

Customer Services and Digital Strategy

2026/2029

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City of
Stoke-on-Trent

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Foreword

This strategy sets out how we will achieve our ambition to become a 24/7, customer-first digitally enabled council, providing joined-up services that are designed around the lives, needs and expectations of our residents, businesses and communities. It is about making it easier for people to access services, get the support they need, and interact with the council in a way that works for them.

Digital transformation is not an IT programme; it does not represent an end goal in itself, and it is not about replacing people with technology. Rather, it is a critical enabler of our Corporate Strategy – one that can help us to deliver more responsive, effective and efficient services, and ultimately improve outcomes and experiences for the people we serve, as well as the staff we employ. By embracing digital, data and new technologies, we can modernise how we work and ensure our organisation and the services we deliver are fit for the future.

We are at a pivotal moment: traditional models of service delivery are no longer sufficient to meet rising demand and increasing customer expectations. At the same time, we face growing pressures to improve quality, drive innovation, deliver continuous improvement, and operate within constrained resources. This necessitates new ways of thinking and working, and the adoption of smarter, more sustainable and cost-effective approaches that maximise the impact of every pound we spend.

Through this strategy, we will break down organisational silos that too often create fragmented experiences for our customers. We will design services that are seamless, joined up and centred on people, not processes. By making better use of data, we will improve how we understand and respond to need, enabling the design and delivery of services that are more targeted, accessible and effective.

Digital transformation will also play a vital role in supporting economic growth, empowering and protecting our most vulnerable residents, and helping the council operate in a more sustainable and resilient way. The use of data, automation and artificial intelligence is about removing unnecessary administrative burdens, freeing up our staff to focus on what matters most - supporting residents and delivering high-quality services. It is about reducing barriers, simplifying processes and creating a council that truly works for everyone.

Executive summary

This Customer Services and Digital Strategy sets out how Stoke-on-Trent City Council will become a more customer-first, digitally enabled and joined-up organisation. It responds to rising customer expectations, growing demand, financial pressures and the need to modernise services so they are easier to access, more efficient to deliver and better designed around residents, businesses and communities. Digital transformation is not an IT programme or a move to replace people with technology. It is about using digital, data and modern ways of working to simplify services, reduce avoidable contact, improve outcomes and free staff to focus on the work where human judgement, empathy and relationships matter most.

The council has already made good progress. Digital contacts have increased, telephone demand has reduced, and the city's full-fibre network provides a strong foundation for Stoke Smart City and wider public service innovation. Investment has also been made in digital foundations including a transactional website, customer relationship management capabilities, cloud infrastructure, Microsoft 365, Power BI, automation and early AI pilots. However, services remain too fragmented, with residents often needing to navigate multiple systems, channels and teams. The council also operates across a complex technology estate, including more than 200 legacy systems, which creates duplication, manual workarounds, data silos and barriers to a seamless customer experience.



The strategy provides a practical route to transform the way the council works and serves. Its vision is to transform the way we work and serve so communities benefit from smarter, faster and more connected public services. This will be delivered through five guiding principles: designing services around customer needs; making services easy, joined-up and right first time; using the right approach for each service; being digital first but never digital only; and building trust by empowering residents with clear information, better communication and greater control.

At the heart of the strategy is a commitment to choice and inclusion. Digital will become the simplest and most convenient route for many services, particularly straightforward transactions that can be completed online at any time. However, the council will not become digital only. Phone, face-to-face and assisted digital support will remain essential for residents who cannot easily use online services, who need additional help, or whose needs are complex and require trusted relationships.

Delivery will be organised around six strategic pillars: improved customer access and experience; community development and empowerment; a digital-first council; systems, platforms and solutions; developing relevant skills; and data and analytics. Together, these will create a clearer single front door into council services, reduce digital exclusion, expand end-to-end online services, simplify the technology estate, strengthen resident and workforce skills, and improve the quality, governance and use of data and AI.

The strategy is a key enabler of the council's wider corporate priorities. It will support healthier communities through easier access to wellbeing, social care and public health services; a wealthier city through stronger digital infrastructure, business support and skills; safer communities through faster reporting and better use of data; greener and cleaner outcomes through smarter environmental, energy and waste services; a fairer city through accessible services and targeted support; and a more skilled city through improved digital capability for residents and the workforce.

Successful delivery will require strong governance, clear prioritisation and an agile approach. The strategy will be supported by a Digital Target Operating Model and Architecture Map, Data Strategy, Customer Service Standards and a rolling delivery plan. Oversight will be provided through the Digital and Data Board,

chaired by the Chief Executive, with accountability through the Cabinet Member to Cabinet. A dedicated Customer Excellence Transformation Programme will coordinate the main customer-facing projects, including website improvement, refreshed customer standards, customer journey redesign, complaints improvement, Amazon Web Services customer contact work and the future direction of Customer Relationship Management.

The strategy has been developed in a period of significant change for local government. The council will continue improving services now while ensuring that investment decisions remain open, flexible, scalable and interoperable to support future organisational requirements. This means investment decisions must be open, flexible, scalable and interoperable, supporting the future transition rather than creating additional complexity.

Initial delivery priorities through to March 2028 include refreshed customer standards, completion of SAP ERP for finance, HR and payroll, an integrated repairs and maintenance offer for council tenants and leaseholders, further digital support for customer contact through Amazon Web Services, implementation of the Data Strategy, automation and AI interventions, Stoke Smart City, targeted service system investment, website improvement, the Digital Academy and the resident digital inclusion programme.

The intended outcomes are clear: residents will be able to access and manage services more easily; receive a more consistent and joined-up experience; benefit from faster, clearer and more responsive services; and continue to have access to inclusive support where needed. The council will operate more efficiently, reduce avoidable contact and manual processing, make better use of trusted data, and enable staff to focus on higher-value work. Progress will be monitored through agreed measures including customer satisfaction, complaints performance, first contact resolution, avoidable contact, digital take-up, website task completion, call waiting times, assisted digital usage, resident feedback and staff training completion.

Setting the Scene – The Broader Context

Local government is undergoing a period of rapid digital transformation, driven by rising demand, constrained resources and increasing expectations from residents for faster, more accessible services. Across the UK, councils are embracing technological innovation through new approaches to data analytics, cloud computing, automation and artificial intelligence (AI). These advances are designed to improve both service outcomes and organisational efficiency. The technologies behind them are enabling councils to redesign services, streamline processes and deliver more personalised, responsive support to communities.

The types of transformation being seen across the sector are wide-ranging. Many councils are adopting "digital first" service models, offering online access to services 24/7 while retaining alternative channels for those who need them. There is a growing focus on end-to-end service redesign, replacing fragmented systems with integrated platforms and shared data. AI and automation are increasingly being used to handle routine administrative tasks, support frontline decision-making and improve customer interactions, for example through chatbots, predictive analytics and case management tools. Alongside this, there is a longer-term shift towards more proactive, data-driven public services, where councils can anticipate need, target interventions earlier and work more effectively with local partners across health, policing and the voluntary sector.

For Stoke-on-Trent City Council, this presents significant opportunities as well as important challenges and risks. There is clear potential to improve customer experience, increase productivity, reduce costs and support wider priorities such as economic growth and reducing inequality. However, the council must address significant but common barriers including outdated legacy systems, fragmented data, digital skills gaps and financial constraints. There is also a need to manage risks around cyber security, data governance and the ethical use of AI, while ensuring that digital transformation does not exclude vulnerable residents.

But most importantly, we need to ensure that there is resident choice and that we are working with residents in the way that works best for them. For many simple transactions, digital will make most sense, but even then, there still needs to be the ability to engage with the Council directly by phone or in person, not



least as our customer offer must work for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. As importantly, many of our relationships with residents are long term, dealing with complex needs and situations, often involving personal care and support. In these circumstances, digital can be an enabler but there is no substitute for human relationships built on trust, empathy and professional judgement.

Ultimately, success will depend not just on adopting new technologies, but on building the organisational capability, culture and partnerships needed to deliver sustainable, customer-focused transformation at scale, where the needs of residents always come first and we are able to differentiate our approach based on the presenting needs.

Where We Start From

The City Council has been improving our customer offer over a number of years, providing more options for how people can access information, advice and services. At the heart of this process has been providing more and better ways of using data and digital technology. We have focused on streamlining and simplifying customer services and making them more intelligent, laying the groundwork for development of a 'digital first' approach wherever possible and relevant. By promoting digital as the preferred option for many transactional services, the council aims to make those services more accessible, responsive and efficient, while freeing up other customer service channels for people who need additional support.

