

Digital Strategy 2026 - 2030

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Digital Strategy 2026 - 2030

Foreword

Digital technology is central to how Middlesbrough Council delivers services and supports our communities. To meet rising expectations and maintain reliable services, we must ensure our digital systems remain secure, modern and accessible.

This Digital Strategy sets out our direction for the coming years. It supports the ambitions of the Council Plan 2026–29 building a successful and ambitious town, improving wellbeing, strengthening resilient communities and delivering best value for residents. It provides a clear framework for maintaining a stable digital environment, improving processes and ensuring services are easy to use and available when people need them.

Our approach is practical and sustainable. We will prioritise improvements that offer the greatest benefit, support consistent service delivery and help our workforce operate effectively. By continuing to improve our systems, processes and digital capability, we will ensure the Council remains equipped to meet future needs and opportunities.

We are committed to providing secure, accessible and user-friendly digital services that residents can trust, and this strategy is an important part of achieving that.

Erik Scollay

Chief Executive

Chris Cooke

Elected Mayor of Middlesbrough

Contents

1.	Introduction	5
2.	Our Vision	6
3.	Purpose of this Strategy	7
4.	Current Position	8
5.	Security, Information Governance and Strategic Alignment	10
6.	Residents and Public Value	12
7.	Technology Governance & the Technical Design Authority (TDA).....	13
8.	Strategic Objectives and Outcomes	14
9.	Utilising Technology.....	19
10.	Delivery Approach & Roadmap.....	23
11.	Strategic Alignment.....	36
12.	Conclusion	37
13.	Glossary	38

Executive Summary

The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 sets out Middlesbrough Council’s updated approach to modernising its technology, infrastructure and digital services. It provides a clear and focused framework for maintaining secure, resilient and well-governed systems that support reliable services and long-term sustainability.

The strategy reflects national expectations for cyber security and the need for modern, consistent and accessible digital services. It ensures that investment in technology continues to deliver safe operations, value for money and effective services for residents and businesses.

Our vision is to create a digitally confident organisation supported by modern systems, efficient processes and a capable workforce. By simplifying and standardising our digital environment, the Council will improve productivity and provide user-friendly, accessible services for all residents.

The strategy is built around four themes:

1. Secure & Modern Foundations – maintaining a reliable, resilient and standardised technology estate.
2. Simpler Processes & Safe Automation – improving processes and applying automation responsibly where it adds value.
3. Workforce Digital and Security Capability – ensuring staff have the skills and confidence to work effectively and securely.
4. Digital Platform, Customer Experience and Inclusion – improving the consistency, accessibility and usability of digital services.

This strategy provides a clear, forward-looking approach to digital improvement that supports high-quality services and maintains public trust.

1. Introduction

The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 is an updated strategy that sets out Middlesbrough Council's approach to maintaining a secure, modern and well-governed digital environment. It reflects the increasing importance of resilient infrastructure, clear governance and accessible digital services in supporting effective public service delivery.

The strategy is shaped by key responsibilities, including national expectations for cyber security, requirements for reliable and consistent systems, and the need to provide services that are accessible, transparent and offer value for money. These drivers ensure the Council continues to operate safely, efficiently and in line with good practice.

This strategy supports the ambitions of the Council Plan 2026–29, a successful and ambitious town, a healthy place, safe and resilient communities and delivering best value by ensuring the Council has the technology, systems and capabilities needed to deliver consistent, dependable and accessible services.

The strategy has been developed through assessment of the Council's current digital environment, input from services, alignment with national guidance and engagement with corporate governance and assurance groups. It provides a clear basis for future decision-making, prioritisation and investment.

2. Our Vision

Our vision is to:

Create a digitally confident organisation where secure, modern technology, high-quality data and efficient processes enable staff to deliver consistent, accessible and high-quality services that residents trust.

We will achieve this by maintaining a simplified, secure and well-governed technology environment supported by good-quality data, streamlined processes and a capable workforce. A strong digital foundation will allow staff to focus on value-adding activity and ensure residents receive timely, reliable and easy-to-use services.

This Digital Strategy will enable better outcomes, improved productivity and more sustainable ways of working. Its success will be evidenced by a simpler and more consistent resident experience, with fewer repeat contacts and greater trust in council services.

Digital inclusion and accessibility will be integral to everything we deliver, ensuring services remain usable, consistent and equitable for all residents, regardless of their circumstances or preferred contact channel.

Our vision also includes developing the organisation's capability to adopt improved systems and enhanced automation safely, responsibly and only where there is clear evidence of benefit.

3. Purpose of this Strategy

This Digital Strategy sets the Council's direction for the use of digital, data and technology from 2026–2030. It provides a clear framework for how the organisation will modernise safely, responsibly and sustainably, ensuring that digital improvement supports the Council Plan, strengthens service delivery and maintains public trust.

The strategy establishes the priorities, standards, governance expectations and roles needed to maintain a secure, coherent and well-managed digital environment. It sets out how digital decisions will be made, how investment will be prioritised and how the organisation will work collectively to simplify systems, improve consistency and enhance efficiency across services.

