St Albans City and District Council Digital and Information & Communication Technology Strategy, 2021-2024
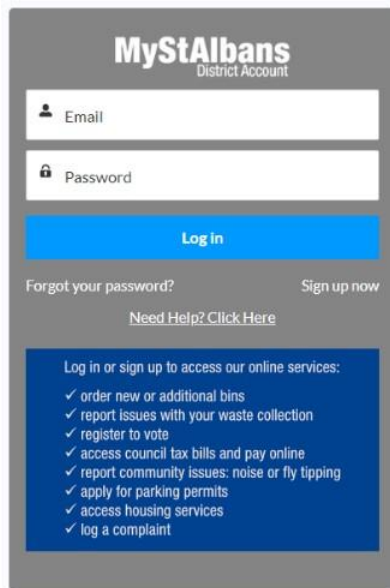
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Background

The Council has been focussed on digital transformation since 2017. Our previous

digital and information & communication technology (ICT) strategy led to the implementation of:

• The '**MyStAlbans'** District Account for customers, residents, and businesses;
• Our on-line booking solution to support the delivery of services to residents;
• Redesign of our website;
• Modern desktop and server infrastructure to support the organisation.

Our on-line citizen account has over 45,000 active households signed up as of January 2022.

Around 2,300 transactions per month are being processed through the account. We are confident that this indicates a widespread willingness of residents and customers to engage online with the Council, and indicates we are in a strong position to take the next steps towards becoming a more digital council.

Introduction

The Council is embarking on a Council-wide transformation programme to deliver a new operating model as an 'Adaptative Council'.

This strategy supports the delivery of an Adaptative Council focusing on People, Process, Technology and Place.

In a post COVID-19 era how we work and deliver services to residents and customers has changed.

Many services can be delivered from places other than the office. As we move towards the mid-twenties – we need to re-evaluate our relationship with place with a more agile mindset. This increased flexibility has the potential to improve how services are delivered as well as providing a better work life balance for the workforce.

More flexible proven solutions are now available that offer more choices for how, when and where we work.
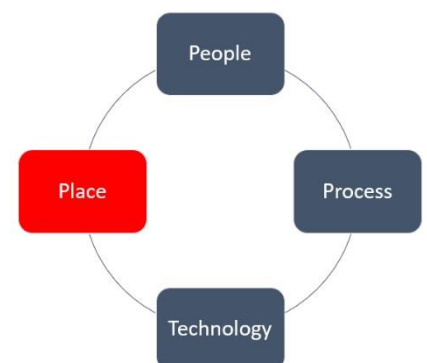
There are, of course, challenges to working in a more agile manner. Our Digital and ICT strategy reflects this and puts in place programmes of work to reduce these challenges.

Document Purpose

Our Digital and ICT Strategy for the next 3 years will focus on our corporate values. These are: being Trusted, Cost Effective, Confident, Caring and Working Together, with the customer experience being at the heart.

The strategy aligns our Digital and ICT goals with the objectives of the Council's 'Building our Future' programme.

We are committed to signing up to the Local Digital Declaration which is about us working with central government and other local authorities to:

- design services that best meet the needs of our residents;
- challenging the technology market to offer the flexible tools and services we need;
- protect residents' privacy and security;
- deliver better value for money.

It is also about making the best use of the technology we have and having the confidence to replace technology which is no longer fit for purpose.

Resources and Project Management

Delivery of the Digital and ICT Strategy will be based on business cases supported by business and customer data, user research and financial assessment.

Resources for both Digital and ICT projects, including project management, will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

We will:

- Pursue national funding opportunities where available to supplement business cases.
- Seek to share costs with partners and drive return on investment, whilst adhering to procurement standards.

Delivery of these projects alongside day-to-day work will require flexible, cross-departmental working.

The Councils 'Building our Future' programme will oversee the delivery of projects to ensure outcomes align with our corporate aims and objectives. Team Leaders, Managers and Project Managers will all support the delivery of projects by working together.

Managers will need to ensure that annual Business Planning considers our digital ambitions, and that resourcing (budget and project capacity) is considered as part of the Council's business planning and budget setting process.

