



# **Digital Strategy for North Devon Council Services 2023 - 2026**

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## Introduction

The digital strategy provides a medium term three-year roadmap for the council's ongoing journey of improvement in providing good, digitally enabled services and supporting access to, and use of, digital tools by colleagues and citizens.

Digital technology has transformed our lives and will continue to do so. As we move more services online and rely on the internet for everyday transactions, the landscape for local government is changing.

The Digital Strategy aims to help the Council increase productivity, build digital capabilities and deliver projects that move North Devon Council to a new level of digital maturity and practice. The strategy puts active inclusion at the centre of all things digital.

Our services rely upon critical ICT systems, some directly connecting with the customer while others work quietly behind the scenes. Exploring all digital routes will be a critical factor or enabler when it comes to improving services and/or reducing the costs of service.

North Devon Council is a signatory to the [Local Digital Declaration](#), this affirms our ambition to maximise the opportunities afforded to us by the internet age. This means we are committed to:

- Designing the services that best meet the needs of our citizens
- Challenge the technology market evaluating the tools and services we need
- Protect citizens' privacy and security
- Deliver best value for money

## **Strategic Direction and vision**

The Council's Corporate Plan sets out our priorities and what North Devon Council wants to achieve and how we are going to achieve it. Our corporate objectives are:

We achieve financial security

We become focussed on delivering the best for our customers

Our environment is cherished and protected

We plan for North Devon's future

"We want our customers to be able to access our services when and where they need it, we want to redesign our services to meet customer expectations and we want our staff to be equipped with technology and skills to be able to work effectively in a digital environment."

We will focus on customer 'end to end' journeys. We will map our organisational processes from start to finish through smart flowcharting. We will respond to customer demand by redirecting resources where most needed when needed, identified through process reviews

Technology will be used to help our customers be more connected and able to self-serve wherever possible

We will continue to work on resilience by delivering, as far as is possible, future proof ICT infrastructure and applications. Delivering the most cost effective services by the most appropriate internal or external digital methods

We will aspire to be 'Digital by default' by changing our culture to always think digital first

## **Drivers to the strategic direction**

A sustained reduction in Central Government funding for Councils allied to increased demand and costs for local government services mean that current forecasts show a potential funding gap which we need to address. These long term financial constraints and the increased demand for services continually challenges the District Council's existing models of service delivery to remain affordable, sustainable and relevant to service users. Key to the success of any new/revised operating models will be how we deliver services differently and more cost effectively but also how we enable people to become more connected with their communities.

## **Service Drivers**

Managing a continuing increase in service demand from a wide range of stakeholders including citizens, visitors, businesses, partners, and employees. Key to the success of this new strategy will be the ability for us to: make it easier for all stakeholders to understand changes, improve access to services, and make all stakeholders feel part of something through better connectivity and links to us and to their communities.

## **Technology Drivers**

Technology keeps improving, is ever changing and more easily available. As a Council we want to be at the forefront when it comes to improving access channels and using the most effective tools to communicate; educate and inform people; make available self-service options; have a variety of tools available to enable people to be, and remain, more independent.

## Why channel shift and making services available digitally?

Channel shift is a method to seek best value and to offer alternative ways in which the council can be interacted with. It is important to note that traditional channels such as telephony and face to face visits will still operate for those that need them.

Traditional channels are more costly than a digital alternative. Digital technologies are not there to replace traditional channels of communication but dovetail and integrate into the customer service system in ways that complement the strengths and compensate for weaknesses within the workforce.

Digital technology and channel shift strategies that encourage greater self-service improve the customer experience by reducing wait times, allowing citizens to interact with the council at a time of their choosing and making key processes quicker and more efficient.

A shift to digital technology allows effective data capture. Data is the key to a better understanding of citizen behaviour and the ability to offer a personalised service and identify trends in the district of North Devon.

. The cost per website interaction is much less than that of a face to face interaction. A channel shift to electronic interactions is a driver delivering the Council's corporate priorities, 'Achieving financial security' and 'We become focussed on delivering the best for our customers'.

The cost per customer interaction can be found in the table below, the figures are based on research undertaken by SOCITM and Deloitte.

Channel	Cost per 'visit' (average of Deloitte & Socitm research)
Face to face	£11.44
Telephone	£2.30
Website	32p

The table below shows how the behaviours and needs of our customers has changed and it is important that we continue to adapt to the requirements of our citizens.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Calls to Contact Centre</b>	<b>Face to face interactions, all sites</b>	<b>Website views</b>
2019	59361	29516	1,943,655
2022	54511	8015	2,178,666

# Our digital principles

## Principle one: easier to do business with us

- We will design our digital services based on user need to make it easier for customers to do business with us.
- We will make sure that our digital services are inclusive and simple to use for everyone, not just for people who are digitally proficient.
- We will measure our customers' experiences of our digital services and use this to inform our processes and drive improvements.

## Principle two: enabling self-service

The council's Channel Shift Strategy set out the benefits technology can bring in terms of both improving service delivery and reducing cost.

- Encouraging customer's to use well tested self-serve platforms is key to the aim of this strategy and forms a major transformation programme for the Council.
- End user testing of both the ability and the technical capability of customers will form part of the delivery of any new and / or improved services. As well as being confident that customers are able to access services easily online we need to ensure that support is given to those customers unable to use digital channels and those customers without the technical capability will be signposted to the relevant places. Digital capability will always be the first consideration of any service change unless legislation advises otherwise.
- We will ensure Council staff have the appropriate training so they are competent and able to deliver and assist our customers with digital services. In order to do this, we need to develop digital skills in-house by supporting the development of a Digital Competency Framework for Council staff.