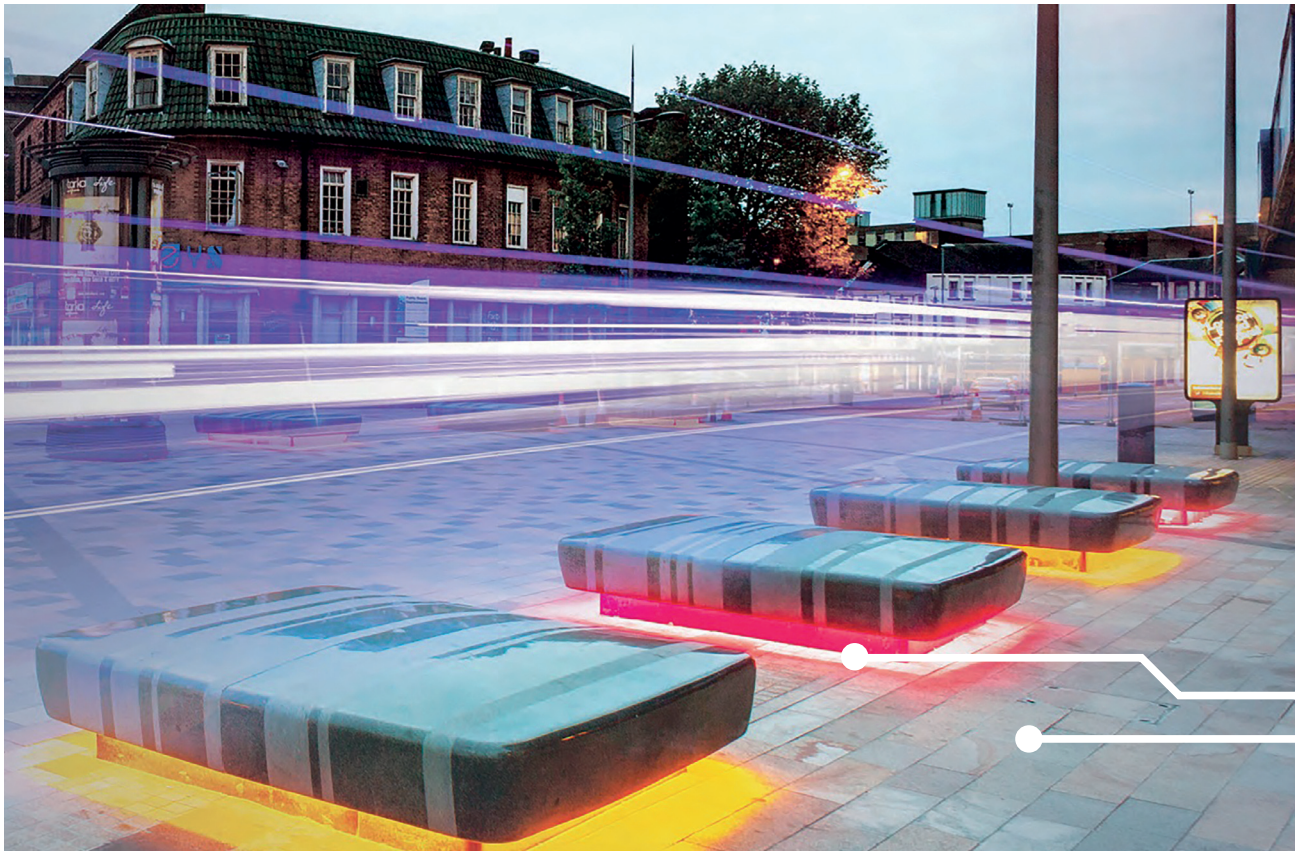
Key areas of focus have been on achieving and maintaining excellent levels of customer service in relation to information, advice, services and help, and developing a range of channels (social media, webchat, chatbot technology, improved online account access) giving customers more control over how and when they access support. The council has also sought to integrate systems and processes to enable customers to benefit from seamless service provision, and to share information across systems to improve the customer service experience, ensuring there is one single view of each customer to better understand their needs. This has been done while always staying within the bounds of personal data protection.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the City Council set out plans to accelerate the pace of digitisation. Stoke-on-Trent became the first place in the UK to deliver a citywide full-fibre, gigabit-enabled high-speed digital network – a key strategic enabler in the development and delivery of innovative online services. The overarching aim was to use digital transformation to rethink council services and deliver increased efficiency, automation and effectiveness.

The citywide full-fibre network was designed to support faster and more reliable digital connectivity across Stoke-on-Trent, including future 5G services. This means council services, public sector partners, businesses and residents can benefit from high-speed connections in more places across the city. The network also provides a strong foundation for better online public services, supports local businesses to become more competitive, helps attract new investment and jobs, and improves access to digital services in homes and communities.

We are working in collaboration with our partner Freedom Fibre on the new iteration of the Silicon Stoke programme; Stoke Smart City, which will continue to build on the city's digital infrastructure to make Stoke-on-Trent the most digitally advanced city in the UK. Enhanced connectivity will make it easier and cheaper for businesses to set up and operate in the city, strengthening economic growth, creating additional employment opportunities and giving households access to a wider range of online services and benefits. Stoke Smart City also aims to capitalise on the potential benefits for public services in the city, including revolutionising provision of health and social care services through the use of remote diagnostic and health monitoring technology, as well as enabling more customers to access online services and take greater control of their health and care needs.

Smart City technology also has the potential to transform the management of key city infrastructure, including energy, transport and utilities networks. By analysing real-time data gathered through networks of sensors, it will be possible to implement changes to reduce traffic congestion, keep bus services running on time, or balance energy grid capacity to address fluctuations in energy supply or demand.



Stoke Smart City Roadmap

The roadmap below shows how Stoke Smart City will build on the city's full-fibre network to support better public services, stronger communities, smarter infrastructure and future economic growth.

Digital infrastructure foundation

Citywide full-fibre connectivity provides the platform for faster, more reliable and more connected services across Stoke-on-Trent.

Connected council services

Using the network to support faster online services, better customer access, digital self-service and more efficient council operations.

Connected communities

Helping residents, businesses and community organisations benefit from improved connectivity, digital inclusion, skills and access to online services.

Connected public services

Working with partners to support health, care, housing, community safety and other public services through better use of digital infrastructure.

Smart city opportunities

How digital connectivity, sensors, data and partner innovation can improve the way the city works.

Smarter health and care

Remote monitoring, digital care tools, assistive technology and better access to health and wellbeing support.

Smarter transport and movement

Using real-time data to support traffic management, active travel, public transport reliability and better planning.

Smarter environment and utilities

Using sensors and data to support energy management, flooding response, waste services, air quality and climate resilience.

Delivery approach

Stoke Smart City will be delivered through practical, partnership-led projects that test, learn and scale what works.

Prioritise use cases

Identify the services and places where smart city technology can deliver the greatest benefit for residents, businesses and public services.

Test and learn

Pilot new approaches with partners, using evidence and feedback to understand value, cost, risk and impact.

Scale and embed

Expand successful solutions, build them into service delivery and ensure they remain secure, sustainable and interoperable to support future service requirements.

Outcome for residents and communities

Better connected services, improved access to digital opportunities, safer and more resilient places, and more proactive support.

Outcome for the city and council

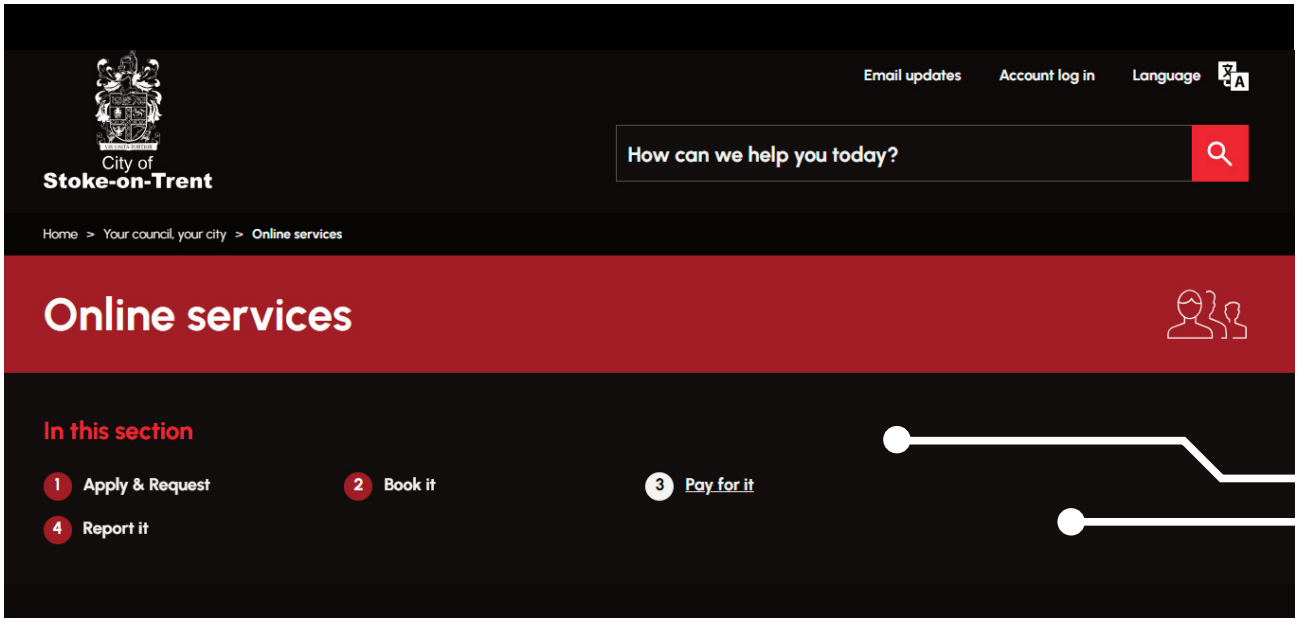
Stronger digital infrastructure, better use of data, more efficient public services, new economic opportunities and a scalable foundation for future public service delivery.