An operational delivery plan will sit alongside this strategy. While the strategy sets long-term direction, the delivery plan will outline specific actions, timelines and dependencies, allowing activity to remain flexible and responsive to organisational needs and capacity.

This strategy aligns with the Council Plan and wider corporate policies covering customer experience, information governance, security, data management and organisational improvement. Its purpose is to provide clear digital direction—simplifying systems, supporting resilient infrastructure, improving consistency and building digital capability to ensure services are accessible and efficient. While supported by the Council's AI Policy, the strategy focuses primarily on delivering the core digital aims set out in this document. Any future consideration of emerging technologies will be managed through established assurance frameworks.

Delivery of this strategy depends on improving system consistency, integration and data readiness across priority areas, ensuring that any future digital, automation or platform enhancements operate reliably, securely and in line with agreed standards.

4. Current Position

Middlesbrough Council has committed to improving its digital foundations and recognises the importance of secure, modern and well-governed technology. While progress has been made, the current digital environment remains complex and varied, creating challenges in consistency, sustainability and efficiency. Addressing these areas provides a significant opportunity to improve reliability, strengthen security and deliver more accessible services for residents.

4.1. Technology Estate

The Council's technology estate has developed over many years, resulting in a mixture of modern cloud platforms, legacy systems and locally procured solutions. This variation leads to duplication and inconsistent integration. Although visibility is improving, continued consolidation and standardisation are needed to reduce complexity, increase sustainability and support a coherent technology environment.

4.2. Processes and Automation

Some services have redesigned processes and introduced early automation, but many workflows still rely on manual tasks and workarounds. Automation delivers value where used, but opportunities remain to streamline service delivery, reduce avoidable effort and improve reliability through clearer process design and well-governed adoption of digital tools.

Data quality varies across systems, creating challenges for integration, automation and contact reduction. Improving data readiness is a key dependency for future digital improvements.

4.3. Workforce Digital and Security Capability

Digital confidence and capability are not yet consistent across the workforce. Leaders and staff require stronger digital and security skills to make full use of modern tools and support new ways of working. Building capability across the organisation is essential to improving productivity and resilience.

4.4. Customer Experience and Inclusion

Residents experience different levels of quality across digital services. While some online journeys work well, others are fragmented or require repeat contact. Many residents also continue to rely on non-digital channels. A more consistent, joined-up and accessible digital platform is needed to support reliable, inclusive and user-centred services.

4.5. Governance and Assurance

ICT has established governance for technology, architecture and assurance, but this is not always applied consistently. Late engagement can lead to duplicated systems, unnecessary complexity and weaker integration. Contract management also varies across services. Stronger governance, clearer ownership and consistent standards are key to maintaining a secure, modern and sustainable technology environment.

Together, these challenges demonstrate the need for a clear, long-term digital direction that strengthens foundations, reduces complexity and enables safe, sustainable modernisation across the organisation.

5. Security, Information Governance and Strategic Alignment

Security and information governance underpin this strategy. The Council will continue to operate transparently and in full compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements to protect systems, information and essential services. A secure and well-managed digital environment is fundamental to maintaining public trust and ensuring services remain reliable and accessible.

This strategy aligns with the Council Plan and wider corporate policies covering customer experience, information governance, data management, security and organisational improvement. This alignment ensures a consistent, joined-up approach where technology, processes and governance work together to support organisational priorities.

Digital improvements delivered through this strategy including the use of modern platforms, workflow, automation and integration will contribute to a more resilient operating environment. Enhancements will be implemented in a way that protects personal information, supports safe service delivery and ensures clear accountability.

Where appropriate, the Council will draw on national guidance and sector best practice to inform decision-making, reduce duplication and ensure a proportionate, evidence-based approach. Digital investment will continue to follow established financial governance, ensuring affordability, value for money and alignment with the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Digital decisions will be documented through established governance routes to ensure clarity, accountability and auditability.

5.1. Digital Principles

The strategy is underpinned by a set of principles that guide digital decision-making across the organisation. These include secure-by-design, lawful and ethical use of technology, evidence-led prioritisation, service-centred design, inclusivity, value for money and continuous improvement.

Standardisation is a key principle. Reducing local variation in systems, processes and data structures supports resilience, reduces cost and enables a sustainable, coherent technology environment.

This Digital Strategy works alongside the Customer Strategy and Information Strategy. While those strategies set out how the Council manages information and engages with residents, this strategy focuses on the technology, capability and governance required to enable and support that work.

5.2. Data Quality as a Critical Dependency

High-quality data is essential for secure integration, consistent service processes, reliable automation and effective digital services. The Council will maintain minimum data standards and ensure clear ownership and stewardship across services.

Data quality improvements will be prioritised where they unlock service benefits, such as reducing avoidable contact, improving processing times and increasing system reliability. Data used for analytics must comply with the Council's Data Management Policy to ensure accuracy, security and consistent handling of information.

5.3. AI Governance

The Council's AI Policy sets the requirements for any future use of emerging digital capabilities, ensuring proposals are transparent, ethical and proportionately governed. The (TDA) will only approve proposals that meet these standards and demonstrate clear data quality, process clarity and integration readiness.