Our Digital Ambitions

- **Digital by default:** If a transaction can be done digitally then it should be done digitally. For both staff and residents, we will invest in our website and our online channels to meet our customer's needs and then target our resources more effectively to help those who cannot access digital channels.
- **Customer First:** using data we will better understand our customers' needs and design simple and effective services to meet them.
- **Invest in digital:** where digital tools will improve the customer experience and it is cost effective to do so.
- **Customer Self-Serve:** we will redesign services with a view to achieving services available 24 hour a day.
- **Think Digital:** we will create a 'digital mindset' with staff and councillors, so they are confident and able to use self-serve systems.
- **Collaboration:** we will work with partners to embrace new technology, making our services more effective and efficient.
- **Pursue funding opportunities:** we will seek funding opportunities to improve to transform our services into digital channels.
- **Cost effective:** We will review the cost benefits of our systems to ensure they continue to provide value for money and where they do not, we will seek alternative solutions.
- **Security:** we will ensure our services are secure and compliant with data protection and other regulations.
- **Sustainable:** we will work to reduce our carbon footprint across all areas.

Digital Transformation Principles

The following Digital Transformation Principles support delivery of our Digital Ambitions:

1. **Digital by default:** If a process can be digitised it should be with support for users to move to the digitalised channel.
2. **Data driven design**: Use the data we are collecting to create customer journeys and feedback to support continuous improvement.
3. **Productivity through simplicity**: Efficient process redesign will improve both the customer experience and the Council's overall efficiency.
4. **Accessibility:** Services will be designed for inclusivity wherever possible, with assisted delivery options put in place for complex user needs and for our non-online residents.
5. **Data protection:** At the heart of all service redesign is the need to keep our services secure.
6. **Platform centric:** Front line services should either use or integrate into the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform for seamless customer delivery.
7. **Investment:** Our funding must be pragmatic and see a measurable return on investment.
8. **Develop a digital mindset:** We will embed an open culture that values, incentivises and expects digital ways of working from every member of our workforce. This means sharing our plans and experience, working collaboratively with other organisations and reusing good practice.
9. **Seeking alternative funding sources**: The Council will openly pursue national funding opportunities wherever possible.
10. **Sustainability:** In an always on world, we must play our part in combatting the climate emergency to reduce our energy consumption. We will look to choose technology partners that share this vision and will work with us to seek and implement tangible solutions for energy use.

Customer Driven

Digital First

Most modern residents and businesses want to transact with us at their convenience, and we will look to fulfil that need via self-service for standard transactions.

Our Customer Services Team will provide support for those individuals who cannot access our online services, have complex needs or issues that cannot easily be resolved through online channels.

To support resident self-service, we will establish a communication and promotional campaign, working with staff and partner organisations to encourage and support residents to transact online wherever possible.

We will also develop more service channels such as webchat and social media feeds into our Customer Services Team.
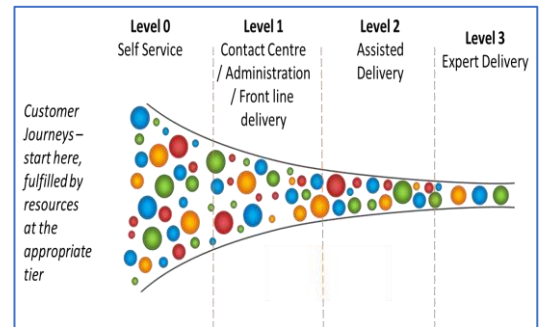
Customer Journeys

We will ensure the customer experience is central to the service offering. To do this we will develop our customer relationship management (CRM) offering so the customer moves seamlessly through the different contact levels as appropriate.

Using a CRM system across the organisation will also allow us to better track and monitor customer enquiries, quickly understand changes in customer demand and use customer data to make improvements in service delivery.

Service Marketing

Take up for the '**MyStAlbans'** district account has significantly increased over the last 18 months (up 136% since April 2020). However, moving more complex transactions on-line will mean that we need to promote the on-line first approach. We still find customers surprised that many Council processes are available online.

To increase awareness of our online offering we will:

- Bring in marketing resources either through targeted skills recruitment or via outsourcing to help us promote services as they are introduced. Costs for

service marketing will be built into future business cases so they are included in the return-on-investment calculations.

Democracy for Residents

2020 has seen a sea-change in how the democratic process can work. The move to on-line meetings offers not only sustainability benefits in the reduction of travel and power requirements, but also enables greater accessibility and social inclusion benefits for our residents.

However, face-to-face service is still a requirement for many; to support this we have already invested in tools to enable public meetings to be attended both online and in person to maximise accessibility and support resident; hybrid meetings. We will continue to look at what tools will further support hybrid meetings.