The Current Picture

The expansion of the citywide full-fibre network has provided Stoke-on-Trent with vital Smart City infrastructure which places the city ahead of most other areas of the UK in terms of technological innovation. For the City Council, connection to the network has opened the door to the development of faster, smarter, safer and more connected council services.

During the last five years, the number of digital contacts recorded by the City Council has increased from 254,890 in 2020/21 to 421,195 during 2024/25. At the same time, the number of telephone calls to the council's Customer Services contact centre have reduced from 424,611 in 2020/21 to 324,456 in 2024/25 and is on track to drop below 300,000 in 2025/26. The most popular categories of digital contact between April and June 2025 were Council Tax, rent and penalty notice payments.

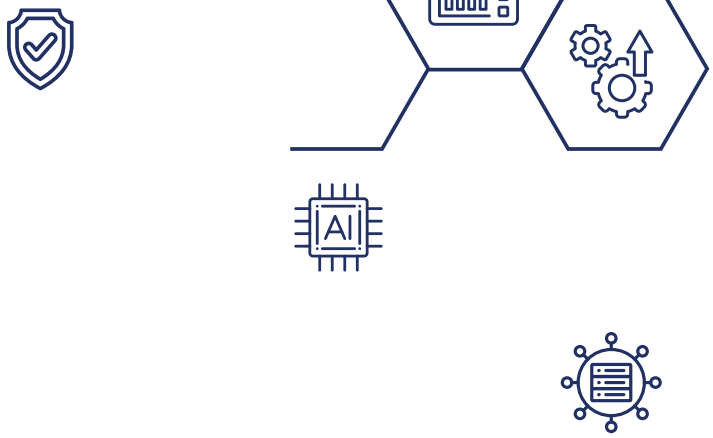
However, while the balance between digital and analogue channel usage has begun to shift towards more online transactions, digital transformation has not yet resulted in the provision of truly joined-up customer services. People are still likely to experience a fragmented service, requiring them to use multiple contacts and channels to resolve different enquiries, with equally varied levels of responsiveness, efficiency and accessibility. One of the fundamental aims of this strategy is to set out how more council services can be provided through digital channels, and in such a way that customers only need to use a single channel, once, to resolve all legitimate enquiries they may have.



However, we recognise that the appetite for digital innovation is variable across Stoke-on-Trent's population. While digital channels such as apps, web portals and even chatbots are becoming the norm in many parts of the commercial world, the city has a higher-than-average proportion of residents and businesses that lack the skills, knowledge, confidence and access to technology needed to interact with these channels successfully. Improving digital skill levels and reducing digital exclusion across the city will be vitally important to the successful implementation of this strategy.

But while we must ensure that no-one is left behind, the City Council is clear that it must embrace the technological opportunity that the current surge in development represents. To this end, we have developed a new Technology Strategy which aims to exploit advances in digital and technological innovation to enable the development of high-quality, modern public services which can deliver better outcomes for residents while strengthening financial sustainability. The strategy focuses on emerging opportunities in relation to:

- Artificial Intelligence
- Process automation
- Advanced data analytics and warehousing
- Service integration
- Cyber security
- Efficiency
- Environmental sustainability



The strategy aims to use new technology to simplify and modernise a complex legacy technology estate. We will use cloud, data and emerging technologies like AI to deliver secure, efficient, and customer-focused public services, while remaining financially and environmentally sustainable. More detail on specific elements and approaches set out in the Technology Strategy can be found in the Appendix to this strategy.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

The City Council faces a set of complex and interrelated challenges that technological innovation must help to address if services are to remain effective in meeting customers' changing requirements. Addressing these challenges will require a fundamental transformation in how technology enables and supports service design, delivery and integration.

- Residents' expectations continue to rise, shaped by their experiences of digital services in other sectors. Customers increasingly expect council services to be accessible at any time, easy to use, and responsive to their needs, with clear communication and timely updates. Meeting these expectations is becoming more difficult as demand for services grows, particularly in areas such as social care, housing and environmental services - all within a challenging financial context where resources are constrained and must be carefully prioritised.

- At the same time, the council's current technology landscape presents significant barriers. With over 200 legacy systems in place, many of which are poorly integrated, both customers and staff experience fragmented and inefficient processes. This is compounded by a continued reliance on manual workarounds, specialist knowledge and reactive service models, limiting the council's ability to operate efficiently or proactively respond to need.

- A siloed approach to service delivery further exacerbates these issues. Customers are often required to navigate multiple systems, channels and teams to resolve related enquiries, leading to frustration, duplication and avoidable contact.

- Data management is becoming increasingly complex, particularly in the context of AI development. The Council will ensure that it abides by all legal requirements on data protection and sharing. We will also adopt an ethical approach to use of AI.

- Future organisational and service changes require the council to ensure that technology decisions remain open, flexible and scalable, enabling continued improvement while supporting long-term sustainability. The council must ensure that all future technology decisions are open, flexible and scalable, enabling seamless integration with neighbouring authorities. This requires a deliberate shift towards interoperable systems and shared standards, ensuring that investment made today remains relevant, adaptable and able to support future organisational requirements.

Digital transformation presents a significant opportunity to reshape how the council operates and serves its customers. As well as delivering meaningful improvements in accessibility and user experience, these opportunities represent a fundamental shift towards becoming a more efficient, responsive and customer-focused council by:

- Empowering customers to self-serve by providing simple, intuitive digital services that are available when people need them.
- Freeing up staff time for what matters most by automating routine tasks and reducing administration, enabling greater focus on complex and person-centred support.
- Reducing costs and improving efficiency by simplifying systems, removing duplication and digitising manual processes.
- Making services faster and easier to access through joined-up digital journeys that reduce delays and repeat contact.
- Using data to make better decisions by understanding demand, identifying



trends and targeting resources where they will have the greatest impact.

Successful delivery of the Customer and Digital Strategy will result in a range of measurable outcomes that improve customer experience, service efficiency and organisational performance, including:

Residents can access and manage services more easily.
More services will be available online end-to-end, enabling residents to self-serve, make requests, track progress and make payments through a single, personalised experience.

Residents receive a more consistent and joined-up experience.
Services will be designed around customer journeys, making interactions simpler, more seamless and easier to navigate regardless of the service or channel used.

The council operates more efficiently and at lower cost.
Automation, process redesign and modern technology will reduce administrative effort, streamline operations and deliver better value for taxpayers.

The council continuously improves services.
Modern platforms and agile ways of working will enable services to adapt quickly to changing customer needs and support ongoing improvement and innovation.

More residents are digitally included and confident.
Improved access to digital services, skills and support will help more people engage online independently while maintaining help for those who need it.

Staff are more productive and focused on high-value work.
Modern tools, better information and reduced administration will enable staff to spend more time supporting residents and businesses where human interaction adds the greatest value.

The council makes better decisions using data and insight.
Improved use of data will support evidence-based decision-making, help anticipate demand, target resources effectively and deliver more proactive services



Vision and Priorities

How are we going to achieve these target outcomes? This strategy sets out a clear and practical approach to transforming how the council designs, delivers and improves services through digital, data and technology. It brings together our customer and digital ambitions into a single, coherent vision focused on delivering better outcomes for residents, businesses and communities.

At its core is a commitment to putting customers first by designing services around their needs, making them easier to access and ensuring they are consistent, responsive and inclusive.

The strategy prioritises simplifying our technology landscape, improving integration and using data more effectively to enable joined-up, proactive services. It also recognises the importance of empowering both residents and staff with the tools, skills and confidence to thrive in a digital environment.

By focusing on a small number of clear priorities, supported by strong governance and continuous improvement, this strategy provides a realistic and deliverable roadmap for creating a modern, efficient and customer-focused council.

> **“Transforming the way we work and serve, so our communities benefit from smarter, faster and more connected public services.”**

Five Guiding Principles



Design services around customer needs

We will design services based on real customer needs, making every interaction simple, relevant and focused on achieving positive outcomes.



Make services easy, joined-up and right first time

We will provide straightforward services that are available when needed, resolve enquiries as early as possible, and deliver a consistent experience across all channels and services.



Use the right approach for each service

We will adopt digital solutions where they improve the customer experience while maintaining personal, relationship-based support where it adds the most value.



Be digital first, but never digital only

We will ensure that everyone can access our services by providing inclusive, high-quality support for those who cannot easily use online services.



Build trust and empower residents

We will communicate clearly, keep customers informed, and provide the tools and information people need to manage their needs independently and confidently.

Customer and Digital Strategy: Future Customer Access Model

The model below shows how residents, businesses and communities will access council services in future, supported by clearer channels, intelligent service operations and strong data and technology foundations.

Residents, businesses and communities

Access information, advice and services through clear, simple and inclusive routes.

Digital self-service

Website, online forms, customer account, payments, reporting, tracking, webchat, chatbot and digital assistants.

Assisted and supported access

Telephone, face-to-face, libraries, community venues, family hubs, community lounges, mobile provision and assisted digital support.

Specialist and relationship-based support

Complex casework, safeguarding, social care, housing support, complaints resolution and trusted professional relationships.