6. Residents

Residents are central to this Digital Strategy, and our approach is focused on improving how people access and experience Council services. Digital will be used to make interactions simpler, quicker and more reliable, supporting residents to get the help or information they need with confidence.

For many residents, digital is the primary way they interact with the Council. Digital services will therefore be intuitive, consistent and easy to use, supported by clear and accessible communication.

We recognise that not all residents are able or choose to use digital services. Telephone and face-to-face routes will remain available and effective, ensuring choice is maintained and no one is excluded.

Trust and confidence will be strengthened through the responsible use of technology, robust cyber security, and clear information about how data is handled and protected. Resident feedback, accessibility needs and local insight will inform ongoing improvements to ensure services continue to meet the needs of our communities.

7. Technology Governance & the Technical Design Authority (TDA)

Strong governance is essential to maintaining a secure, efficient and sustainable technology environment. The Technical Design Authority (TDA) provides the central mechanism for assuring digital and technology decisions, ensuring they align with organisational needs and preventing disconnected or duplicative systems.

Standardisation is a core part of the TDA's remit. By aligning systems, integrations and design patterns to shared standards, the Council reduces complexity, duplication and long-term cost. Standardisation will be applied proportionately, ensuring solutions remain aligned with the Council's strategic architecture.

Local customisation, unsupported solutions and shadow IT will not be permitted where they introduce risk, inconsistency or unnecessary complexity, unless explicitly approved by the TDA.

The TDA ensures:

- coordinated review of proposals to prevent duplication
- consistent use of shared standards and design pattern
- strong security and information governance
- evidence-based investment decisions
- effective lifecycle management to reduce legacy risk
- data readiness for proposals requiring integration
- compliance with the Council's AI Policy for any emerging digital capabilities

This governance structure supports a disciplined, forward-looking approach to digital improvement and ensures that technology decisions remain consistent with service needs, organisational priorities and financial sustainability.

8. Strategic Objectives and Outcomes

These strategic objectives set the long-term direction for digital improvement and provide a framework for prioritisation and investment across the organisation. They are deliberately framed at an enterprise level, focusing on outcomes rather than specific projects, to ensure flexibility, affordability and effective governance over the life of the strategy.

Digital improvements are structured around four strategic objectives that collectively support secure, consistent and efficient services delivered through continuous improvement.

- To simplify the Council's technology estate, reducing risk, cost and complexity while improving resilience and sustainability
- To improve efficiency, consistency and service reliability by redesigning processes and applying automation in a controlled, evidence led manner
- To build a confident, capable and security aware workforce that can adopt, sustain and continuously improve digital ways of working.
- To ensure digital services are designed and delivered in line with Digital by Design, informed by user insight, accessibility standards and evidence, ensuring services are intuitive, inclusive and continuously improved over time.

Achieving these objectives is dependent on data quality being sufficient to support secure integration, automation and improved digital systems.

The following section sets out the priorities for each of these objectives and expected detailed outcomes.

Theme 1: Secure & Modern Foundations

Objective: To simplify the Council's technology estate, reducing risk, cost and complexity while improving resilience and sustainability.

Priorities

- Maintain a single authoritative register of systems.
- Reduce duplication, consolidating products to improve efficiency.
- Strengthen standardisation across platforms, integrations, data structures and design patterns.
- Use secure, cloud first and standards-based platforms wherever appropriate.
- Improve integrations and architectural consistency across all services.
- Proactively manage system lifecycles to reduce legacy risk.
- Strengthen ICT governance through documented processes, change control, architectural assurance and security oversight.
- Ensure ICT ownership of major system contracts and mandatory ICT oversight of digital procurements, with clear joint contract management arrangements.
- Migrate priority datasets into Microsoft Fabric as a secure, scalable analytical platform to improve data availability and consistency.

Expected Outcomes

- Lower cost and reduced technical complexity.
- Improved reliability, stability and resilience of critical systems.
- Stronger security posture supported by consistent governance and change control.
- Reduced support burden and clearer lifecycle management.
- Better supplier performance and organisational assurance through ICT led contract oversight.
- A more consistent, seamless experience for staff and residents.
- Increased assurance that digital services and suppliers are secure, compliant and well-governed.
- Improved data availability and consistency through Microsoft Fabric as the central analytics platform.

Theme 2: Simpler Processes & Safe Automation

Objective: To improve efficiency, consistency and service reliability by redesigning processes and applying automation in a controlled, evidence led manner.

Priorities

- Redesign processes collaboratively with services to remove unnecessary steps, manual workarounds and duplication.
- Introduce automation only where processes have been simplified, standardised and are operationally ready.
- Expand automation and workflow capabilities where evidence demonstrates clear operational benefit.
- Use emerging digital capabilities safely and responsibly, aligned with governance and organisational risk.
- Create reusable workflow, form and integration components to reduce duplication and accelerate delivery.
- Embed transparent impact measurement to inform prioritisation, investment and continuous improvement.

