



City of
Stoke-on-Trent



Stoke-on-Trent City Council **Digital Strategy 2021-24**

CONTENTS

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Stronger Together Vision	3
Executive Summary	4
Our Vision, Aims and Objectives	6
Connectivity	9
Communities	11
Customers	14
Care	18
Capability	23
Commercial	28
How We Will Deliver the Strategy	30

STOKE-ON-TRENT CITY COUNCIL STRONGER TOGETHER VISION



The Stronger Together vision sets out the priorities for Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the wider city. The strategic plan has been shaped by the political ambition of the city council's leadership, as well as the values and aims of the organisation. As such, it is as much a corporate plan for the council's directorates and teams as it is a strategic blueprint for improving Stoke-on-Trent as a city. Our Stronger Together principle is embedded into every strategy including our Digital strategy which is set out within this document.

This strategy is part of a suite of documents, supporting the Stronger Together Vision, which includes the Customer Service Strategy, the Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy and the Asset Management Strategy, all of which are designed to support Stoke-on-Trent City Council to create a stronger city we can all be proud of.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Stronger Together Digital Strategy 2021-24 sets out our ambition and commitment to enhancing the way we use digital technologies in providing services to our residents, businesses, customers and partners.

The Internet and digital technologies have transformed lives on a global scale and continue to do so. Covid-19 has accelerated the pace of digitisation, providing both opportunity and challenge for all organisations

The effect has been to revolutionise nearly every sector whether that be shopping, banking, health care, the way we socialise, as well as our homes and workplaces. Organisations unheard of ten years ago are household names and have developed incredibly quickly such as Netflix, Airbnb and Uber. Stoke-on-Trent genuinely has the opportunity to be amongst UK leaders for digital exploitation, but this will require full focus and commitment as it's a highly competitive field where current advantage will be quickly lost.

The council has its part to play as an organisation to respond to unmet resident demand, enabling people to access to transactional services and information through their own device at a time that suits them, mirroring the experience they receive commercially. Even where services require much more human interaction, such as social care, these can still be enhanced by technology and in fact is one of the fastest growing areas for digital technologies. Digital has been proven to help people to live independently for longer and for families to better support their loved ones.

High speed internet access is now considered to be the fourth utility along with water, gas and electricity and is an important consideration for residents and business when looking to relocate.

Digital technologies are helping to enable more sustainable growth in cities: to make cities better connected, safer, greener and better places to live.

Digital means different things to different people and whilst there is no single correct definition, in the context of this strategy it means delivering services through online, automated

and integrated technological solutions. Digital is a key aspect of the council's Stronger Together vision and will enable all services to contribute to the Stronger Together priorities. It has the power to change people's lives, enabling more independence, enhancing customer experience and improving the environment. Digital services are intended to be easy to access and facilitate self-service, reducing the need for council staff to act as brokers between the customer and the person actioning the request, thus making the organisation more efficient and reducing cost for the taxpayer. The council is moving towards to an enhanced 'digital first' service offer that puts the customer in control of how and when they access support.

The strategy confirms that Stoke-on-Trent City Council will adopt a digital first model which places the residents of Stoke-on-Trent at its heart. The benefits are numerous, enabling residents to self-serve via a variety of channels, accessing our services 24/7 and receiving updates via the same method.

Coupled with this we will design digital processes and solutions with a strong emphasis on user experience and ease of use, completely rethinking the way services are delivered rather than just computerising them. This will enable us to achieve increased efficiency, automation and effectiveness, potentially delivering a reduction in cost for the taxpayer also.

Our workforce will see benefits from flexible and agile working, increasing productivity and work/life balance. The strategy will improve our prospects as a commercial council, enhancing the experience for customers who pay for non-essential services such as leisure and visitor attractions, and driving additional income from new commercial opportunities.





OUR VISION

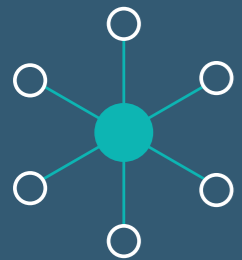
We will embrace digital technologies to transform our services, ensuring they support our residents to access our services and thrive in a digital world.

Aim:

The aim of this strategy is to ensure we are continually developing our services through digital technologies to provide easy access for customers, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the way we work and reduce digital poverty and exclusion.

OBJECTIVES:

Connectivity



Provide infrastructure and connectivity to create a digitally enabled smart city environment that is open for business

Customer



Provide services to our customers through digital channels with a range of easy to access, efficient solutions that improve the customer experience

Capability



Equip our organisation with the right technology, systems and tools to work in an agile, flexible way

Communities



Reduce digital exclusion and digital poverty, supporting our residents to fully engage and thrive in a digital world

Care



Use technology to enable people to remain independent, stay in their homes for longer, reduce isolation, make healthier choices, deal more effectively with illness and disability when it arises, and to have happier, healthier lives

Commercial



Ensure services we sell are easy to access and pay for through digital technologies and we offer digital services on a commercial basis where appropriate



CONNECTIVITY

Silicon Stoke

Stoke-on-Trent is joining a growing network of smart cities across the globe and will become the foundation of our digital approach.

