zero-blame, pragmatism and empowerment would feature prominently. Embedding such a culture impacts every part of an organisation and is invariably resisted by some, so strong leadership and management is required.

### Delivering the Strategy

Theme	Action	Target
Digital Council	Collaborate more and work to break down traditional silo working, encouraging multi-disciplinary, cross-cutting teams, and exploring the deployment of connected technologies across the enterprise.	
	Support remote and home working	
	Use data to make informed strategic decisions using well managed data for insight and business intelligence to guide decisions and strategy.	
	Improve our customer knowledge and understand their needs as we improve our customer research and use low-code configurable capabilities, moving away from single-use 'systems' to meet their needs.	
	Invest in our workforce to promote digital as the default, working towards efficiency, productivity, and sustainability.	
	Innovate, take risks, learn, and develop, implementing an agile approach to the digital vision.	
Digital Place	Improve connectivity across business and residential areas.	
	Seek innovation opportunities to maximise the investment made in our digital infrastructure.	
	Take advantage of the latest technologies available for economic growth, creating an environment that enables others to grow their business.	
	Implement digital technologies that are not only green and low carbon in themselves but also enable and support other green and low carbon initiatives, activities and working practices.	
	Share data between partner organisations where we are licensed to do so to increase process efficiency and make our data open and published where safe and legal to do so.	

	Implement a single directory of public and voluntary services to achieve better outcomes for complex-needs cases and to tackle vulnerability.	
	Empower local communities	
Digital Customer	Put our customers at the heart of our digital design work, understanding their journey when using our services and understanding their needs and preferences.	
	Keep our customer's personal data safe and respect their privacy, allowing customers to take control of how their own information is managed and shared.	
	Connect our technologies so information can be accessed across services in a single customer account.	
	Support and enable our customers to access our digital services, recognising that not everybody is ready to take advantage of our online services.	
	Ensure there is a role for social media to play a part as a customer contact channel	
Digital Care	Delivery of a shared health and care record for people in Somerset (Currently the Somerset Integrated Digital electronic Record (SIDeR) project)	
	Development of population health management approach.	
	Establishing a programme to support digitisation of social care (DISC).	
	Technology enabled care programme.	
	Simplifying access to online health and care support and advice, making it easier for people to find the help and support they need quickly	
	Workforce development.	
	Reducing health inequalities through targeted digital inclusion activity	
	Establishing a strategic function for digital to enable the ambition of the ICS.	
Digital Inclusion	Establish and develop a framework of support and delivery for the County	
	Explore innovative and assistive technologies to support our customer services approach and to help overcome digital inclusion barriers.	
	Have a provision for digital presence to increase accessibility in rural and remote areas of the county.	
	Explore broadband connectivity and infrastructure improvements throughout the County to support increased access and speeds in rural and remote areas.	
	Support and encourage staff to build upon existing digital skill levels	
	Work with local businesses to highlight digital benefits and support digital growth	

## Roadmap

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The Future of Digital – What next?

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