Expected Outcomes

- Faster, more reliable and more consistent service delivery processes.
- Reduced manual effort, fewer workarounds and lower operational friction across services.
- Safe, well governed adoption of automation and digital capabilities.
- Clearer evidence of benefit, enabling improved return on investment and better prioritisation of future change.
- More predictable, scalable and sustainable processes that reduce demand failure, avoidable contact and repeat customer requests.
- Policy compliant use of emerging digital capabilities, monitored and reviewed through established governance.

Theme 3: Workforce Digital, Data and Security Capability

Objective: To build a confident, capable and security aware workforce that can adopt, sustain and continuously improve digital ways of working.

Priorities

- Strengthen baseline digital skills to support effective use of core tools and platforms.
- Build digital confidence among leaders so they can champion change and maximise the value of digital investment.
- Provide targeted training, guidance and practical support to embed consistent digital, data and security practices across the organisation.
- Develop internal ICT and digital capability to reduce dependency on external suppliers and strengthen organisational resilience.
- Embed continuous improvement approaches within services to support sustained adoption, reduce rework and drive ongoing optimisation.
- Strengthen security awareness and behaviours to ensure all staff understand their role in protecting information, systems and residents' data.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased workforce confidence and competence in using digital tools, data and secure working practices.
- Improved productivity, consistency and quality of work across services.
- Greater leadership ownership and advocacy of digital change.
- Reduced reliance on external suppliers through strengthened internal capability and knowledge transfer.
- A more resilient, digitally ready and security aware organisation able to adapt to ongoing change.
- A workforce confident in identifying opportunities for digital improvement and capable of adopting new tools safely and effectively.

Theme 4: Digital Platform, Customer Experience and Inclusion

Objective: To design and deliver intuitive, inclusive and continuously improving digital services, guided by Digital by Design principles, user insight, accessibility standards and evidence.

Priorities

- Develop a modular, standardised digital platform that supports end-to-end service journeys.
- Strengthen accessibility, usability and design consistency across all online services to meet recognised standards and support all residents.
- Ensure appropriate non-digital access routes remain available and effective for those who cannot or prefer not to use digital channels.
- Improve customer insight, analytics and feedback loops to guide prioritisation and service redesign.
- Review opportunities for enhanced digital systems within a wider integrated ecosystem.
- Introduce emerging digital capabilities through small, evidence led pilots aligned to governance and organisational risk appetite.
- Standardise digital components, design patterns and user journeys to reduce variation and improve quality.

Expected Outcomes

- A more coherent, seamless and joined up customer experience across all channels.
- Increased appropriate use of digital self-service through simpler, more intuitive journeys.
- Improved accessibility and inclusion for all residents.
- Greater service consistency and reliability through standardised design patterns.
- Better organisational decision-making supported by stronger customer insight and analytics.
- Transparent and accessible use of emerging digital capabilities, with assisted and non-digital routes maintained for those who need them.

9. Utilising Technology

Technology acts as a core enabler of modern public services. ICT is responsible for providing secure, reliable and future-ready platforms, tools and technical standards that support the organisation to operate effectively. Services remain responsible for the data they hold, the processes they operate and the decisions they make, while ICT provides the digital foundations, governance and assurance that enable those services to function safely and efficiently.

All digital solutions must align to a coherent ICT architecture to ensure consistency, interoperability and long-term sustainability across the Council's technology estate.

This model ensures clarity of ownership and accountability, reduces duplication and risk, and supports sustainable digital improvement across the organisation.

9.1. Modern, Flexible and Consistent Digital Working

Modern working practices depend on reliable, structured and well-managed digital tools. ICT will provide and maintain the collaboration platforms, devices and technical standards required for effective use. Services remain accountable for how information is used, maintained and organised within those tools, ensuring consistency and compliance.

9.2. A Secure and Well-Governed Digital Environment

ICT is responsible for the technical controls, security configuration, identity management, devices and platforms that protect the organisation. Services remain responsible for the appropriate use of data, operational decision-making and compliance with policies and governance frameworks. This clear division ensures technology risk is managed centrally while operational data is managed within services.

9.3. Automation, Workflow and Streamlined Processes

ICT provides the automation tools, workflow platforms and integration capabilities that allow processes to be digitised and streamlined. Services are responsible for defining their processes, agreeing business rules and validating outputs. This partnership approach ensures that automation supports redesigned processes. Delivery models will be determined on a case-by-case basis in line with corporate governance arrangements.

9.4. Improving Customer Experience and Transparency

ICT enables the digital platform, online journeys, integrations and data flows that support a coherent customer experience. Services retain ownership of content, business logic and operational decisions, ensuring accuracy and relevance while ICT ensures the digital layer is modern, consistent and well supported.

9.5. Building Workforce Digital Confidence and Capability

ICT provides the tools, standards, guidance and support that enable staff to work digitally and safely. Services are responsible for embedding these ways of working within their teams, supporting adoption, addressing resistance to change and participating in skills development.

This shared approach ensures digital improvement is sustained through continuous learning and service ownership, with responsibility embedded across the organisation rather than centralised within ICT.