Imagine a city where you could have remote access to a healthcare specialist who could assess, diagnose and potentially treat you at home, or a school lesson where you're virtually transported to the surface of the moon to learn about the solar system, or a meeting with colleagues who are in different parts of the world which feels like they're in the same room as you. The technological blocks such as sensors, screens and processors are already in development. These experiences are also dependent upon high capacity networks which we are making a reality through our citywide full fibre network. The possibilities are almost endless.

Our citywide full fibre network covers 113km around Stoke-on-Trent providing access for residents and businesses in the city. This is a truly future proof point to point network delivering gigabit plus symmetric services. The whole network has built in dark fibre capacity, low latency and is ready to connect to vertical infrastructure, enabling 5G capability. This effectively means the network is high speed and future proofed to enable digital services to run seamlessly. Business and residential services are delivered by a neutral host fibre operator, VX Fiber who invest in and install the Fibre to the Premise (FTTP) infrastructure. Services are delivered through an open access platform and will include broadband, TV and VOIP as a minimum.

Council Buildings

We'll also connect all council owned buildings to the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) ensuring high speed internet access in all office bases enabling greater collaboration and communication as well as improved and increased public internet access.

The ability of the city council to operate its own network and deliver other public sector services is now being referred to as the Municipal Marketplace, this will generate significant cost savings for the city council and public sector partners along with the ability to generate income, through for example:

- Digital infrastructure services for schools
- Connecting the city's care homes and GP surgeries
- Lease of dark (unused) fibre to private providers

The city council has developed the Silicon Stoke Prospectus that explains in the detail the benefits and expectations for the network, known as dividends, these are:

- The Economic Dividend – boosting the local economy by making firms more competitive, attracting inward investment and jobs and improving homes.
- The Social Dividend – revolutionising health, social care and learning.
- The Eco-Dividend – ceating a smart cities infrastructure focusing on transport, energy and homes.
- The Creative Dividend – focusing on entertainment creation and production and gaming.

5G

The city's open access approach does not currently fit with the vendor dominated cellular networks who control the spectrum. As a city we see open access as the future but there is some way to go to get the cellular networks onboard. Suppliers are really just dipping their toe in the water and as a city we need to demonstrate we're open for business and not closing the door whilst we wait for something that could never happen. However, we will have a huge amount of high value technical real estate which puts us in a fairly unique position so we will continue to push for open access and will ensure any providers who want to come to the city work with us and utilise the LFFN.

With the city on the verge of something incredibly unique in the marketplace and with open access at the heart of what we're looking to achieve, we'll require providers to utilise the LFFN. This approach is likely to increase demand in our primary data centre. This could have a knock-on effect, with content providers then looking to move into Stoke-on-Trent and utilising the space.

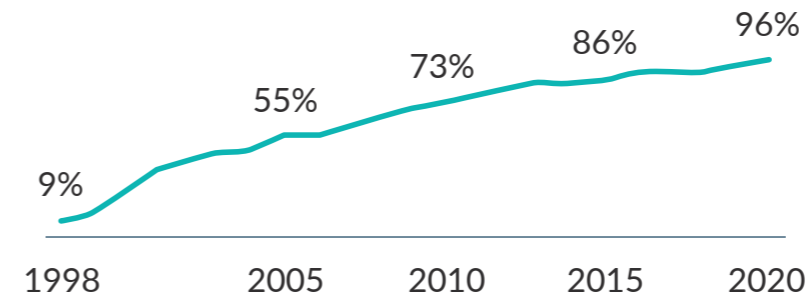
Commitments

- We will connect all council owned buildings to the LFFN.
- We will develop the municipal market place to provide open access to the digital network.
- We will develop a 5G pilot to prove the concept and test our approach before further rolling out.



Use of digital services is on the rise in Stoke-on-Trent with more people than ever owning personal devices along with having access to the internet:

UK - % of households with internet access (ONS)



Communication Methods

	Envelope with @	Speech bubble	Network of people
Stoke-on-Trent	81.9%	58.7%	53.9%
National	83.9%	58.2%	58.8%

Technology Ownership

	Stoke-on-Trent	National
PC	69.5%	71%
Laptop	85.4%	85.5%
Tablet	50.3%	52.6%
Mobile Phone	72.9%	71.8%



84.9% of households in the city are very/fairly internet savvy compared to the national average of 85.6% (YouGov)

To fully support and get the most from a digital first council we need to have a digitally skilled community where everyone has the opportunity to get connected and confident online.

When we think about digital inclusion amongst our adult population, the over 18s will often fall into two categories; digital exclusion and digital poverty. We make lots of assumptions about the residents who make up these two groups; pre Covid-19 the number of non-internet users was falling, in fact it had halved since 2011 to around 7.2m nationally, or around 10% of the population. In 2020 it is thought this figure had reduced to 4% - to put this into perspective this represents just under 10,000 people in Stoke-on-Trent. These residents are likely to already be some of the hardest people to reach and it's important we bring them along with us.