Outcome for residents and communities

Services are easier to access, more joined-up, faster to resolve, inclusive for those who need support and supported by clear communication.

Outcome for the city and council

Reduced avoidable contact, better use of data, improved productivity, stronger governance, more consistent service standards and better value for money.

Intelligent service operations

How the council manages demand, resolves enquiries and improves services behind the scenes.

Single front door and triage

Clear entry points, consistent customer standards, intelligent routing and prioritisation of requests.

Joined-up case management

Customer relationship management, end-to-end case handling, progress updates and reduced need for customers to repeat information.

Service redesign and improvement

Customer journey redesign, complaints learning, demand insight, workflow automation, scheduling and time management, knowledge management, and continuous improvement.

Council data and technology foundation

The core platforms, data and capabilities that enable modern, secure and joined-up services.

Strategic platforms

Website, customer relationship management, AWS contact centre platform, SAP ERP system, line-of-business systems and integration tools.

Data, insight and analytics

Trusted data, Power BI, dashboards, data governance, data quality, forecasting, insight and ethical use of AI.

Secure and resilient technology

Cloud infrastructure, cyber security, interoperability, application rationalisation, lifecycle management and scalable solutions that support future organisational needs.

Case study: Designing the Future Customer Access Model with Residents and Tenants

Engagement with the Citizens Assembly and Tenants Voice helped test the direction of the Customer and Digital Strategy with the people who use council services. We asked both groups about how they currently access services, what makes this difficult, what would make digital services easier to use, and how the council should make sure that digital-first does not become digital-only. The discussion focused on the need for simpler access, clearer communication, better online journeys, more joined-up systems and continued support for residents and tenants who need help by phone, face-to-face or in community settings.

The groups described similar experiences. Residents and tenants said they can be asked to repeat information, move between different channels, or use systems that do not always work smoothly together. They highlighted problems with website navigation, search results, online forms, address look-up and a lack of progress updates. Tenants were particularly clear that some people, including older or vulnerable residents and those without internet access, may miss important information if communication relies too heavily on digital channels. Both groups supported better digital services where they are simple and reliable, but emphasised that the council must continue to provide choice, reassurance and practical help.

Their suggestions directly shaped the future operating model described in this strategy. They asked for a clearer single front door into services, better tracking and updates through CRM-enabled case management, improved website search using plain language, more proactive communications, service testing through residents and tenants, and stronger use of data to understand demand, preferences and repeat contact. They also suggested practical non-digital routes, including information through posters, newsletters, GP surgeries, community lounges, resident associations, libraries and frontline staff. This reinforces the strategy's future model of digital self-service where appropriate, assisted and supported access through phone, face-to-face, libraries and community venues, and specialist relationship-based support for more complex needs.

The engagement demonstrates why the council's future model must be built around real customer journeys rather than organisational structures. It supports the strategy's commitment to joined-up case management, inclusive digital design, customer standards, community-based support, data-led improvement and continuous feedback. It also provides a clear mandate for the council to keep testing services with residents and tenants as delivery progresses, ensuring that transformation improves access, reduces frustration and gives people confidence that they can use council services in the way that works best for them.

Alignment with corporate priorities

This strategy is a key enabler for the delivery of the priorities set out in the council's corporate strategy. Through improved access to services and more proactive, data-driven approaches, we will support healthier lives and stronger, safer communities.

By enabling economic participation, improving digital skills and supporting local businesses, we will contribute to a more prosperous and skilled city. Our focus on digital inclusion and accessible services will help tackle inequality and ensure a fairer Stoke-on-Trent for all.

At the same time, smarter use of technology and more efficient operations will support cleaner, greener and more sustainable ways of working. By aligning our digital transformation with these priorities, we will ensure that innovation is not an end in itself, but a practical tool for delivering meaningful and lasting change.

Our City, Our Wellbeing corporate priorities



1. Healthier
Creating a healthier standard of living for all our citizens

2. Wealthier
Reducing hardship and enabling greater shared prosperity

3. Safer
Building empowered communities, safe from the threat of harm

4. Greener
Conserving our environment and living more sustainably

5. Cleaner
Working together to clean up our city and our communities

6. Fairer
Tackling inequality and improving life chances for everyone

7. Skilled
Transforming our city's education and skills provision

How the strategy will address these priorities

Healthier

- Easier access to social care, wellbeing and public health services.
- Access to tools to enable people to better manage their own health and wellbeing.
- Digitally enabled active travel networks to support walking and cycling.

Case study: Technology in Care Settings

Adult Social Care has used digital innovation to improve outcomes for people using in-house provider services while also supporting more efficient care delivery. A phased programme across Marrow House and The Meadows introduced fall detection sensors, activity monitoring, reminiscence technology, digital reception services and new communication tools.

The programme combined technology with service redesign, including acoustic fall detection, activity monitoring, digital care systems, virtual reality therapy, Alexa-enabled solutions and person-centred software. It has delivered benefits including reduced unscheduled night checks, improved resident rest, earlier identification of health concerns, reduced anxiety and behavioural issues, better communication and increased interaction. It also provides a stronger foundation for independent living, more personalised care and future digital innovation.

Wealthier

- Making it easier for local businesses to transact with the Council.
- Citywide high-speed full fibre network supports enhanced digital capabilities.
- Enhanced intra-city transport connectivity through digital transport network management and data-informed transport planning.
- City-wide workforce more equipped to access higher skilled jobs
- Digital support for those who wish to establish and grow their own business.

Safer

- Faster reporting of issues such as environmental health or community safety.
- Digital approach to highways defect management.
- Enhanced CCTV monitoring systems.
- More effective use of data to identify and address community safety risks.

Greener

- Enhanced citywide waste and recycling services.
- Digital energy management solutions to reduce emissions and consumption relating to council-owned and managed buildings.
- Digital monitoring of impacts of climate change and associated environmental risks, such as flooding, allowing for earlier intervention and prevention.

Cleaner

- Digital channels make it quicker and simpler for residents to report fly tipping, litter, graffiti and street cleansing issues
- Digital first processes reduce paper and printing, supporting environmental objectives.
- Better use of data and analytics enables the council to identify hotspots, repeat issues and trends, helping services target cleansing, enforcement and prevention activity more effectively.

Fairer

- Smarter, more accessible services to support vulnerable residents.
- Using data to tailor support and services to different geographies and cohorts
- Making it easier for digitally excluded residents to access key services.
- More effective and timely resolution of when things go wrong.

Skilled

- Raising local residents' skill levels to enable more confidence in use of services but also enhancing access to employment opportunities.
- Improving the digital and customer service skills of our own workforce.

The Strategic Pillars

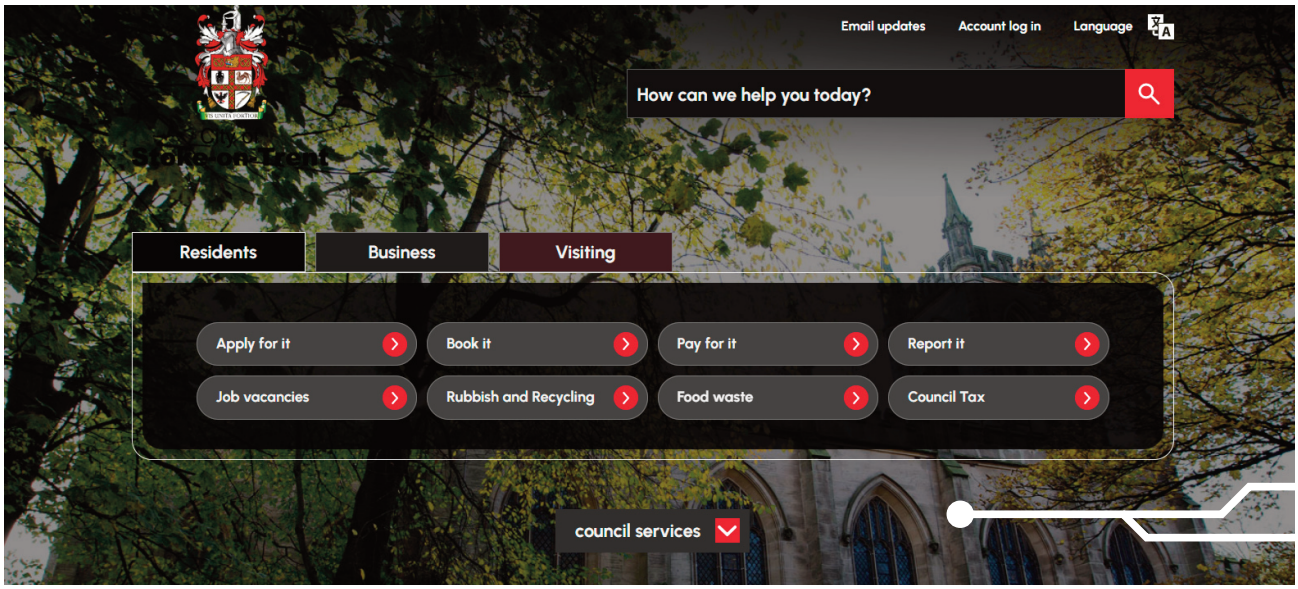
1 – Improved customer access and experience

Current context

Residents' interactions with the council can currently feel fragmented, with customers often needing to contact multiple services, repeat information and navigate different systems to resolve a single issue. While significant progress has been made in enabling online transactions, customer journeys are not always consistent or end to end, and systems do not always integrate seamlessly across services.