## Principle three: moving our services to cost effective digital platforms adopting a digital first approach

- Our customer relationship platform will continue to connect customers with the Council's front and back-office processes to deliver an end-to-end service. Where this is not currently viable we will look into the feasibility of replacing existing systems to able integration with other systems. Doing this will provide a personalised multichannel experience. It will be possible to build or buy other



business capabilities on this platform meaning that siloed, traditional line of business applications can be gradually phased out.

#### **Principle four: Effective use of data to meet the demand for public services**

- We will encourage a 'collect once, use many times' principle for data and information. Wherever possible and with appropriate safeguards and permission we will share data across the Council and our delivery partners, so that we can provide more effective services for customers. We will use this to measure service performance, anticipate future challenges and drive improvements in services.

#### **Principle five: innovative and agile**

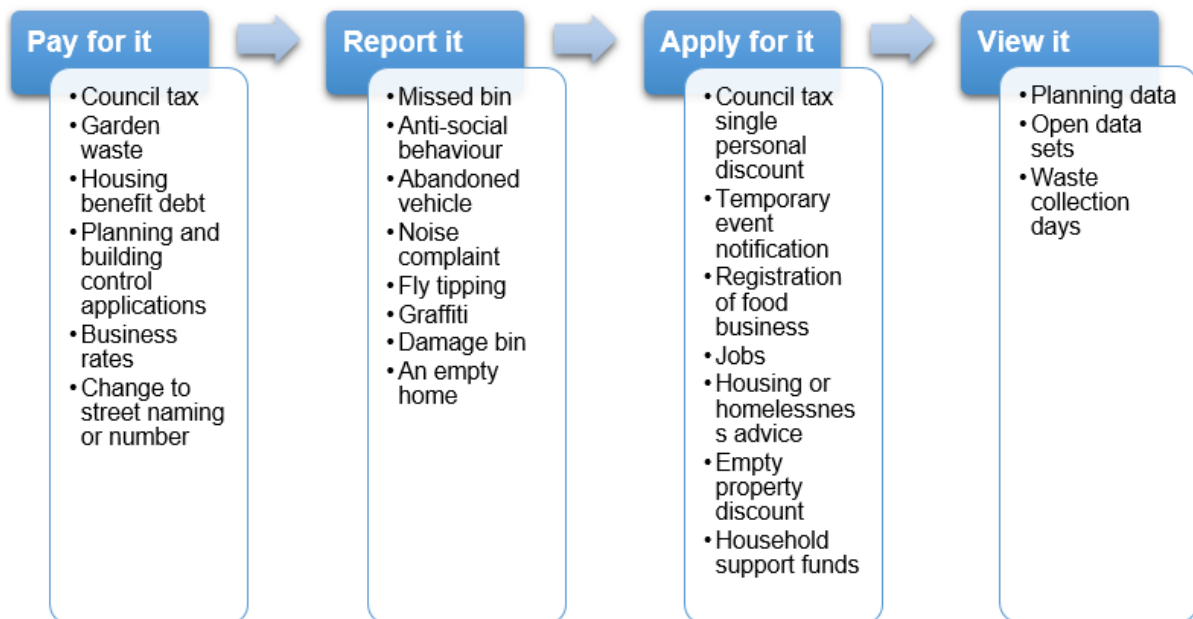
- We will use our networks to find new and better ways of using technology to deliver our services and make things better for our customers. We will attempt to respond rapidly to changes in customer demand and market opportunities. We will always start with real user needs and work with our customers to design our digital services.

#### **Principle six: Addressing privacy and security**

- We will continue to build cyber resilience. We aim to maximise the benefits of digital technology and citizens are secure online and are confident that their data is protected.
- We will build our digital skills and knowledge across the organisation. Staff will have the right tools, systems and data to enable them to continually improve processes and performance.

## Digital Services

We want our customers to be able to carry out the following interactions digitally and increase those activities moving forward.



We will continue to work with internal departments to deliver more services online. We will continue to gain intelligence on what our customers want and endeavour to make our award winning website even more user-friendly, to make it easier for people to access our services online.

## **Where are we now?**

We are making excellent progress with our transformation journey. We have the appetite to do more and to move forward maximising the use of technology and digital tools, working collaboratively and applying these across the Council to support our ambitions to improve interactions for local residents. The transformation journey will never be complete as we will have to constantly respond to new challenges and to find and exploit new digital resources as they become available.

- An accessible website which is easy to use
- Our online services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- We have implemented and adopted a hybrid working model
- We have identified opportunities to use Social Media to further promote and deliver our services
- We have adopted a 'one device fits all' user device policy
- We have adopted a cloud smart approach when reviewing application lifecycles

## **What's next?**

### **Robust, secure and reliable ICT**

We will continue to take preventative measures to ensure our network and systems are protected. We aim to provide a more resilient and secure digital environment for our citizens and our staff.

We will continue to expand and evolve our cybersecurity capabilities, including an improved response plan.

### **Deliver an online Council Tax portal**

Use technology to improve efficiency and promote the adoption of initiatives such as e-billing and direct debit payments.

Use the technology to reduce costs and administrative overheads.

The Portal will be device agnostic, intuitive and easy to use.

### **Review our Contact Centre and Unified Communications platform provision**

We will review the provision of our current contact centre and UC platform, including UC services such as Voice, Instant Message, Presence and Video.

### **Maximise the use of Microsoft 365**

Evaluate all elements of our Microsoft subscription. We aim to support new innovation and smarter ways of working. We will find new opportunities for staff and for our citizens.

### **Printing and scanning review**

We will continue with the work we undertook 5 years ago. We will continue to rationalise the number of end devices and further reduce our print volumes.

### **Online payments**

We will implement an online payment system which will allow the Council to offer a wider range of services online.

The new system will make it simpler to collect and manage payments ensuring our customers can pay with confidence, no matter how they wish to pay - online, by phone or in person.