Improving support to gain and improve digital skills is vital. Some residents may respond better to support from experienced groups operating across the city. The voluntary and community sector already has a strong reputation in this field, and works closely with the city council, VAST and Staffordshire Community Foundation to deliver a number of schemes to support improved digital engagement amongst a number of excluded communities. We will continue to develop innovative approaches, such as the community lounge pilot, taking a multi-agency approach to helping people with a range of issues in an informal environment, including digital support and information.

Similarly, we'll look to reduce digital poverty by focusing on two key areas. Firstly, ensuring free to use publicly accessible computers are available to support internet access, ensuring everybody has access to ICT facilities. We will also work innovatively as part of Silicon Stoke to offer not only competitively priced broadband but also look at options to create social connectivity.

Addressing school age children, the 2021 Digital Futures paper developed by the Carnegie Trust and UNICEF talks about five key components that go together to inform digital inclusion, these are:

- A device
- A strong connection
- Skills and support
- A safe online environment
- Sustainability of access

In 2020 the council rolled out 1432 laptops to school children and care leavers to ensure these cohorts did have a modern device. With ambitions to connect schools as part of Silicon Stoke we'll be able to deliver a strong, sustainable connection which with the support of schools will be a safe online environment.

Digital Engagement and Consultation

During the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the council, working with its partners in health and local advocacy organisations, was able to undertake a significant engagement and consultation exercise online to develop the life-course Learning Disabilities strategy. Moving to digital platforms, we were able to reach more parents of children and young people with learning disabilities, more front line staff and partners from care and support providers than we would with "real life" workshops. We were able to meet with parents and young people in the evenings, in the comfort of their own homes, via a screen. Younger people particularly found technology easy to use, but we did become aware of "digital exclusion" in older people, older carers who didn't have the appliances or access to the internet. Moving forward, we plan to continue to use and promote digital platforms to supplement real life contact which we believe will widen participation and the opportunity for people to have their voice heard and for the council to feed back to people what has happened as a result.

Commitments

- We will work with the voluntary sector to improve digital skills across the community.
- We will look at options to further support council tenants in digital use and uptake.
- We will work innovatively as part of Silicon Stoke to bring low-cost high-speed broadband to all sectors of the community.
- We will look to connect our schools to the Local Full Fibre Network enabling high speed broadband within schools but also options for households to connect to schools for home/outreach learning.
- We will equip libraries with the right technology to enable residents to access digital technology and support them to be able to use it effectively.





CUSTOMERS

Digital First

Initially the council adopted a 'channel choice' approach when offering digital services, introducing residents to transacting with the council digitally.

The first part of the jigsaw was to completely rebuild our website from the ground up giving the council a truly transactional website which allows residents to buy, request and pay for services. This is fully integrated into our CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system and citizen portal ensuring we provide joined up integrated services to our residents. Building on this we then launched the MyStoke App to make accessing web services even easier from a smart phone, so you can genuinely report a pot hole or graffiti as soon as you see it. Moving forward we're now piloting a chatbot to convert analogue channels to digital but also to offer an extended service.

Adopting a digital first approach is the logical next step to ensure that services are provided with a strong, clear digital interface for residents. This will provide a more modern service as well as reducing the costs of transactions to the taxpayer. In some service areas, the majority of demand is already for online services, and the digital offer is mature enough to allow the potential withdrawal from other channels, for example contact via phone. It is proposed that this channel shift work would be completed on a directorate by directorate basis, selecting the most mature and suitable service requests first. These would serve as a test, and if successful, it would enable a more complete channel shift approach over the longer term. Examples of channel shift include increased use of online forms to make enquiries or provide changes in details, use of the MyStoke App to interact with the council, ensuring payments made by telephone are handled via the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system reducing resources and costs, and implementing alternative and automated enquiry routes such as chatbots, webchat and digital assistants.

As more and more residents contact us digitally, we also need to engage with them in the same way. Building on the work we've done with Council Tax, where residents can receive their annual bill digitally, we'll look to send further documents electronically which require a signature such as contracts, tenancy agreements and employment contracts, so customers can sign these documents electronically and return them reducing the cost of paper, postage and scanning but also making us far more efficient. This is standard practice now in many sectors, such as house sales.

We will retain analogue services such as the phone and face to face, and residents that are not able to access online services will still be able to access services via the contact centre and via face to face at local centres. All council libraries already offer digital access to residents and additional support to use these facilities where residents require this. This will enable residents to receive an enhanced reshaped offer across our libraries where residents will be assisted in completing any service requests using the ICT facilities available. This will assist those residents with no online provision at home and will also help to encourage and demonstrate to those residents who are unsure about or are unaware of the online channel how easy it is for them to complete next time they have a requirement.

The Universal Library Offer

Through the Information and Digital Offer, libraries provide quality information and digital support. Libraries enable individuals and communities to develop learning skills, to find answers and to inform life choices. The offer helps children and adults to engage and feel safe online. It ensures resources and opportunities are accessible and it embraces creative and innovative technology.



The Planning Offer

The future of Planning is changing. The recently published Planning for the Future white paper highlights that 'fundamental cultural change' is on the way and at the heart of this is a drive to introduce major improvements to digital capabilities across the planning sector. This would deliver high quality digital local plans and digitally enabled decision-making.