The council has already invested in key foundations, including a transactional website, Customer Relationship Management (CRM capabilities) and early use of automation and chatbots. These have enabled residents to report issues, make payments and track requests more easily than in the past, and have supported growing demand for digital services. However, demand continues to rise, expectations are shaped by commercial digital experiences, and pressure on resources means that avoidable contact and inefficient processes create risks to both service quality and value for money.

Engagement with residents consistently highlights a desire for simpler access, clearer communication, quicker resolution and reassurance that digital improvements will remain inclusive. This creates a strong mandate to move further towards a genuinely joined up, customer centred model.



Strategic aims

Under this pillar, we will:

- Make it easier for residents to access council services through a single, joined up front door.
- Reduce the need for multiple contacts by getting things right first time.
- Improve speed, clarity and consistency of responses.
- Increase take up of digital and self service options while maintaining inclusive alternatives.
- Create a dedicated customer service offer for Council tenants and leaseholders with respect to repairs and maintenance of their homes.
- Use data and insight to proactively identify issues and improve customer outcomes.
- Improve our response when things go wrong, including our management of complaints.
- Build trust and confidence through clear communication and better service standards.

Key areas of focus, delivery and expected change

- **Customer standards and a single front door** – we will create a clearer, more visible route into council services, supported by refreshed customer standards tested with residents and reported on regularly. This will help residents understand what to expect and improve consistency across services and channels.
- **CRM-enabled, joined-up case management** – we will strengthen our approaches to Customer Relationship Management and integration with back-office systems so staff have the right information, customers do not need to repeat themselves, and cases can be managed end-to-end with clearer updates on progress.
- **Digital-first, inclusive access** – we will make digital channels the quickest and easiest route for suitable services, using online forms, self-service, chatbots and assisted digital tools, while maintaining phone, face-to-face and community-based support for those who need it.
- **Clear, simple customer journeys** – we will redesign services around real customer needs before applying technology, simplifying choices, removing avoidable contact and making transactions easier to complete first time.

- **Website improvement** – we will make the website more transactional, task-focused and easier to navigate, including a dedicated online offer for council tenants and leaseholders.
- **Better handling of complaints and service failure** – we will make it easier to raise concerns, take a restorative approach where things have gone wrong, put issues right earlier and use learning from complaints to improve services.
- **Data-led learning and continuous improvement** – we will use system insight, analytics, customer feedback and complaints data to understand demand, reduce repeat contact, improve outcomes and focus staff capacity on more complex cases.
- **Flexible and skilled customer contact workforce** – we will align staffing, skills and digital support to customer demand across the day and week, ensuring residents get the right help at the right time.

By putting customers at the heart of service design and access, this pillar will make it easier for residents to get help, receive clear updates and resolve issues first time, while enabling the council to reduce avoidable contact and operate more efficiently.

Case study: Garden Waste Subscription Service

The introduction of the chargeable garden waste service demonstrated how a digital-first approach can improve customer access while protecting capacity for residents who need additional support. The council designed a simple online subscription journey, supported by clear customer communications, website improvements and integrated service processes. Assisted routes remained available through the contact centre, libraries and specialist support so that residents were not excluded.

AI-enabled telephony helped guide customers directly to the online subscription route, reducing avoidable demand and making the process easier to complete at a convenient time. During 2025/26, 93% of subscriptions were completed online, with only 7% requiring contact centre support. Customers described the process as quick and easy, showing how well-designed digital services can be efficient, inclusive and scalable.

2 – Community Development and Empowerment

Digital transformation is not only about improving council services; it is also about strengthening communities and enabling residents to thrive in an increasingly digital world. This pillar focuses on empowering individuals, communities and local organisations with the access, skills and confidence needed to participate fully in society and the local economy.

We will work with partners across the public, voluntary, community and private sectors to tackle digital exclusion, support community-led initiatives and create opportunities for people to develop digital skills that enhance employment, wellbeing and independence. By improving access to technology, fostering collaboration and enabling greater self service, we will help residents take greater control over their interactions with the council and their wider lives, ensuring that digital transformation contributes to a more inclusive, resilient and empowered city.

It is also about how we deliver services that need personal contact and relationships. Increasingly, we will join up our service offer in individual places and neighbourhoods so that residents, particularly more vulnerable residents, can find the help and support they need in one place, such as a Family Hub, community lounge or library.

Current context

Digital exclusion remains a significant barrier for many residents, affecting access to services, learning, employment opportunities and social connection. Challenges are not limited to access to devices or connectivity, but also include confidence, skills, language barriers, accessibility needs and trust in digital services.

The council and partners already deliver a range of activity to support digital inclusion. This includes digital literacy and access support through libraries and community venues, as well as targeted programmes delivered in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations. These initiatives provide assisted digital support, basic digital skills training and safe access to technology for residents who may otherwise be excluded.

There is also emerging insight at regional and national level highlighting persistent inequalities in digital access and skills, particularly affecting older people, residents with disabilities, people on low incomes and those seeking employment or skills progression.

Case study: Wavemaker and DigitALL

DigitALL, developed by Wavemaker, has become one of Stoke-on-Trent's largest digital inclusion programmes and demonstrates the value of neighbourhood-based, partnership-led support. Backed by more than £800,000 of UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment from Stoke-on-Trent City Council, the programme has helped nearly 2,300 residents gain digital skills and confidence, distributed 751 digital devices, delivered 194 guided learning hours and provided more than 400 face-to-face sessions.

The programme supports residents to develop the digital skills, confidence and opportunities needed for employment, education, everyday life and access to online services. Delivery is rooted in trusted community settings, including Wavemaker Connect digital inclusion hubs operating through local community organisations, with Digital Champions embedded across communities. Support is targeted towards residents who may face additional barriers, including unemployment, homelessness, disability, mental health challenges, family support needs and veterans' services.

DigitALL won the national Digital Technology Leaders Award 2026 for Digital Programme Excellence, recognising the impact of this partnership approach. It provides a strong foundation for the council's future model of digitally enabled community hubs, libraries, community lounges and assisted digital support, ensuring residents can benefit from digital transformation without being excluded by it.

Local evidence shows that Stoke-on-Trent is comparatively well served in terms of digital infrastructure, but that access to the network does not automatically translate into digital participation. Ofcom's Connected Nations 2025 data indicates that 86.8% of premises in the city have access to full fibre broadband, above the UK average of 77.5%, while superfast broadband coverage is almost universal at 98.2% and 93.1% of premises can access gigabit-capable services. This means that, for most residents, the physical availability of high-speed broadband is no longer the main barrier. However, take-up remains relatively modest, with only

23% of all premises subscribing to full fibre services and 27% of covered premises using the infrastructure available to them. This suggests that affordability, awareness, confidence and skills continue to shape whether residents are able to benefit from the city's digital infrastructure.

Broadband Infrastructure (2025)	Stoke-on-Trent	Comparator average*
Full fibre coverage	86.8%	73.9%
Gigabit coverage	93.1%	93.9%
Superfast broadband (>30Mbit/s)	98.2%	98.8%
Full fibre take-up (all premises)	23%	35.6%
Full fibre take-up (covered premises)	27%	45.0%

*Comparator authorities: Kingston upon Hull, Coventry, Wolverhampton, South Tyneside and Telford & Wrekin.

The greater challenge is therefore around digital literacy, inclusion and confidence. Evidence from NHS England's Digital Exclusion Risk Atlas ranks Stoke-on-Trent 72nd most at risk nationally for digital exclusion overall, with the city's most significant issue relating to Ability and Skills, where it ranks 11th most at risk out of 296 authorities. This reflects wider challenges linked to educational attainment, disability, long-term health conditions and language barriers. By contrast, the city performs better in the Digital Access and Capability domain, ranking 172nd, which reinforces the conclusion that infrastructure is relatively strong but many residents still face barriers to using digital services independently. Overall, 54 of the city's 163 Lower Super Output Areas, or 33.1%, fall within the two highest-risk deciles for digital exclusion. This provides a clear evidence base for continued investment in digital inclusion, digital skills, affordability support and assisted access as part of the Customer and Digital Strategy.

At the same time, there are residents who, for a wide variety of reasons, need to access services, or at least advice and information, in person. This may be because they have additional needs or are caring for someone that does. In future, we want to make this as easy as possible by bringing more services into our neighbourhoods across the city. The plan is to use our growing network of neighbourhood hubs - community lounges, day centres, family hubs, libraries,

voluntary sector and faith-based provision as places where council staff, but also local NHS staff and welfare experts can attend to support residents with their needs. Increasingly, these centres will have a timetable of different provision through the week so residents know what support they can access when. And for those places that don't have such centres, we will put in place a mobile provision, so no-one feels isolated and disconnected.