9.6. Reducing Complexity and System Duplication

The Council will reduce complexity and duplication by standardising platforms, consolidating systems, and managing technology lifecycles proactively. ICT leads the strategic direction, governance and architecture to ensure the estate remains secure, coherent and sustainable. Services play a critical role by aligning local practices to corporate standards, retiring redundant systems, and engaging early on any new digital needs.

This shared approach lowers cost, reduces risk and strengthens resilience across the organisation.

9.7. AI Roles & Responsibilities

ICT is responsible for:

- Enterprise architecture and standards setting and assuring the design principles, patterns and data structures that keep the estate coherent.
- Technology governance and assurance approving all digital/system procurements; enforcing change control, security and integration standards.
- Lifecycle and rationalisation consolidating products, managing end of life, and planning sustainable replacements.
- Platforms and core services operating and evolving shared platforms, identity, devices and integrations.
- Strategic contracts owning and managing all major system contracts, supplier performance and technical/commercial risk.
- Maintaining the AI Policy as a governance framework for emerging digital capabilities, coordinating information governance/security assurance and confirming monitoring arrangements prior to go-live.

Services are responsible for:

- Early engagement involving ICT at the outset of any system change, procurement or process redesign.
- Business ownership defining service outcomes, requirements and process rules; leading adoption and benefits realisation.
- Operational use and data ensuring data quality and consistent use of systems within their service areas.
- Standards alignment adhering to corporate architecture, security and design standards.
- Ensuring any use of emerging digital capabilities is governed responsibly, with clear business rules, transparency and proportional oversight.

Procurement is responsible for:

- Compliant, value driven sourcing — structuring procurements and contracts with clear SLAs/KPIs, protections and exit provisions.
- Supplier governance support, partnering with ICT and services on performance reviews and commercial changes.
- Ensuring AI related procurements include policy conformance, transparency obligations, testing/evaluation rights, audit access, data portability and exit provisions.

Shared commitments

ICT, services and Procurement will ensure that all digital investments:

- follow agreed governance and assurance
- are architecturally and security aligned
- have clear ownership and measurable benefits
- retire duplication as new capabilities are adopted; and
- no deployment of advanced or automated capabilities proceeds without proportionate assurance, monitoring and governance.

ICT will approve all digital procurements, own and manage all major system contracts, and work jointly with services and Commercial/Procurement to deliver secure, standardised and value for money technology.

10. Delivery Approach & Roadmap

Delivery is based on continuous improvement, with manageable enhancements prioritised by evidence, impact and capacity. Delivery and investment decisions will be aligned with the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan and financial governance processes to ensure affordability, value for money and long-term sustainability. The strategy focuses on achievable steps that strengthen foundations and enable informed future decisions.

This strategy reflects national digital policy direction, including principles set out in government digital and data strategies, while remaining grounded in local priorities, governance and capacity.

10.1. Principles for Delivery

Middlesbrough Council will deliver digital change in a way that strengthens public value, safeguards residents and builds organisational resilience. These principles apply across the whole Council and its partnerships, setting clear expectations for how technology is designed, selected and operated.

In practice, this means ICT applies a consistent and transparent approach to digital change, including:

1. Clear definition of need

ICT works with services to understand the problem to be solved, statutory requirements, essential outcomes and operational constraints, ensuring decisions are driven by *needs*, not preferences.

2. Review of the current position

Existing processes, data quality, system dependencies and operational readiness are assessed to identify constraints, risks and improvement opportunities.

3. Development and assessment of options

ICT identifies viable options and evaluates each collaboratively with services against:

- ability to meet essential service requirements
- operational impact and readiness
- benefits, risks and cost
- interoperability and alignment with standards
- accessibility, security and information governance
- sustainability, support and lifecycle considerations

4. Collaborative decision-making

ICT will not impose technology that prevents or undermines the delivery of core functions. Decisions are made jointly with services, informed by evidence, feasibility and organisational standards.

5. Transparent governance and assurance

Agreed decisions are recorded through established governance and TDA processes, ensuring traceability, accountability and organisational assurance.

This approach ensures that technology choices address service needs, not organisational preference, and that decisions are transparent, explainable and aligned to governance, security and operational assurance standards.

Strategic Commitments

Digital decisions will follow a consistent approach:

- Council Plan led: Digital investment will enable Council Plan outcomes and statutory duties.
- Security and trust by design: Security, privacy and accessibility embedded from the outset.
- Needs before solutions: Business need and outcomes defined before selecting technology.
- One Council architecture: Solutions must align with enterprise architecture for interoperability and reuse.

- Standardise and simplify: Reduce duplication, cost and technical debt by standardising before customising.
- Process first, then tech: Processes redesigned where needed to ensure technology delivers maximum value.
- Evidence and transparency: Decisions based on transparent appraisal and recorded for assurance.
- Safe adoption of emerging tech: New capabilities used responsibly, proportionately and with accountability.
- Joint ownership: ICT, services and Procurement share responsibility for outcomes; early ICT engagement is mandatory.
- Value and sustainability: Prioritise whole life value, resilience and planned exit to avoid lock-in and legacy risk.
- Assurance: No solution will be approved or imposed where it would prevent delivery of statutory or operational functions.