Advances in technology present an opportunity to make our planning process more efficient, innovative and responsive to environmental, social and economic objectives. New digitally enabled systems would promote transparency, understanding and inclusiveness. They would provide significant opportunities to improve customers' experiences and the quality and efficiency of decision-making. Communication and engagement would also be revolutionised, leading to greater public involvement in all aspects of planning.

We share this vision, and new systems across the Planning Service are vitally important in delivering it. Anyone wanting to develop property, improve places or understand why and how decisions are made should have better access to the information and knowledge they need. Data should be machine readable so that it is easy to interrogate, share and re-use. This would enable better analysis, monitoring and reporting of the economic, social and environmental outcomes of planning policies and decisions, beyond those usually measured.

We want to embrace this opportunity and be at the forefront of the 'Plantech' agenda.

Creative solutions are being employed to ensure residents are able to access services easily, without being put off by the technology. Chatbots are already in use on our website, and still enable the customer to ring in; however, the call will be answered by a 'bot' effectively turning an analogue call into a digital transaction. Correct application of chatbots needs to be carefully considered, however it has a lot of advantages - it can run 24/7, it can handle thousands of calls simultaneously and is relatively cheap. Once this approach has been proved to work it's easy to migrate it to other similar technologies such as Alexa and Google. This will open up a further channel often used by those with lower digital skills.

Cashless

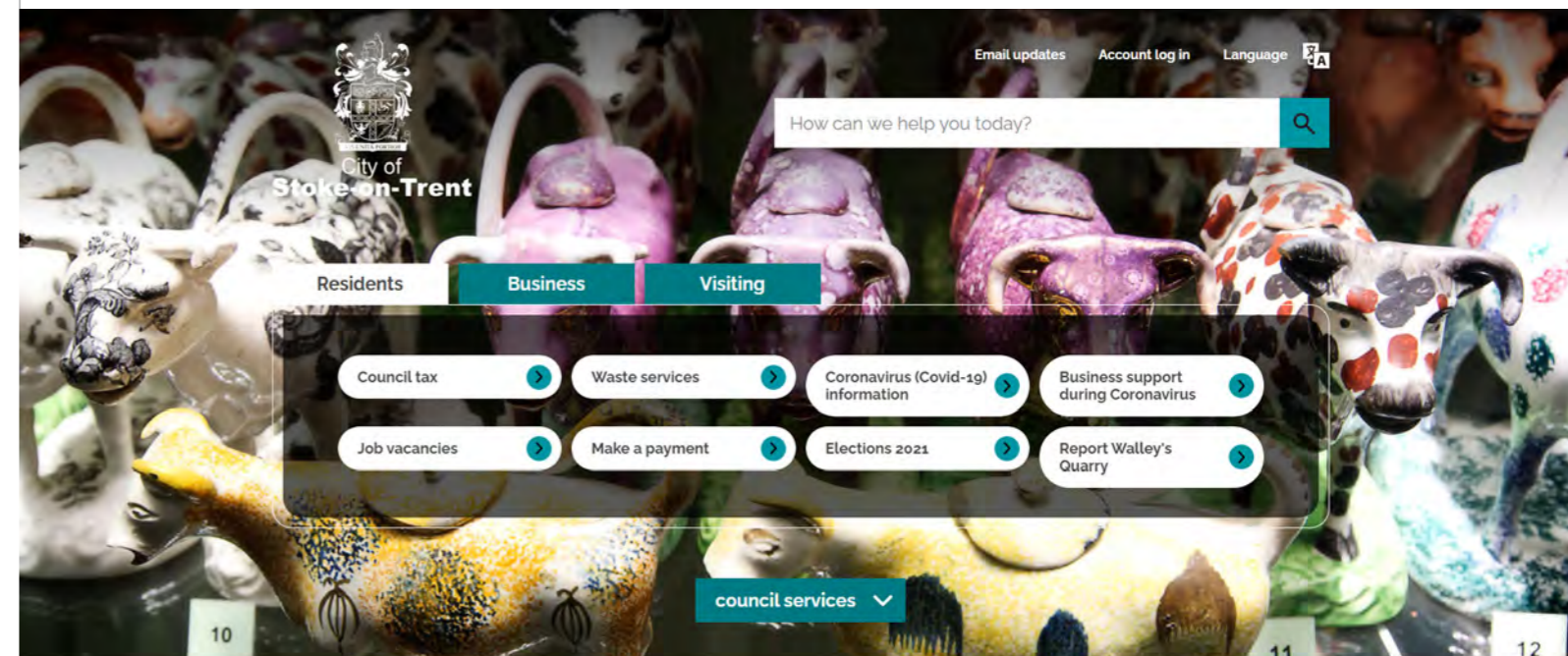
The council has already started to move towards becoming a cashless authority. Evidence indicates that the UK is shifting its preferred method of payment from cash to digital payments. Cash was used for less than a quarter of all payments last year, as people now frequently choose debit cards and contactless to make payments instead. The percentage of all payments made using banknotes and coins fell to 23 per cent in 2019, according to trade body UK Finance; this is down from 48 per cent as recently as 2014. In Stoke-on-Trent, we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic an increased number of payments received through automated means such as direct debit, standing order and online/card payments. Residents are also more aware of other third-party locations where you can pay with cash, across the 140 PayZone outlets in the city. To ensure a successful implementation with resident buy in our approach to moving towards a cashless model is being completed in phases, in conjunction with

a communications campaign detailing alternative locations and ways to pay, with a particular focused campaign on paying by direct debit for services where appropriate e.g. Council Tax and housing rent.