DERA Digital Exclusion Risk Ranking (1 = highest risk)	Stoke-on-Trent
Overall Digital Exclusion Risk	72nd
Digital Access & Capability	172nd
Affordability & Economic Pressure	75th
Ability & Skills	11th
Agency, Motivation & Trust	180th
LSOAs in highest-risk deciles	54 of 163 (33.1%)

Strategic aims

Under this pillar, we will:

- Reduce digital exclusion and inequality by improving access to devices, connectivity and skills.
- Build digital confidence and capability across communities, enabling residents to engage independently with services and opportunities.
- Support employment, skills and economic participation through targeted digital skills development.
- Deliver more access points in the places where people live so individuals can get the advice and help they need more easily.
- Strengthen community resilience by supporting digitally enabled community groups and local organisations.
- Ensure digital transformation complements, rather than replaces, inclusive and human-centred support.

Key areas of focus, delivery and expected change

- **Neighbourhood access and community support** – we will work with public, voluntary, community and faith partners to provide clearer, more joined-up access to advice and support in the places where people live, including libraries, family hubs, community lounges, day centres and mobile provision where needed.
- **Digital access and inclusion** – we will coordinate device access, connectivity support, safe public access points and assisted digital help so residents can use online services with confidence, while maintaining inclusive alternatives.
- **Digital skills linked to life and work** – we will deliver targeted skills pathways linked to everyday digital tasks, employment, learning, health, wellbeing and independence, focusing support on communities most at risk of exclusion.
- **Community capability and leadership** – we will support community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprises to use digital tools, shared platforms and secure data-sharing arrangements to deliver services and engage residents more effectively.
- **Partnership-led, asset-based delivery** – we will map and publish the support available across the city, clarify partner roles and referral routes, and build on local assets rather than duplicating provision.
- **Inclusive design and assisted pathways** – we will ensure services and digital tools are accessible by default, with trusted support available through libraries, community venues and frontline teams for residents who need additional help.

By focusing on people, places and partnerships, this pillar ensures digital transformation is complementary to and supporting our wider ambitions to develop stronger communities, reduce inequalities and enable residents to benefit fully from digital progress—rather than being left behind by it.

Case study: Community Lounges / Communities Together

Community Lounges are helping residents access practical support in the places where they live. The council identified that many people needed face-to-face help to complete basic forms and everyday digital tasks, particularly where they lacked confidence, skills or access to support.

Locality Connectors and specialist partner services now co-deliver support from community sites across the city, helping residents with activities such as applying for benefits, completing housing applications, applying for bus passes and blue badges, making medical appointments, researching local activities and applying for employment. This provides early help on residents' doorsteps, reduces the need to travel across the city or rely on telephone support, and helps prevent issues escalating to crisis point.

Case study: Supporting People to Live Independently

This case study shows how simple, accessible digital tools can support independence, safety and wellbeing. The Occupational Therapy service worked with a resident living alone and their family to introduce home Wi-Fi, a voice-enabled smart speaker and smart lighting. Practical support was provided so the resident could use the technology with confidence.

Voice-controlled lighting reduced the need to move around in the dark, video calling helped maintain regular contact with family, and online shopping supported day-to-day independence. Over a three-month period, falls reduced from more than two incidents per week to no reported falls. The approach improved confidence, reduced isolation, eased pressure on family members and enabled more positive time with support networks.

3 – A Digital-First Council

Becoming a digital-first council means redesigning how we deliver services so that digital is the simplest, fastest and most effective way for residents to engage with us. This pillar focuses on transforming end-to-end services, embedding digital ways of working and making better use of automation, data and emerging technologies to improve efficiency and outcomes. Digital-first does not mean digital only. However, while ensuring inclusive access for those who need alternative support, we will prioritise well-designed digital journeys that reduce effort for customers and staff alike. By rethinking processes, removing unnecessary complexity and enabling seamless interactions across channels, we will create a more responsive, efficient and customer-focused organisation that is equipped to meet future demand.

Current context

The council has already made significant progress towards a digital first approach. This includes the development of a fully transactional website, integration with CRM where appropriate and online services that enable residents to request services, make payments and report issues at a time that suits them. Early pilots of chatbots and automation have demonstrated the potential to extend access beyond traditional opening hours and reduce pressure on analogue channels.

Demand for digital services has increased steadily, accelerated by changes in customer expectations and the experience residents have with commercial digital services. In many service areas, online demand is now the dominant channel, indicating that digital offers are sufficiently mature to support a shift towards digital first delivery. However, services are not yet consistently designed end to end, and opportunities remain to further integrate systems and reduce avoidable contact.

Importantly, feedback from residents and tenants shows strong support for digital improvements but also reinforces that digital services must remain inclusive. Phone, face to face support and assisted digital provision through libraries and community venues continue to play a vital role in ensuring no one is left behind.

Strategic aims

Through a digital-first council approach, we will:

- Make digital the default and most straightforward way to access council services.
- Enable residents to self-serve, track progress and receive updates wherever possible.
- Reduce avoidable contact and manual processing by redesigning services end to end.
- Improve efficiency and consistency while maintaining high standards of customer care.
- Ensure digital services are inclusive, accessible and supported by assisted channels.

Key areas of focus, delivery and expected change

- **Digital channels and self-service** – we will expand end-to-end online transactions so residents can request services, make payments, track progress and receive updates 24/7, supported by accessible design and clear guidance.
- **Automation and intelligent routing** – we will use automation, chatbots and digital assistants to handle routine enquiries, support 24/7 access and route more complex issues to staff quickly and appropriately.
- **Joined-up systems and progress visibility** – we will further integrate Customer Relationship Management, the website and back-office systems so requests flow seamlessly, reducing duplication, delays and repeat contact.
- **Redesign before digitisation** – we will simplify services before applying technology, prioritising mature services with strong online demand and delivering channel shift progressively, service by service.
- **Inclusive access and assisted digital** – we will retain phone and face-to-face support and strengthen assisted digital provision through libraries and community venues so digital-first never becomes digital-only.
- **Safe and ethical use of technology** – we will use automation and AI to support staff and customers, improve consistency and reduce manual processing, while maintaining appropriate human oversight.

Case study: AWS Connect Customer Experience Transformation

The implementation of Amazon Connect has modernised the council's customer contact platform, replacing legacy telephony with a more flexible, scalable and customer-focused cloud solution. The programme has improved call handling, introduced customer callback functionality, strengthened reporting and analytics, and created the foundations for future AI-enabled omni-channel customer journeys.

Customers can now request a callback rather than remain on hold, improving choice and reducing pressure on telephone queues. AI capabilities such as Contact Lens, Amazon Q and Agent Assist are being enabled to provide customer insight, quality monitoring and adviser support. Future AI-powered voice agents will help automate routine service requests, provide 24/7 access and route more complex enquiries to advisers, ensuring capacity is focused on residents who need the greatest level of support.

A digital-first council will enable residents to access services in simpler, faster and more convenient ways, while ensuring inclusive support remains in place for those who need it.



4 – Systems, platforms and solutions

Modern, reliable and well-integrated systems are essential to delivering high-quality, efficient and customer-focused services. This pillar sets out how we will simplify and transform our current technology landscape, moving away from fragmented, legacy systems towards a more coherent set of strategic platforms and solutions. By reducing duplication, improving integration and adopting common standards, we will create a more seamless experience for both residents and staff. Our approach will prioritise scalable, flexible and interoperable solutions that support service transformation and are aligned with future organisational and service delivery requirements. Through this, we will enable faster service delivery, better use of data and more consistent outcomes, ensuring our technology estate acts as a strong foundation for innovation and continuous improvement.

Current context

Over time, the council has implemented a wide range of digital systems to meet specific service needs. While many of these systems perform their individual functions effectively, the overall technology landscape has become increasingly complex, with multiple platforms operating alongside one another and limited integration between them.

This fragmentation can create challenges for both residents and staff. Customers may experience disjointed journeys across services, while staff often need to work across several systems, re enter information or rely on manual processes to bridge gaps. Data is frequently held in silos, limiting the organisation's ability to gain a single view of customers, services or outcomes.

Significant progress has already been made in establishing strategic foundations, including the use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), a transactional website, cloud technologies, M365, Power BI and a move towards cloud-appropriate infrastructure. However, further rationalisation, standardisation and integration are required to fully realise the benefits of these investments and to support future organisational change.

Strategic aims
Under this pillar, we will:

- Simplify and rationalise the council's systems and applications landscape.
- Reduce duplication and reliance on bespoke or legacy solutions.
- Improve integration between systems to enable end to end digital services.
- Establish a clear set of strategic corporate platforms.
- Enable better use of data to support decision-making, insight and proactive services.
- Ensure systems are scalable, resilient and capable of supporting future organisational change.