10.2. Monitoring Progress and Benefits

Progress will be monitored using a balanced set of measures, including service performance, system resilience, security assurance, reduction in duplication and customer experience. Benefits will be tracked proportionately to ensure digital improvements deliver measurable organisational value.

Monitoring will include data quality readiness, platform stability, workforce capability, process reliability and customer insight.

Improvements will be tracked through theme level KPIs and reviewed through established digital and corporate governance arrangements.

Progress will be reported to Executive and Audit Committee as required.

Theme 1: KPI - Secure & Modern Foundations

- Reduction in system duplication and legacy risk
- Platform stability, resilience and availability
- Cyber and information assurance outcomes
- Lifecycle visibility and control
- Moving priority datasets into Microsoft Fabric as a secure, scalable analytical platform, enabling consistent data models, reliable reporting and improved data availability.

KPI	Description	Target
System Rationalisation Progress	Completion of a Council-wide systems amnesty to establish a full and authoritative baseline of all systems, including system count, cost, usage, technical status and ownership.	Baseline established by 2026
	Reduction in overlapping or duplicative systems to simplify the estate, measured by changes in system count and/or system cost compared to the established baseline.	Directional reduction from baseline following audit.
Estate Simplification	Reduction in the number of different tools used across the Council, supporting standardisation and reduced complexity.	Baseline established in 2026
Platform Stability	Availability and uptime of systems supporting critical services.	≥ 98.5%
Security Posture Improvement	Progress against cyber security controls, audits and assurance recommendations.	Year on year improvement
Lifecycle Visibility	Percentage of systems with documented lifecycle status (including	80% by 2028

	support arrangements, dependencies and planned exit where applicable).	
M365 Adoption Improvement	Increased use of approved, standardised Microsoft tools and reduction in unapproved or shadow systems.	Baseline established 2026; improvement tracked annually
Data Ownership Coverage	Percentage of priority systems with a named Information Asset Owner and documented data ownership.	95% by 2027
Data Migration to Fabric	Percentage of priority datasets migrated into Microsoft Fabric as the Council's central analytical platform, subject to data quality readiness and contractual constraints.	Baseline 2026 → progress tracked annually (subject to contract notice periods and data extract readiness)

Theme 2: KPI - Simpler Processes & Safe Automation

- Evidence of process simplification and reduced manual effort
- Reliability and consistency of automated workflows
- Assurance outcomes for emerging digital capabilities aligned to policy
- Demonstrated benefits realised from automation initiatives

KPI	Description	Target
Processes Redesigned	Percentage of priority processes redesigned and simplified before automation or system enhancement, based on an agreed corporate definition of “priority process”.	Baseline established 2026; up to 50% by 2030
Manual Effort Reduction	Reduction in manual steps within redesigned processes, measured post-redesign and verified with services.	Directional improvement evidenced per process.
Automation Reliability	Percentage of automated tasks and workflows operating without manual intervention, excluding planned controls and assurance checkpoints.	≥ 80%
Governance Compliance	Compliance with agreed governance, assurance and policy requirements for automation and emerging digital capabilities.	100% compliance
Pilot Success Rate	Number of automation or digital improvement pilots demonstrating measurable benefit against agreed success criteria.	2–3 by 2029
Process Benefit Realisation	Evidence of time, cost and/or customer experience improvements delivered through process redesign and automation.	Reported annually through benefits reporting

Theme 3: KPI - Workforce Digital, Data and Security Capability

- Workforce digital confidence and adoption
- Completion of relevant training and guidance
- Strength of security behaviours and compliance
- Reduced dependency on external suppliers

KPI	Description	Target
Digital Confidence Improvement	Improvement in staff readiness and confidence to adopt redesigned processes and enhanced digital tools, measured through agreed workforce readiness indicators.	Baseline established 2026; improvement tracked annually
Digital Skills Training Completion	Percentage of workforce completing core digital training, including Microsoft 365 and security awareness.	80% workforce; 100% leadership
Security Behaviour Maturity	Improvement in security behaviours measured through phishing simulations, policy compliance and incident reporting.	Baseline 2026; year-on-year improvement
Adoption of Standardised Tools	Reduction in reliance on ad hoc tools, spreadsheet-driven workarounds and non-standard solutions where approved platforms are available.	Baseline established 2026; improvement tracked annually
Reduction in External Dependency	Evidence of increased internal capability and reduced reliance on external consultants.	Directional reduction reported annually
Digital Literacy Training Completion	Workforce understanding of safe, ethical and policy-compliant use of digital and emerging technologies.	80% workforce; 100% leadership
System Adoption Readiness	Organisational readiness to adopt new systems or redesigned processes, including skills, capacity and change readiness.	Baseline established 2026; improvement year on year

Theme 4: KPI - Digital Platform, Customer Experience and Inclusion

- Accessibility and inclusion outcomes
- Levels of appropriate digital self-service
- Reduction in avoidable or repeat contact
- Improved resident confidence and trust through clearer communication, greater transparency and more reliable digital services