Councillor Services

For councillors we will:

- Simplify the councillor experience by consolidating tools and implement single-sign-on where possible.
- Continue with a 'paperless first' approach to the issuing of committee agendas, including Part II papers in line with our internal 'Working Paperless' approach and sustainability goals.

Security

Cyber Security and Data Protection is at the core of how we build our digital services and is essential in maintaining customer confidence in our services.

True security needs technology, business processes, staff and place to be working in harmony and our approach will be inclusive of these four areas.

Technology
- We will monitor for new threats and adapt our security posture to deter and resist attacks.
- Where necessary and appropriate, we will seek investment in new technology to limit cyber exposure.
- We will continue to improve our asset management processes to ensure unused assets are returned and reused in an appropriate timescale.
- Move to a multi-factor authentication process for all services.

Processes
- Maintain compulsory accreditations such as PCI, Public Sector Network (PSN) and Cyber Essentials Plus across the client and infrastructure environments.
- Develop and implement an 'Application Charter' to ensure that the application estate remains secure and the necessary funding is in place to maintain compliance.
- Work with all departments to ensure that the Council's digital processes are technically secure and comply with General Data Protection Requirements (GDPR).

People
- Work closely with all users of our network services to ensure that they are trained in operating systems in a safe and secure way.
- We will actively use resources such as the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) toolkit to build organisational cyber resilience across all staff levels.
- Introduction of constructive cyber user-testing to test our organisation cyber capabilities and work with the business areas on improvements.

Place

- Ensure that the office space is technically secure.
- Support people to maintain their personal workplace security regardless of location.

New ways of working

The workplace and the way we work has changed considerably over the past decade. The Council has adapted well to these challenges providing dedicated devices and non-physical voice services to allow for complete flexibility of where people work. Work is what you do not the place that you do it.

COVID-19 has accelerated the need to work with more agility and to remove barriers that limit flexibility.

Over the next 3 years we will concentrate on reducing the barriers to successful agile working for example by digitising physical documents and replacing applications that do not support remote working. We will:

Technology

- **Improve the network provision** to support greater home working efficiency and productivity.
- Develop an **Application Charter** which sets out a joint approach between ICT and each business area to ensure applications remain secure and fit for purpose and maximise the use of all available functionality and automation.
- **Move services to the cloud**, where appropriate, to improve availability and performance.
- Further develop our **Digital Toolset** and expand the use of our existing tools including the Microsoft stack to really work our assets hard. This will include the **review of our digital platform, Salesforce,** to ensure continued value for money whilst remaining fit for purpose.
- Introduce **Digital Mailroom technology** to support the handling of print and post requirements in an agile workplace, and to support the further reduction of physical printers and printing in our offices.
- Use appropriate **automation to increase productivity.**

Process
- Digitisation of physical documents/fiche (subject to business case approval).
- Replacement of applications which only offer physical solutions.

- Introduce e-signatures.
- Actively using the service review function to:
  - Look at process efficiency.
  - Eliminate duplication and waste and ensuing value for money.
  - Collect data from the service review process to support digital project prioritisation (effort and spend).
  - Using this data to support transformation of services based of need.

- Develop our approach to automation solutions to support productivity gains.
- Utilise procurement efficiencies wherever possible to maximise return on investment.

People

- Encourage staff to constantly challenge how they are working and look for ways to improve.
- Support staff to develop a digital skillset to maximise productivity.
- Focus on recruitment of staff who have the necessary digital skills.
- Ensuring people have the equipment they need at the right time and in the right location.

Place

- Implement tools to manage the office workspace capacity for maximum productivity and support future outbreak management learning from the Covid experience.
- Support the fit out of all meeting rooms with suitable technology to enable collaboration both in and out of the office.
- Work closely with staff to set up their home environment for maximum productivity and workplace wellbeing

Technology Enablers

Our technical roadmap underpins the delivery of this strategy.

Server Estate
- In late 2020 the server infrastructure was completely replaced. Unless a significant change in capacity is needed, we expect no further action to be taken within the scope of this strategy.

Network
- Migrate Public Sector Network (PSN) reliant services away from the PSN network using alternative network access solutions to simplify the solution and reduce costs.
- Replace Wide Area Network (WAN) with Software Defined Wide Area Network (SDWAN) to allow for a more flexible approach to capacity management and disaster recovery.
- Review options for the retirement of the on-site computer room.
- Complete the remaining Local Area Network replacement programme.
- Handle the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) retirement notification, working with the business to review their use of PSTN (alarms etc) and put in place appropriate alternative solutions.