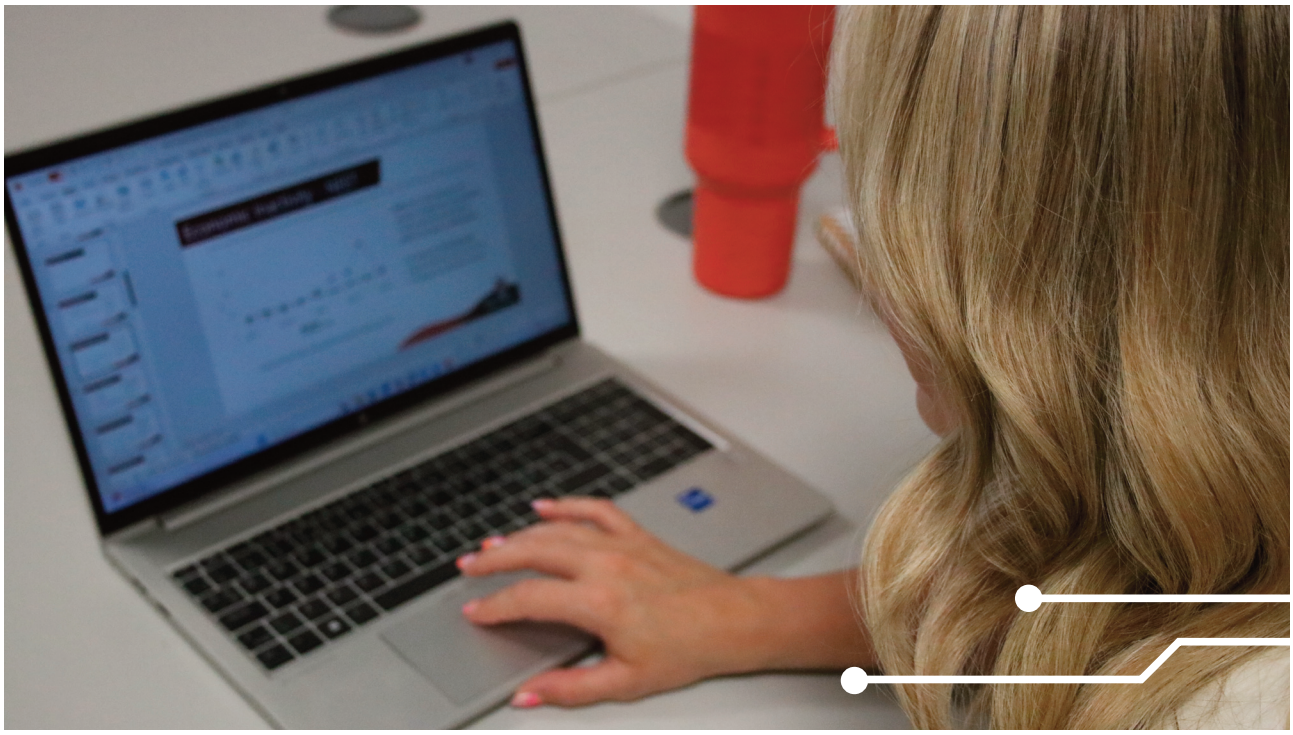
Key areas of focus, delivery and expected change

- **Strategic platforms and architecture** – we will define and maintain a clear target operating model and architecture map, identifying the core corporate platforms needed for CRM, website, finance, HR, data and integration services.
- **Integration and interoperability** – we will improve how systems connect and share data so customer requests flow from front-end to back-office systems without duplication, manual workarounds or avoidable delays.
- **Application rationalisation and legacy reduction** – we will review, consolidate and retire standalone or overlapping systems, prioritising "configure not customise" solutions and considering future operational and organisational requirements.
- **Cloud-appropriate, secure and resilient infrastructure** – we will continue moving to scalable, vendor-supported and standards-based cloud infrastructure that supports flexible working, cyber security, data protection and future service redesign.
- **Lifecycle management and standards** – we will actively manage systems from procurement through to retirement, reducing cost, risk and complexity while improving reliability and consistency.
- **Better data quality and staff insight** – we will strengthen data platforms, integration and analytics so staff and leaders have better access to trusted information and can make faster, more consistent decisions.

5 – Developing Relevant Skills

Digital transformation must benefit everyone. This pillar focuses on ensuring that all residents have fair and meaningful access to digital services, alongside the skills and confidence to use them. We recognise that not everyone is able or willing to engage digitally, and we will continue to provide alternative ways to access services where needed. Through targeted support, partnerships and community based initiatives, and by making services accessible, inclusive and easy to use, we will ensure that digital becomes a tool for reducing inequality rather than reinforcing it.

Similarly, the council's workforce will be central to delivering this strategy, and they require a wider set of skills that covers not only digital competence but wider customer relationship management skills and a strong understanding of community development. This pillar therefore focuses on equipping staff with the skills they need to succeed in a modern, technology-enabled organisation that places an emphasis on high quality relationship management. We will invest in training, tools and new ways of working that empower staff to work more efficiently, reduce administrative burden and focus on higher value activities. At the same time, we will foster a culture of innovation, continuous learning and collaboration, enabling teams to test, adapt and improve services over time. By supporting our workforce to embrace change, we will ensure that transformation is sustainable and delivers lasting benefits for both staff and residents.



Current context

Across the city, many residents access and use digital tools confidently, but a significant minority continue to face barriers linked to skills, confidence, accessibility and trust. The council and partners already provide digital support through libraries, community venues and targeted initiatives, offering assisted access and basic digital skills. Feedback from residents and tenants confirms the importance of maintaining these inclusive, supported options as digital services expand. Within the organisation, there is growing use of modern tools such as M365, data dashboards, automation and early AI pilots. Good practice and innovation exist across services, supported through initiatives such as ADAPT and service led digital pilots. However, this activity is currently fragmented and not always visible or easy for staff to access consistently.

More broadly, we need staff at all levels of the organisation to be trained in how to maximise the customer experience for residents and businesses when they deal with the council. This ranges from our staff in the customer contact centres to those working day-to-day in communities. This includes the following core competences:

- effective listening and understanding of the issues that residents raise
- taking ownership of the whole situation, not just the part that falls within the individual officer's job description
- excellence in problem-solving, including the direct involvement of the individuals and communities in what the best solutions might be
- adopting a restorative approach, that puts the emphasis on putting things right, rather than attributing blame, making excuses or hiding behind bureaucracy.

Engagement with senior leaders and staff highlights the need for a clearer, more coordinated approach to the development of all these skills, focusing less on formal training alone and more on practical, day to day adoption, confidence and behaviour change.

Strategic aims

Under this pillar, we will:

- Reduce digital exclusion by improving residents' skills, confidence and access to support.
- Ensure digital services are designed to be accessible, inclusive and easy to use.
- Equip staff with the skills they require to deliver modern services.
- Build confidence in the safe, ethical and responsible use of digital and AI tools.
- Create a culture of continuous learning, innovation and improvement across the organisation.

Key areas of focus, delivery and expected change

- **Resident digital skills and confidence** – we will support residents to develop the skills and confidence needed to access services, information and opportunities, while maintaining non-digital channels and inclusive support for those who need them.
- **Assisted digital and community support** – we will strengthen support through libraries, community venues and partners so residents can get help at the point they need it.
- **Workforce capability and practical learning** – we will develop staff confidence in customer relationship management, restorative practice, digital tools, data, automation and continuous improvement through bite-sized learning, peer support and practical examples.
- **Digital Academy and communities of practice** – we will establish a visible Digital Academy offer, supported by networks of digital, AI, community development and customer response champions who share learning and support adoption.
- **Leadership and change mindset** – we will support leaders and managers to model digital behaviours, create the conditions for innovation and embed new ways of working into everyday service improvement.
- **Safe and responsible adoption** – we will provide clear guidance, standards and support for ethical, secure and appropriate use of digital and AI technologies, helping build confidence across the organisation.

6 – Data and Analytics

Data is a critical asset that underpins effective decision-making, service design and organisational performance. This pillar focuses on strengthening how we collect, manage, share and use data to deliver better outcomes for residents and communities. By improving data quality, integration and accessibility, we will enable a more joined-up view of customer needs and service demand. Advanced analytics will support earlier intervention, more targeted support and more efficient allocation of resources. We will also promote a culture where data is used confidently and responsibly at all levels of the organisation, supported by clear governance, strong data protection and ethical use of emerging technologies. Through this, we will move from reactive to proactive services, using insight to anticipate needs, improve experiences and drive continuous improvement.

Current context

The council holds a significant volume of data across services, systems and partnerships. While this data supports statutory reporting and operational activity, it is often held in service-specific systems and data silos, limiting its wider use for insight, prevention and strategic decision making.

Progress has already been made in areas such as business intelligence, use of Power BI dashboards, and early development of a more centralised data approach. However, data quality, consistency, ownership and accessibility vary across the organisation, and staff confidence in using data is uneven.

There is also a growing expectation—from residents, partners and regulators - that decisions are evidence based, transparent and driven by insight. At the same time, Increasing collaboration, integration and service transformation require strong data foundations, common standards and clear governance.

Strategic aims

Under this pillar, we will:

- Establish a clear understanding of our current data maturity and priority gaps.
- Improve data quality, consistency and accessibility across the organisation.
- Enable better integration and sharing of data to support joined up services.
- Strengthen analytical capability to support insight, forecasting and early intervention.
- Build a confident data culture where staff use insight routinely and responsibly.
- Ensure strong data governance, security and ethical use of data and AI.