A cashless model can reduce costs and increase productivity, removing the need for cash collections and protecting our workforce. Meir became our first cashless locality in 2014, and this approach has been gradually rolled out across our localities through cashless kiosks from 2015 onwards.

Commitments

- We will further develop the website and app by adding more services.
- We will further integrate our back-office systems to enable more efficient and robust online services.
- We will reduce analogue demand by improving access to digital alternatives, either converting to, or moving to digital.
- We will continue to support other options to engage with services, through making residents aware of third-party outlets for cash payments, improved access to computers, and specific support for learning digital skills.
- We will continue to reduce the amount of cash being paid at city council premises.
- We will fully implement a Chatbot, following the initial pilot, along with other innovative digital channels.
- We will improve access to the planning process by replacing the ICT system and adopting a digital approach.



CORONAVIRUS - LATEST UPDATES

For the latest news about the coronavirus pandemic, including important information on local health advice, available services and more, please follow the link.

[For the latest update, click here](#)



CARE

Digital technology is hugely beneficial and we believe it can make a transformative difference to the way we deliver care services across the city. Across the country, technology is enabling people to remain independent and stay in their homes for longer, reduce isolation and enable health and social care providers to join up like never before.

In Stoke-on-Trent we believe technology should be used across the health and care system to enable people to make healthier choices to be more resilient, deal more effectively with illness and disability when it arises, and to have happier, longer lives in old age. Better use of data and technology improves patient outcomes, efficiency, effectiveness and safety. Use of technology to connect with others can help reduce the need to travel for health and social care workers as well as citizens, patients, clients. Working with young people, we will work to further reduce carbon emissions and educate many of all ages and circumstances around the use of technology for virtual engagement reducing the need for travel by promoting a new approach.

With this in mind we will create a digital offer to ensure:

- Greater understanding of technology and capabilities, thus more appropriate take up of local services
- Increased digital literacy and confidence, therefore becoming 'digital ready'
- Increased mental wellbeing
- Increased independence
- Reduced social isolation in a Covid-19-safe way
- A shared sense of community through digital collaboration
- Reduced avoidable healthcare utilisation (hospital admissions/GP appointments etc.) through enhanced self-care leading to prevention of deterioration of health conditions via patient empowerment and prompt remote health and social care.

To achieve this our key outcomes are to create digitally enabled:

- People
- Products
- Partnership
- Practice

Adult Social Care

As well as the existing use of technology to support several thousand people with Telecare, Adult Social Care has explored other ways to use emerging digital solutions to help the people we support. For instance, we are currently rolling out tablets to 100+ people with a learning disability across the city – these are people whose normal day opportunities have been disrupted by Covid-19, but by using a vetted range of apps for communication, information, education, entertainment and support we are able to support them to get the benefit from day opportunities in new and innovative ways. Working with health partners and using central government funding we have supported several dozen care homes to access similar technology to keep their residents in touch with family and friends, able to find out the information they need, able to have virtual consultations with GPs and consultants, and able to access online resources such as exercise videos. The plans for the next 12 months are to expand greatly on this work.

People

As in all aspects of the community, residents expect and want to engage with the council at a time and in a way that suits them. To achieve this, we need to create a digital front door into social care by improving information, advice and guidance, and by introducing intelligent online systems to support self-referrals and assessments.

We also need to open digital communication channels to enable people to engage with a social worker more flexibly. Use of video consultations within health have been used for a number of years but its use exploded during Covid-19, to such an extent it's now almost embedded in our thinking when ringing the doctors. We believe we can also utilise this technology within social care to offer more flexibility around appointments, delivering a tangible benefit as journey time will be removed, social workers can have more time to talk and engage with people.

We will open up digital channels to support personalisation, enabling control of personal budgets online and to enable wiki style approaches to allow individuals to manage their engagement with multiple professional teams, putting the control back into the hands of those people using our services.

Products

We'll explore and deliver efficient and cost-effective assistive technologies such as wellbeing analytics, which is starting to become widely used. This technology utilises smart sensors in people's homes to understand patterns of behaviour, and when the behaviour changes an alert is raised.

This type of technology can reduce the amount of intervention by the care sector and provides reassurance for family members.

Reducing isolation is key to improving people's wellbeing and overall outlook, this is a significant problem for parts of our elderly population which in turn can lead to declining health. Digital assistants such as Alexa can keep people in touch with what's going on in the world and provide practical help with day to day tasks such as reminders to take medications.

MySense

The council has been trialling MySense alongside the University of Hospital of North Midlands. The technology uses passive sensors to give visibility on their patterns of behaviours whether that's improvements, decline or normality. The system provides data to help inform decisions around care and support.