KPI	Description	Target
Digital Self Service Uptake	Percentage of transactions completed through digital channels where digital is the appropriate route, informed by service design and user need.	Baseline established 2026; up to 40% by 2030
Repeat Contact Reduction	Reduction in the proportion of residents needing multiple contacts to resolve the same issue across priority services.	Directional reduction evidenced in priority services
Customer Effort Score	Measure of how easy it is for residents to complete digital journeys, using agreed customer experience metrics.	Baseline established 2026; improvement tracked annually
Accessibility Compliance	Proportion of new or significantly redesigned digital services meeting accessibility standards.	95% for new services
Feedback Integration	Percentage of digital customer feedback reviewed and acted upon within agreed timescales.	75%
Transparency & Trust Indicator	Resident confidence in using Council digital services, including clarity, reliability and understanding of how data is used.	Year-on-year improvement
Programme Alignment	Planning, sequencing and delivery between digital initiatives and the Customer Strategy.	Year-on-year improvement

These measures will be reviewed through existing digital and corporate board governance arrangements, in line with the Council's governance arrangements, and reported to Committee as appropriate to support assurance and oversight.

10.3. Security, Risk and Assurance

All digital initiatives will be subject to proportionate cyber security assessment, information governance assurance and ongoing risk monitoring throughout their lifecycle. Where artificial intelligence or advanced automation is proposed, enhanced safeguards may be applied in accordance with the Council's governance frameworks. Emerging technologies will be adopted only where risks are understood, mitigated and managed appropriately, and where clear ownership, accountability and oversight are in place.

10.4. Roadmap Overview

The roadmap reflects a continuous improvement approach, with activity sequenced to maximise value, manage change and reduce risk. Across all phases, emphasis will be placed on demonstrating benefit, supporting adoption, addressing resistance to change and learning from delivery to inform subsequent decisions.

Progression through roadmap phases will depend on organisational readiness, data maturity, service capacity and evidence of benefit achieved during earlier activity.

Dependencies and Assumptions

Successful delivery of this strategy depends on:

- Sustainable funding
- Services participation in redesign and governance
- Compliance with TDA and architecture standards
- Ongoing cyber and information security investment
- Workforce participation in digital and security training
- Organisational commitment to simplification and standardisation.

- Data quality readiness and priority integrations (standards defined, ownership agreed, cleansing approach resourced).
- Council Plan and Strategies alignment to sequence quality improvements ahead of digital deployments.

Delivery will be planned and sequenced realistically, based on the capacity of both ICT and services, ensuring activity is achievable and sustainable.

10.5. Measures of Success

This Digital Strategy will support the Council to deliver incremental enhancements that build on existing strengths and make our digital environment more consistent, resilient and secure.

Success will include:

- A simplified and sustainable technology estate, achieved through incremental improvements and better use of existing platforms.
- Reduced system duplication and clearer ownership, delivered through strengthened governance and standardisation.
- A more mature and effectively managed automation pipeline, expanding automation where it adds value without increasing complexity.
- Reduced legacy and technical risk, achieved by gradually modernising systems and improving resilience over time.
- More consistent, accessible and joined up digital journeys, refined through small, iterative enhancements that improve users' experience.

Phase 1 – Foundations and Understanding (2026–2027)

Building clarity, confidence and early value

- Completing and maintaining a single authoritative register of systems to improve transparency and control.
- Improving customer communication and transparency using existing digital channels.
- Identifying service pain points and delivering small, visible improvements to demonstrate early value.
- Introducing early automation and workflow improvements in low-risk, high-volume areas.
- Strengthening data quality, ownership and consistency across services.
- Applying low-risk advanced automation where evidence demonstrates clear benefit.
- Supporting staff through change by providing guidance, engagement and reassurance to reduce resistance and build confidence.
- Begin preparing priority datasets for onboarding into Microsoft Fabric, including data quality assessment and ownership, and establish an upskilling plan for specialist teams and end users to ensure they can effectively adopt and exploit the platform's capabilities.
- Scale policy compliant emerging digital capabilities, expand monitoring and model review cycles aligned to risk.
- Focus - early value, learning, confidence building and evidence generation.

Phase 2 – Targeted High Impact Enhancements (2027–2028)

Scaling what works and embedding new ways of working

- Expanding automation in high-value areas where benefits and service impact have been demonstrated.
- Enhancing or implementing new digital platform capabilities.
- Scaling automation and emerging digital capabilities where adoption is strong and value is proven.
- Reducing dependency on legacy systems where risks, dependencies and service impacts have been mitigated.
- Embedding continuous improvement practices within services to support sustained adoption and reduce rework.
- Focus – embedding change, managing resistance, and maximising return on earlier investment.
- Migrate high value datasets to Fabric to support automation and improved data enabled insight

Phase 3 – Strategic Options and Scaled Improvement (2028–2030)

Making informed, longer-term decisions based on evidence and readiness

- Progressing future digital platform improvements where organisational readiness is sufficient data quality, process clarity and integration requirements are sufficiently mature.
- Retiring legacy systems where sustainable alternatives are in place and organisational readiness is high.
- Enhancing end-to-end digital journeys across priority services, informed by customer insight and operational evidence.
- Strengthening cross-service working and organisational standardisation where this delivers clear value.
- Focus - strategic decision-making, maturity-led investment and long-term value.
- Establish Fabric as the central data platform underpinning customer insight, data enabled automated processes and advanced analytics.