Key areas of focus, delivery and expected change

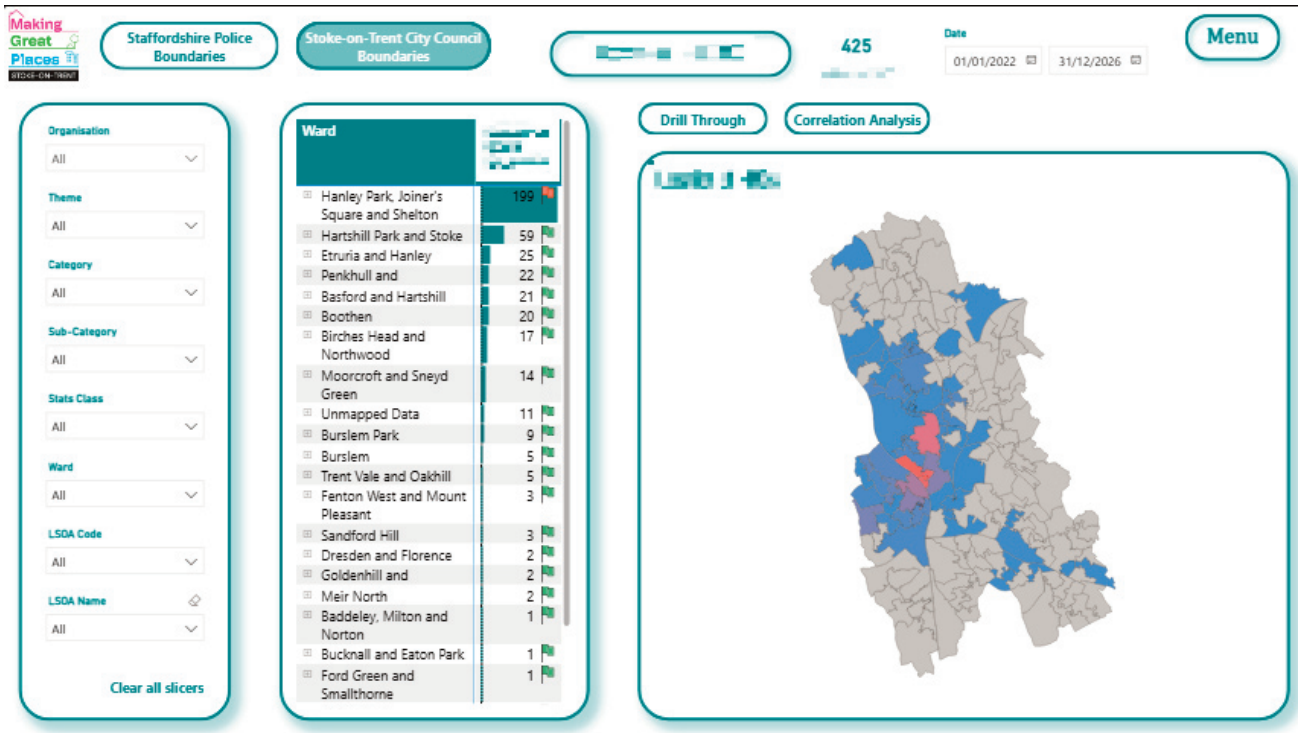
- **Data maturity and improvement roadmap** – we will establish a clear baseline of current data governance, quality, capability and culture, using this to prioritise a realistic improvement roadmap.
- **Data governance, standards and ownership** – we will clarify roles, responsibilities, policies and assurance arrangements so data is managed consistently, responsibly and securely across the organisation.
- **Integrated data and joined-up insight** – we will improve how data flows across systems and services to create better insight into customers, demand, outcomes and opportunities for prevention.
- **Analytics and self-service business intelligence** – we will expand the use of Power BI, dashboards and self-service analytics so staff and leaders can use evidence more routinely in operational and strategic decision-making.
- **Data culture and capability** – we will build confidence, curiosity and data literacy through training, guidance, leadership behaviours and practical support.
- **Ethical, secure and proactive use of insight** – we will ensure strong governance and responsible use of data and AI, enabling the council to anticipate demand, target support earlier and improve outcomes.

By strengthening data and analytics as a cross cutting capability, this pillar ensures insight drives better decisions, more proactive services and improved outcomes across all areas of the council.

Case study: Making Great Places – Partnership Intelligence Dashboard

The Making Great Places Partnership Intelligence Dashboard shows how better data and analytics can support safer, more coordinated and more evidence-led public services. Previously, council, police and partner intelligence sat across separate systems, making it harder to identify priority places, coordinate action and evidence whether interventions were improving safety, confidence and the town-centre experience.

The Performance Team, Partnership Analyst and Staffordshire Police developed a secure Power BI dashboard that brings refreshed council and police data into one governed environment. It provides strategic and restricted views, mapping, hotspot analysis, KPI monitoring, trend insight and Clear-Hold-Build tracking. The dashboard now gives partners a shared single source of truth to target risk, harm and vulnerability, reducing manual analysis and supporting town-centre patrols, enforcement, environmental action, communications and partnership decisions. It has supported hotspot targeting in Fenton, Shelton, Tunstall and town centres, helped evidence reductions in monitored town-centre crime and anti-social behaviour, and supported Bronze recognition in the LGC Public Partnership Award.



Turning Strategy into Delivery

The Fundamentals

The Strategy will be supported by the following:

- Digital Target Operating Model and Architecture Map
- Data Strategy
- Customer Service Standards
- Rolling Delivery Plan

The successful delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the existing Digital and Data Board (DaDB) chaired by the Chief Executive, and accountable through the Cabinet Member to Cabinet.

Acting under the relevant officer delegations, the Board will consider any IT & digital business cases and investments required to successfully deliver this strategy. The Board will receive regular project progress reports from Project Managers and Senior Responsible Owners (SRO's) and monitor the delivery of benefits arising from approved IT & digital investments. The Cabinet Member will be kept regularly appraised on progress as well as the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A dedicated Customer Excellence Transformation Programme will provide the governance and delivery oversight for the main customer-facing projects within this strategy. This programme will coordinate the improvement of the council website, the refresh of customer service standards, the redesign of customer journeys, future phases of work with Amazon Web Services to support customer contact, improvements to complaints handling, and the future direction of Customer Relationship Management. Where projects include IT, digital or data components, they will also report into the Digital and Data Board to ensure appropriate oversight of technology decisions, investment, risks and benefits. This will ensure that related projects are managed as one coherent programme, with clear accountability, joined-up decision-making and a consistent focus on improving the resident experience.

Our delivery approach: agile, iterative and responsive

Delivery of this strategy will not be a single, fixed programme of work. It will be managed through an agile and iterative approach, enabling the council to test ideas, learn from delivery, respond to resident and staff feedback, and adapt priorities as technology, demand and organisational circumstances change. This will help ensure that investment is focused on the areas that deliver the greatest value, that improvements are implemented in manageable phases, and that services can continue to evolve in line with customer needs, financial pressures. In practice, this means we will deliver improvement now while ensuring that our services, technology and ways of working remain adaptable to future requirements.



The Delivery Roadmap

Without pre-empting the drafting of the full delivery plan, the work undertaken to date indicates that delivery will be organised through a small number of priority programmes and projects through to March 2028. These will be prioritised to deliver improvement now, while also creating the foundations, standards and capabilities needed to support future service transformation and organisational development including:

1. Development of Refreshed Set of Customer Standards
2. Completion of the Delivery of the SAP ERP system covering finance, HR and payroll
3. Creation of an integrated customer offer for our housing tenants and leaseholders with respect to repairs and maintenance, from first contact through to satisfactory completion of the work.
4. Delivering the next phases of our digital support for customer contact, working with Amazon Web Services.
5. Implementing our Data Strategy including investing in data storage, transfer and analytics.
6. Delivering a rolling programme of automation and AI interventions to improve services and support our workforce.
7. Delivery of the next steps our Smart City programme (previously Silicon Stoke) using our full fibre network to support operations and infrastructure improvements and working with partners to support digital enterprises.
8. Targeted investments in individual support systems for services, such as IDOX (covering Planning, Building Control and Land Registry), Liquid Logic (Adult and Children's Social Care) and Capita (Education).
9. Completion of the overhaul of the Council's website to make it much more user-friendly with a focus on enabling self-service by residents and businesses.
10. Development of the Digital Academy to support staff to upskill and our digital inclusion programme for residents.

Resourcing the Programme

The Council has included the capital and revenue resources to pursue this strategy in its Medium-term Financial Strategy. The sufficiency of this investment will be kept under review but future funding requirements will be considered as part of ongoing medium-term financial planning and organisational priorities.

What does success look like?

We already have a number of direct and strategic measures in relation to customer services that will continue to deliver and better inline with the strategy.

Outcome	What success looks like	Measure	2025/26 Position	2026/27 Target	2027/28 Target
Better complaints handling	Complaints are resolved more quickly and learning is used to improve services.	Complaint response times	Inline with corporate policy and statutory timeline targets.	Inline with corporate policy and statutory timeline targets.	Inline with corporate policy and statutory timeline targets.
Stronger digital take-up	More people use online services where appropriate.	Digital take-up and website task completion.	350,000 online form/ interactions	350,000 online form/ interactions	350,000 online form/ interactions
Easier access	Residents can access more services through one clear front door.	Call waiting times	00:06:30	00:06:30	00:06:30

Over the lifetime of this strategy, we will continue to develop and refine our performance measures to strengthen accountability and demonstrate delivery of an exceptional customer experience. These measures will focus on improving customer satisfaction and complaints handling, reducing repeat and avoidable contact, strengthening access to digital support for residents and staff, and using customer and workforce feedback to inform the ongoing transformation of services.



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