Partnership

Working with local NHS providers we will continue in partnership delivering the Staffordshire Health & Social Care Digital Strategy working holistically not just across the city but also county wide. One of the recent successes is the launch of One Health & Social Care. Building on the successful go-live with adults data we now plan to work on children's data.

One Health and Care

Across health and social care, there are countless different systems and depending on which location you present at will determine the data they hold about you. Traditionally, this causes huge challenges as there was the very real chance you might not get the most suitable treatment in a timely manner. One Health and Care will look to change this.

One Health and Care is a confidential digital shared care record for people living in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. One Health and Care brings data together from the different organisations involved in health and social care. It allows doctors, nurses and other registered health and social care professionals directly involved in patient/client care to view relevant information in order to provide better and safer care. This means that a health or social care professional involved in an individual's care will be able in near real-time to see the treatment and medications provided by others so they can make better diagnosis and treatment decisions.

We're also keen to improve the digital experience in Care Homes or similar settings of care. Working with our NHS and Staffordshire County colleagues we'll look to develop a blueprint for what 'excellent' looks like. This will take two forms, services for residents and ensuring great integration around administrative functions. We will also look at options to connect the city's Care Homes via the Municipal Marketplace ensuring they have high speed internet access to enable digital health initiatives.

Practice

Like many council staff, social workers are constrained by systems and practices that dictate that they're in the main office based. We want to free social workers to work flexibly and ensure they can work in a mobile way, and for that to happen we need to ensure systems and tools work in a way that enables and supports practitioners to safely adopt a more agile way of working. With this in mind we're going to pilot an agile working approach across children's and adults services. Not only are we looking at physical devices but also the software. By utilising the Liquid Logic App which is a lite version of Liquid Logic (our social care system) accessible from mobile devices, we believe practitioners will be able to work flexibly and won't be tied to the office.

We will also support the locality working model, (which in simple terms structures practitioners from across the council around geographies in the city, working collaboratively with partners) in a similar way to work being undertaken more widely on flexible working mentioned later in this strategy. We will provide technical solutions to ensure social workers and partners can work collaboratively in shared spaces by utilising software solutions and improved WIFI and conference facilities.

Commitments

- We will continue with and expand the MySense Pilot and if successful implement it fully.
- We will investigate the use of video when liaising with service users and if successful implement it more widely.
- We will pilot new ways of working by harnessing the benefits of more agile software, specifically the Liquid Logic App.
- We will create the concept of a digital front door based on our existing systems.
- We will join up our Education and Social Care system, so we have one view of every child in the city.
- We will add children's data into the One Health & Social Care system.
- We will create a digital blue print for Care Homes and look at options to connect them to the internet utilising high speed links via Silicon Stoke.



Flexibility

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the necessity of ensuring that services could continue meant that on average, 2000 Stoke-on-Trent City Council officers were regularly working from home successfully. This had been unimaginable before, but proved that you don't need to have a desk and go to work in an office to be effective and productive. Until the start of the pandemic city council officers had an allocated desk, whereas in many other local authorities, agile working had become the mainstay a number of years before.

Alongside both our Asset Management Strategy and move to increased locality working, agile working will deliver multiple benefits for residents, through a reduction in council buildings that are not being fully utilised, as well as better informed officers who are working closer to the residents they support in services such as housing and social care. It will also increase the health and well-being of officers, many of whom have appreciated the advantages of agile working during the pandemic. It gives the opportunity for those who prefer office-based working to have more freedom around location and engagement.

To achieve this vision, we need to ensure we have the technology to support it. Due to the pandemic and the speed with which we were able to equip staff to work from home, the majority have the equipment and software to work from anywhere with a wireless connection. We need to now focus on the services that tie us to the office. Traditionally most large enterprise systems had complex screens which didn't work so well on smaller agile devices. New systems should meet the requirements of flexible and agile workforces and existing systems mobile enabled via off the shelf technologies, ensuring staff have the ability to work where the work is.

We also need to reduce our reliance on printers; again 2020 has shown us we don't need them as much as we did. However, we still send a huge amount of paper out to residents, e.g. tenancy agreements; we will digitise these, email them and request a digital signature, rather than a traditional wet signature.

By freeing up staff to work in a more agile way we will no longer require the office space we have historically needed. By reducing office space and improving key locations such as the Civic Centre to support an agile approach and ensuring we have the right software we will be able to change the culture and practice of work.

Environmental Services

Environmental Services have been one of the early adopters of new ways for working, staff have mobile devices to ensure they are 'working where the work is' and utilising PowerBI to get real time management information and analytics.

Data

The council has traditionally been very good at writing point in time reports, but what we haven't had are the tools to apply business intelligence and predictive analytics to determine outcomes. When looking to make decisions a key facet is having the intelligence to make informed decisions based on what the information tells us.

One of the major issues the council has is that its key data is locked in systems or data silos. To change this and to enable the above, the council will create a cloud-based data warehouse with the vision that all council data can be interrogated from within it. With the introduction of smart technology and sensors into everyday lives the council will inevitably start to receive huge amounts of data which needs to go somewhere; because the data increase is likely to be significant, the ability of our data warehouse to be flexible in terms of storage and processing is key. Only a cloud-based product can accommodate this effectively and economically.