Progress across all phases will be reviewed regularly to ensure activity continues to deliver value, support adoption and align with organisational capacity and priorities.

11. Strategic Alignment

This Digital Strategy is aligned with the Council Plan, Information Strategy, Artificial Intelligence Policy and Governance Policy, cyber security, Information Governance Framework, Customer Strategy and risk management frameworks, equality and workforce priorities, and financial planning processes. This ensures digital improvement is coherent, governed and integrated into the Council's wider strategic and operational landscape.

The strategy also aligns with national digital, cyber and accessibility expectations, supporting assurance against government frameworks and sector guidance

This strategy is explicitly underpinned by the Council's approved AI Policy, ensuring all AI use is ethical, transparent, human centred and aligned with our security, privacy and equality obligations.

12. Conclusion

This strategy sets a clear, realistic and responsible direction for the Council's use of digital, data and technology over the coming years. It balances ambition with responsibility, ensuring modernisation supports essential services, public trust and long-term sustainability. By strengthening foundations, improving processes, building capability and adopting emerging technologies carefully and responsibly, Middlesbrough Council can make steady, meaningful progress within available resources while continuing to deliver high quality services for its communities.

13. Glossary

Term	Definition
Architecture (Technology Architecture)	The structure, standards and design principles that determine how systems, platforms and data work together across the organisation. Supports coherence, security and sustainability.
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Used in governance contexts as part of the Council's oversight of emerging digital capabilities. References within this strategy do not represent a commitment to deploy AI technologies.
AI Policy	The Council's approved policy that defines the safe, ethical and transparent use of AI, including procurement expectations, human oversight and proportionate assurance.
Automation	Using digital tools to perform routine or repetitive tasks automatically, reducing manual effort and improving accuracy.
Change Control	A formal process for assessing, approving and recording technical changes to ensure they are secure, controlled and do not introduce risk.
Cloud First	A principle that prioritises secure, modern cloud-based platforms where appropriate, supporting resilience, scalability and sustainability.
Contract Management (Strategic Systems)	The coordinated management of supplier contracts for major or business-critical systems. ICT leads technical oversight; services lead on outcomes; Commercial ensures commercial compliance.
Cyber Security Posture	The organisation's overall protection against cyber threats, including technology controls, governance arrangements and workforce behaviours.
Data Governance	The policies, processes and roles that ensure data is accurate, secure, well managed and used consistently across the organisation.
Data Quality	The accuracy, completeness, validity, timeliness and uniqueness of data required to support reliable integration, automation and decision-making.
Digital Confidence	The capability staff and leaders need to use digital tools effectively and support digital change.
Digital Inclusion	Ensuring all residents can access and use services regardless of skills, technology access or personal circumstances.

Term	Definition
Digital Platform	Shared systems, tools and components used to deliver consistent, scalable and integrated digital services.
Digital Self-Service	Online services that allow residents to complete transactions without contacting the Council directly, where appropriate.
Digital Strategy	The Council's long-term direction for digital, data and technology, setting priorities, governance and intended outcomes.
Human in the Loop	A control approach ensuring a trained person reviews, validates or can override automated or AI-supported outputs before decisions with material impact are acted upon.
Integration	Technology that enables systems to exchange data automatically, reducing duplication and manual effort.
Interoperability	The ability of systems to work together and share data reliably and securely.
Lifecycle Management	Managing systems from procurement through to retirement, ensuring they remain secure, supported and fit for purpose.
Microsoft Fabric	The Council's secure, cloud-based data and analytics platform used to consolidate data, improve consistency, enable reporting and support automation and advanced analytics.
Platform	A foundational system, such as workflow or case management, used across multiple services to deliver digital processes.
Process Redesign	Improving how work is carried out to remove inefficiency and prepare processes for digital or automated solutions.
Security First Design	Ensuring cyber security, data protection and compliance requirements are built into digital initiatives from the outset.
Service-Centred Design	Designing services based on user needs, insight and operational context rather than technology preference.
Standardisation	Reducing variation by using shared systems, processes, data structures and components.
Supplier Governance	Oversight of supplier performance, risk and contract obligations to ensure quality, compliance and value for money.
System Register (Authoritative Register)	A single, accurate record of all digital systems used across the Council, supporting governance, assurance and lifecycle planning.

Term	Definition
Technical Design Authority (TDA)	The Council's digital governance body responsible for assuring technology decisions, ensuring alignment with architecture, security, information governance and strategic direction.
Technical Debt	The future cost or risk created when systems diverge from agreed standards or best practice.
Workflow	A digital sequence of tasks and rules used to support automation and streamlined service delivery.