Voice
- Create a Voice strategy covering:
    - The use of Microsoft Teams and the 8x8 telephony system; establish a roadmap for voice and collaboration services post 2023.
    - Development of 8x8 telephony services in the Contact Centre to bring in social medial channels and payment solutions that comply with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS).
    - A review of our mobile phone offering to ensure the solution remains fit for purpose and provides value for money, including re-evaluating the use of 'Bring Your Own Devices'.

Infrastructure Services
- Move file shares to SharePoint, to improve document management control, and revisit archiving solutions.
- Review the archiving solution to increase customer satisfaction.

Client Services

- Replace 250 laptop devices as they reach a 4-year life span.
- Review the way staff remotely access centralised systems to improve to the remote access experience offered (Thin Client).

Sustainability

The government has published a paper [Greening Government: ICT and Digital Service strategy 2020-2025.](#)

This paper sets out a range of objectives for ICT to consider that impact on strategy, but its primary objective is set out below:

"*Sustainability is central to the procurement, design and management of digital services and ICT to reduce costs and carbon. Wherever possible, waste is removed from the system, for example redundant services, duplicate files, legacy ICT systems and hardware, promoting shared systems and services across HMG*"

We will:

- Commit to following the guidelines on Greening Government where possible.
- Actively promote the removal of digital litter across our user estate. This will be reflected in projects such as SharePoint and in our approach to archiving and data deletion programmes across the organisation.

High-level indicative timeline for delivery of strategy

St Albans City & District Council

	2021	2022	2023

Security (Desktop)
- Office 2013 → Office 2020
- Apply 20H2 update
- 100 Windows Rebuilt 20H3?
- 100 Laptops replaced (20H3?)
- 100 Windows Rebuilt 20H3?
- 100 Laptops replaced (20H3?)

Security (Infrastructure)
- Server Firewalling improvements
- Server 2012 → Server 2016+
- SQL 2012 → SQL 2016+

Security (Application)
- User Security Program Development & Impementation
- Phishing Toolkit
- Endpoint Reactive services
- E-Mail sandbox
- SIEM → SIEM replacement
- PCI-PAL
- Payments 3DS2
- Civica Image Store Move to SQL
- BAU Application Upgrades

Technology Enablers
- Sharepoint for Intranet → Sharepoint for Intranet P2
- ISP Upgrade → 350mb ISP
- Retire PSN Network
- LAN Replacement
- PSTN Retirement Plan → 2025
- Move To Sharepoint for document control and Archive options
- Voice Strategy → Implementaion of Voice options

New ways of Working
- Garden Waste → GW Intergration
- Develop Marketing Approach
- Market (Phase 1) → Market (Phase 2)
- Hybrid Meetings
- CRM – Phase 1 (Front Office) → CRM Phase 2 (Back Office)
- Parking → Parking Application Replacement
- Planning Application Upgrade
- Office Fit out
- Automation → Implementation & Deployment
- Supporting business areas to develop approach & business cases to address physical document/ application constraints → Implementation
- Implementation of Desk Booking System
- DVLA replacement → 2025
- Digital signature system
- Grounds maintenance asset replacement
- Staci Replacement
- Landlords Portal migration to cloud
- ModernGov upgrade
- Finance modules
- Review of Citizen Access
- Housing Application Web Front End → Review of Housing Application system
- Evolve the existing Hybrid Mail solution into Digital Mail Room

Appendix A: Principles of our Application Charter

Our Application estate needs to be fit for purpose. Our definition for being fit for purpose covers these 5 areas:

- Functionality
  - Does the Application offer self-serve (either for the internal or external customer)?
  - Are we making full use of all components? If the answer is no, is the cost of the components limiting us from using these components?
- Security
  - Does the application meet our security standards?
  - Are the providers of the application keeping the application up to date on the latest or latest -1 version of all components within 3 years of release of a component?
- Performance
  - Does the application require considerable infrastructure to perform well?
  - Does the application work well when used remotely?
- Cost Effective
  - Have we benchmarked tested the costs against market in the last 5 years?
  - Have the results of the benchmark test proven that the product is cost effective?
  - Are upgrades included in the maintenance costs? If not – how expensive are the upgrades and are they off-set by low support costs
  - Are supplier day rates high?
- Account Management.
  - Is the supplier pro-active about coming forward with suggestions on how to reduce costs/increase our usage of the product (for our gain)?
  - How quickly can the supplier react to the requests for work/upgrades etc

If the application scores poorly against the above criteria, we need to have the confidence to replace it.