To interrogate the data, analytics software will be rolled out. PowerBI has been selected as our preferred system, and the process of rolling out has commenced and will continue through the course of this strategy.

With both the data warehouse and PowerBI in place, the ability for the council to use all its data creatively to solve real problems will be realised.

To further assist this, the council will continue to promote the rationalisation of applications; we should where possible try to have as few 'best of breed' systems as possible to make it far simpler for the organisation to query the data but also reduce cost wherever possible. We are currently progressing this in several areas, to reduce the number of different applications services - often within the same directorate - are using. This simplifies processes, reduces the specialist in house support and training needed, and often delivers a saving also, whilst providing a better system.

Security

With more and more digitised services and with world events such as Covid-19 and BREXIT, cyber-crime is very much on the rise. At a recent presentation given to Digital Leaders, the Head of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) stated a targeted attack against public sector organisations was not a case of 'if' but 'when'. We have already seen similar attacks at Redcar, and recent sector news reported Birmingham being under consistent attack. This is a sobering message and whilst we can do little to prevent a sophisticated targeted attack we can do everything possible to not make ourselves a target, and to mitigate the risk should an attack be successful. Whilst we are encouraging the community to transact with us digitally we have to ensure these transactions are secure and immutable.

With this in mind we need a twin track approach, prevention and mitigation:

Prevention

As mentioned earlier it is incredibly difficult to prevent a sophisticated targeted attack, however, we can make ourselves as difficult a target as possible. We will therefore install new up to date firewalls, migrate email into the Cloud and follow all advice issued by the NCSC. But perhaps the most important weapon in our armoury is staff awareness; the weakest point of any security system is usually people, who unlike machines can be coerced to doing something they wouldn't normally do, such as click a link or reveal a password. There is council Cyber Security training in place, however it's not currently mandatory, something we will be looking to change. It's also important that we communicate effectively with staff by sending out regular reminders and examples of good practice.

Mitigation

Whilst we hope we will never be successfully compromised by a cyber-attack, we do have to plan for it. The NCSC have an 'exercise in a box' which we will complete to ensure we are prepared, and then continue with an annual cyber-attack simulation. We will also ensure we have online back-ups which are immutable and unable to be compromised should our core network be targeted.

M365

To help improve systems across the city council, we have already begun to move from on premise Microsoft products to a cloud offering, M365. The council currently has lots of 'best of breed' standalone products enabling staff to work effectively; with a move to M365, a number will be replaced with Microsoft products enabling a core common platform from which users can work.

M365 will radically change the way officers and Councillors will be able to work. The council's mail system will be moved into the Cloud allowing for a much more agile approach with email and calendar being accessed 'on the go' from a device agnostic Outlook App. All council employees will have managed access to all Microsoft applications such as Teams, Word, Excel etc. on any device in a secure way, this could be a personal or work device, circumstance depending.

Documents can be accessed and shared securely using OneDrive. This will be of huge benefit to all staff, but especially Councillors as it will give them access to secure storage on a device agnostic platform which will revolutionise the way we all work and collaborate on a day to day basis.

Overall it is expected that the move to M365 will support major council initiatives and will become the cornerstone of a flexible and agile workforce.

Cloud

The city council heavily invested in a data centre and data centre technologies in 2011, and since then moved towards an on-premise approach; this changed in 2018 when we moved to a best value position and now we're taking the strategic direction of 'cloud first'.

Over the next five years we are expecting to see most of the major vendors of the council's core pieces of software move to a cloud solution and therefore we will see an evaporation of hardware in our data centre. In preparation, some key pieces of hardware need to be either upgraded or migrated; almost immediately for example the Firewall and backup solutions. This work is in train now. A reduction in our own data centre capacity opens up space which could be made available to the public or private sectors at commercial rates, this is covered in more detail in the Commercial section.

As the applications move into a cloud environment, the council's server estate will gradually decrease. Much of the infrastructure is enterprise based and as such it will take a prolonged period of time to analyse and architect it in such a way as to reduce it significantly. That does inevitably mean that hardware will still have to be bought and maintained for some time to come; however, we will see this decrease, gradually at first, moving more rapidly in years 3-5. This piecemeal approach is recommended by the large vendors, such as Microsoft, as it enables us to sweat the initial capital investment whilst gradually migrating to Cloud in a controlled way. To support this, we'll undertake a Cloud Economic Assessment in 2021 and build out the business case. However, we will see a shift from a capital model to a revenue model of financing. As our systems reside on enterprise infrastructure (shared) whilst we remove and downsize the on-premise estate we'll be paying for that along with any cloud systems already migrated.

Whilst the council has many large enterprise systems which are provided by large software houses, we also have many much smaller very niche systems which are likely to have to stay in our data centre a little longer. We'll also have some core infrastructure and network which will need to remain, so whilst this will reduce it won't all together disappear

Commitments

- We will ensure all future systems support an agile workforce.
- We will upgrade the wireless network in the Civic Centre.
- We will pilot digital signature software and if successful roll it out.
- We will deliver M365 across all users.
- We will complete a cloud readiness assessment and move more services into the cloud.
- We will build out a corporate data warehouse.
- We will install new Firewalls and increase bandwidth.
- We will explore options for mandatory Cyber Security Training.





COMMERCIAL

Supporting Income Generation

Any organisation that is serious about competing in a post Covid-19 world has an online presence to sell and deliver services from. The council is no exception. Many of our services also operate commercial models selling services such as trade waste, catering, print and many others to private and public organisations. A simple online presence is vital for the council to ensure we're able to compete with commercial competition, but just not compete, thrive. Without these tools we'll be left behind. Digital services can help build a brand via social media and increase revenue by making it easier and simpler to transact with us at a time that suits our customers.

Leisure Services

Growth in the home workout sector is a factor that is providing strong competition, with an ever-growing range of app, subscription service and personal trainers. Clubs still retain an advantage offering a more personalised service. Digital is an obvious threat to the service. However, it is also an opportunity; by utilising digital services ourselves, for example online workouts via Facebook, recipe cards for members in an online portal. There is also the possibility to tie this in with the Municipal Marketplace to reach a significant audience.

Commercial Opportunities

Commercialising services that we know have value to the private sector will drive an income for the city council, so we're keen to explore any potential commercial opportunities that exist and see how we can exploit them. We will also ensure services that we sell are easy to access, book and pay for through digital technologies.

Data Centre

We already have capacity in our data centre which could be utilised by any third party who requires data centre space. This would ideally suit other public sector organisations in the West Midlands and North West regions, especially those organisations looking to house off site backup, test instances. With our existing infrastructure decreasing and given the roll out of the full fibre network we're also likely to see requests for space from 5G cellular providers and possibly content providers and opportunities exist as a possible location for a Rendering Farm as Stoke-on-Trent's journey to a digital city gathers pace.

Services Contract

In early 2022, the council will be going out to procurement for the supply of ICT software, hardware and consultancy services, this will be the second time the council has gone to market for this type of the service. It was hugely successful the first time and it is believed that by opening this up to other public sector bodies in the region we could leverage a small fee for its use. The market is huge; however, many organisations will have their own arrangements in place so we hope to be able to interest these when their arrangements come to an end.

Shared Services and Partnership

The council has inhouse ICT capability which could easily be leveraged with a view to operating in a shared services capacity with another local authority or potentially even managing/overseeing an ICT service. Whilst the market for this is relatively small we will look at this in more detail to see what could be achieved.

Commitments

- We'll develop online channels and a marketplace to ensure services that are offered on a commercial basis are easy to find, book and pay for.
- We'll further explore the commercial opportunities to generate income from provision of digital services where we have capacity to do so.



HOW WE WILL DELIVER THE STRATEGY

Skills and Competences

Attracting the right people with the right skills, knowledge and values to fill our roles will be key to our success. Our objective will be to attract and recruit high calibre candidates who are committed and passionate about working with us and for the city's residents. With this in mind, recruiting people with digital skills and outlook is key; one way to achieve this is to utilise technology in the recruitment process whether that is electronic application process, use of social media advertising and direct links to professional networks such as LinkedIn.

Investment in the continual support, coaching, training and development of our workforce is fundamental to our service delivery that continues to strive for excellence. Paramount to keeping our employees is a strong induction process, a detailed training plan for each role, recognising and developing our talent and offering progression, all of which are underpinned by the council's policies and procedures.

Methodology

Our approach to digital improvements will be to utilise the council's ADAPT programme which utilises a Continuous Improvement methodology. In this context we will be using Lean Six Sigma tools and techniques.

- Lean focuses on efficiency through the reduction of waste, error and delays in process/products/services.
- Six Sigma focuses on quality and consistency, through process improvement and reducing variation.

Lean and Six Sigma together deliver value to the customer, by ensuring we have efficient operations and high-quality standards.

The methodologies that are used within Lean Six Sigma are:

- DMAIC (Define-Measure-Analyse-Improve-Control) is about improving existing product/processes/services using data and an analytical approach.
- DMEDI (Define-Measure-Explore-Develop-Implement) is about creating a new robust product/processes/services where one does not currently exist.

Programmes and projects will be derived from the transformation programme which has three types of projects:

- Efficiency and productivity proposals agreed as part of 21/22 budget setting
- Proposals identified for delivery over next 1-3 years to improve service delivery and drive financial efficiencies
- Corporate cross-cutting project that will ensure that the council has a sustainable platform for effective stewardship into the medium term.

Measuring Success



Connectivity

- All council owned buildings are connected
- Increased take up of Broadband services across residential and commercial customers
- Live services on the Municipal Network



Communities

- Increase in digital skills training
- More accessible / cheaper Internet services
- Continued access to free Internet services and support in the city's libraries



Customer

- Increase in digital transactions
- Reduction in voice and face to face transactions
- Reduction in cash paid



Care

- Increase in smart technology usage
- Increase in use of video consultations
- Increase in use of Tele Health services
- Connected Care Homes



Capability

- Increase in staff numbers connecting remotely (pre Covid-19 figures)
- All staff migrated to M365
- Increase in Cloud services
- Reduction in security incidents



Commercial

- Increase in revenue taken via online channels



City of
Stoke-on-Trent